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Vietnam: A History

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under Patch. He began the final attack against the Matanikau line on 10 January 1943.

Hyakutake, in a remarkable evacuation conducted during the first week of February, managed to extricate the remnants of his Seventeenth Army, some 10,000 men who lived to fight another day.

Although Griffith writes vividly of the great sea battles that intersticed the ground operations, he writes, understandably, from the viewpoint and perspective of the Marines looking outwardly from the island. For a reader who wants a fuller appreciation of the air-sea-land battle, a comparative reading of Samuel Eliot Morison's *The Struggle for Guadalcanal* is recommended.

There are many other good books on Guadalcanal; so many, in fact, that there seems to be no reason for a book such as Robert Edward Lee's well-intentioned but poorly executed *Victory at Guadalcanal*. Presidio Press is one of the foremost publishers of military history, and it has brought out a number of good Marine Corps books. This, unfortunately, is not one of them. Lee's book is written in adventure magazine language with imagined dialogue that can best be described as being at the television docu-drama level.

EDWIN H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General, US Marine Corps (Ret.)

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*.
New York: The Viking Press,
1983. 750pp. \$20.

In *Vietnam: A History*, Stanley
Karnow has produced an interesting,

factual, and unbiased volume that makes a substantial contribution to the growing bibliography of works about the war in Southeast Asia. The book was written as a companion to the television series produced by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), and serves in that role well. The volume, divided into sixteen chapters, smoothly covers not only the American experience in Vietnam, but the long centuries of war that preceded US involvement and the bitter years since our withdrawal. It contains a fairly good if sketchy chronology, thumbnail portraits of some of the major actors, and a superb set of photographs that precede each chapter. Finally, the book contains six clear and useful maps. It is well indexed and captioned throughout, functioning as an excellent resource work and reference on the war.

Yet Mr. Karnow has given the reader more than a simple chronological treatment of the war. The work has the lean yet anecdotal style common to wartime journalism, and manages to mix the reporter's traditional cynicism and the observer's distant concern about the fate of Vietnam.

Of particular note is the first chapter, the title of which, "The War Nobody Won," more or less illustrates Mr. Karnow's central theme. Agreeing with Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., Karnow points out that the "United States won a tactical victory but suffered a strategic failure in Vietnam." The essence of the conflict, according to the author

was the fanatical sense of dedication felt by the North to unify the country. This led to the North's ability to accept tremendous casualties and physical destruction from the bombing campaigns with equanimity. While hardly a new thesis concerning the war, Mr. Karnow's workman-like and reasoned analysis represents a centrist view of the conflict. He manages to discuss the US involvement in Vietnam without becoming emotional or biased, and carefully points out the various stages of American presence and the political decisions that motivated the action. The author is particularly cogent on the subject of Vietnam today (1983), showing a country that is learning that winning a war can be easier than running a country. The Vietnamese Gulags and the story of the boat people are told well under Mr. Karnow's steady approach.

From a critical standpoint, there are a few problems with the volume. The scope of the war, of course, was vast. It would hardly be possible to complete the history of the US involvement in less than 10 volumes, as one group of writers is currently doing. Additionally, the war wasn't prone to dividing up into neat segments as Mr. Karnow presents it. There was, of course, much overlap between the stages of the war; yet Mr. Karnow seems to provide little transition between many of the chapters—giving one the sensation that the war was only a series of vignettes, connected only by the geographic theater. One could also fault the author for an excess of color

and anecdote at the expense of larger events, particularly in a volume that calls itself "The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War."

But these are relatively small concerns when compared to the overall effort of the work. Mr. Karnow has contributed a solid, reportorial volume to the literature of America's longest war. One leaves *Vietnam: A History* with a sense that a good deal of work and tribulation went into the book. It is a large canvas that Mr. Karnow seeks to paint, and he does a credible job of covering the detail and the sweep of a long and bitter struggle.

JAMES STAVRIDIS
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Beckett, Ian, and Gooch, John, eds.
Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy, 1845-1970. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 1983. 202pp. \$20

Too little has been researched and written in the field of defense policy-making, and this work by two academic men, the coeditors, and authors of two of the eight articles, is a well-written addition. Ian Beckett, Senior Lecturer in War Studies at Sandhurst, and John Gooch, Lecturer in History at the University of Lancaster, have researched and written in the field of defense policy-making in which too little work has been done. *Politicians and Defence* is principally concerned with several British cabinet ministers responsible for the Army, and two of those more