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## The Vietnam War: The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia

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seem to improve morale. She says nothing about the argument that in certain combat situations women might lower morale by imposing greater responsibilities on men or, even worse, boost the morale of the enemy by making him fight harder against women.

Although she concedes that there are problems with the AVA as well as the draft, she declines to discuss the political and moral issues of an all volunteer force which recruits from the most disadvantaged groups in society, leaving white middle class educated males to pursue their careers. Instead, she focuses on the opportunity the AVA provides to women, competing against male high school dropouts and mental incompetents. Because she sees no problems with such a force, she finds in back of the army's recent decision to limit women recruits a "hidden agenda" to bring back the male draft.

Finally, General Holm skirts the central question of women in combat. Throughout the book, she observes that the full integration of women in the military cannot take place until the combat issue is resolved. From her testimony on abolishing Section 6051 restricting women in combat, I take it she favors women in combat, but she refuses to discuss the issue. Perhaps this is because she does not wish to alienate those who would agree with her on the smaller issues. But she rightly points out that all these policy questions, e.g. promotion, retirement, admission to the service academies, turn on the question of combat. On the issue of the service academies, the

general is especially disingenuous. She points out that at West Point, the admission of women necessitated that only (sic) the physical training part of the curriculum be changed. Women carry lighter rifles, and are pitted only against women in pugil stick training. If we could sign a treaty with the Soviets insuring that American women fight only Soviet women, the general's expectations of fairness and equity would be realized.

General Holm's democratic principles seem to extend even to her writing, where she makes nouns do the work of verbs and draws on a formidable arsenal of slang expressions and cliches.

In the end, this is a disappointing book. *Women in the Military* deals with a serious subject, but not in a serious way.

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Bonds, Ray, ed. *The Vietnam War: The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia—Updated Edition*. New York: Crown Publications, 1983. 256pp. \$19.95

Crace, Max D. and McJunkin, James N. *Visions of Vietnam*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1983. 248pp. \$25

Mason, Robert C. *Chickenhawk*. New York: Viking Press, 1983. 339pp. \$17.75

As the administration struggles with the vagaries of public opinion in making critical foreign policy decisions about Central America, the

vision of America's Vietnam experience dangles before them like a shadow in the wind. The daily press constantly recalls the "lessons" of Southeast Asia, and dozens of books continue to be published each year, each with its particular rationale or memory of the war. The study of Vietnam is in many ways like theology—everyone is aware of it, most people have strong opinions about it, and virtually nobody has bothered to learn the facts about America's longest and most controversial war. The recent release of three new works on Vietnam continues the general tradition of literature on the war in that they are radically different treatments of the conflict, each of which has a specific point to make.

The first, and by far the best, of the group is a general history of the conflict called simply, *The Vietnam War*. The subtitle is "The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia," and the book lives up to the billing with superb maps, photographs, charts, drawings, and illustrations. The text is divided into two dozen excellent, brief essays by a distinguished collection of authors. The essays range chronologically from the French era to the fall of Saigon and the continuing brutal conflict in the region today. Also included are highly useful sections that give a thorough chronology of key events, brief biographies of all the major actors in the war, and a list of US MIAs of 1983. As a reference work, *The Vietnam War* is the best single volume yet in print on the conflict. Of particular note are the maps (many of which are topographic

in character), the illustrations of the weapons and techniques of warfare developed in Vietnam, and the striking photography.

The writing is conservative in tone and argument, and falls into the category of "new scholarship" on Vietnam that is emerging in reaction to the long orgy of self-flagellation that marked the earlier (1973-1978) writing. The best use for the work is as a reference volume on the war, to be read and studied for its factual, unemotional, unbiased reporting on many aspects of the conflict. It is a perfect companion piece to Harry G. Summers' recent minor classic, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (see review in *NWC Review*, March-April, 1983, p. 81). While it is possible to point to minor criticisms in some of the individual essays, the overall value of the work is immense. General Westmoreland's introductory essay alone is worth the price of admission. All in all, *The Vietnam War* is a work of tremendous value to those interested in understanding the facts in America's Vietnam experience.

The second recently released book, *Visions of Vietnam*, is an effort by two young artists, photographer James McJunkin and artist Max Crace, to capture the war with their artistry. Both served in Vietnam, Crace as an Air Force artist and McJunkin as an Army correspondent—the book is a compilation of their work in-country.

The volume has over 80 photographs and 30 line drawings, and is divided into three sections, "The War Machine" (the military equipment

and operations), "The Civilians" (portraits of the Vietnamese), and "The Grunts" (the combat soldiers). There are brief captions associated with each photo and drawing, and the book is well-layed out and sharply printed, although the left page is always blank, evidently for dramatic effect.

Unfortunately, *Visions of Vietnam* fails to capture the essence of the war. The photos are unremarkable and not especially dramatic and the artwork, while serviceable, is not memorable. Perhaps the nightly coverage of the war spoiled us for books such as *Visions*, giving readers a sense that the war was more dramatic than the pictures and art in this volume would indicate. The volume contains all the clichés of the war (men on tanks, prostitutes and pimps in Saigon, patrols through the jungle, destitute peasants) but does little to go beyond the surface that is already too familiar from newspapers and television broadcasts. One is left, sadly, with the feeling that it has all been said before.

The final recent book on the war is the memoir of a year's combat tour in country by a helicopter pilot, Robert Mason. The book is an intensely personal look at combat that is realistically and dramatically written. It describes the helo air war in Vietnam in the same biting prose that James Webb and Phil Caputo used in telling the story of the ground soldiers in *Fields of Fire* and *A Rumor of War* respectively. As a combat memoir, *Chickenhawk* is fairly good, accurate, and occasionally powerful writing.

By far the most haunting portion of

the book, however, deals with the author's return to the United States and his life from 1966 to the present. In a few short pages of epilogue, Mason manages to capture the horror of post-Vietnam trauma that afflicted some veterans. For a man who had survived the dangerous air war over the jungles in Vietnam, it seems sadly ironic that alcohol, drugs, and severe stress disorders were ultimately crippling. Robert Mason is today appealing a conviction for drug-related charges, and claims "No one is more shocked than I." These are the final words in a sadly troubled memoir written by a man who could have done better. One is left with a sense that having survived the war in Vietnam, Mason had little left over to deal with the demands of life after combat. While Mason's experiences are not typical of the vast majority of Vietnam veterans, they are sadly indicative of the problems many suffered. At least America seems gradually to be coming to terms with the war in Vietnam. Robert Mason, it would seem, has yet to come home.

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Borowski, Harry R. *A Hollow Threat: Strategic Air Power and Containment before Korea*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982. 242pp. \$27.50

Long before World War II ended, it was apparent to US leaders that our ally, the Soviet Union, would be the biggest threat to the postwar world. While the West demobilized its military forces, the Soviets did no such thing. The pressing question then, was