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**THE VIETNAM WAR
AND
THE PRESS**

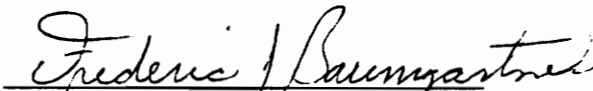
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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

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(ABSTRACT)

This study examines how three liberal publications (Washington Post, Newsweek, and New Republic) and three conservative publications (Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, and National Review) reported six different events of the Vietnam War. Chapter one will examine the publications' coverage of the Tonkin Gulf incidents of August 1964 and the November 1965 Pleiku attack. The 1968 Tet offensive will be the concern of chapter two. Chapter three looks at how the six publications covered the My Lai incident, the Christmas bombing of 1972 (Linebacker II), and the release of American prisoners of war (Operation Homecoming).

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written if it was not for the unrelenting support of my parents. They understood the challenge that I faced and they gave me the encouragement to continue. Thanks mom and dad.

A special thanks goes to Joyce L. Simpkins and Joyce B. Muldoon. Although they have never met, their combined wisdom has had a profound impact on my life. They placed into perspective at an early age in my life the importance of reading, writing, and the study of history. I will forever be indebted to the standards that they set and the motivation they gave me to pursue a higher education.

Finally, I wish to thank my instructors at the Virginia Military Institute and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for molding me into a better scholar.

Dedication

To my brother Isaac who served his country as a Marine in Vietnam.

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Introduction

The task of analyzing the press and its treatment of the Vietnam War is a major undertaking. There is a wealth of information available to the historian. Hundreds of newspapers and magazines reported on the war from America's earliest involvement in the 1960s until the final withdrawal of embassy officials in 1975. With nearly every family on the home front owning a television, Americans could see for themselves the horrors of war in the hot and swampy jungles of Southeast Asia. For over a decade the media in Vietnam portrayed the daily struggles of a country at war. The nightly newscast brought the on-going events of a foreign war into the homes of the American people. The combined efforts of the printed press and the televised media made a tremendous contribution to the historical preservation of America's longest and most controversial war. Having to select from such a variety of publications to see how the press reported the war is a difficult challenge.

A noted author on the media and the Vietnam War, Daniel C. Hallin, states: "It is of course impossible for any single study to deal comprehensively with the media's coverage of Vietnam." He adds, "The problem is not simply

one of volume . . . It is also diversity."¹ Although an examination of the press and its treatment of the war entails difficulty, a study of how the war was portrayed is a necessary and important issue. Many of the more noted works such as The Uncensored War, The Military and the Media, 1962-1968, and Big Story have focused on both printed publications and television coverage.² These three studies primarily dealt with the nightly newscasts of the three major networks and the more widely circulated newspapers and magazines like the New York Times, Life, and Time. There is no single study that deals exclusively with a selected group of printed publications.

Stanley Karnow in his well-received Vietnam: A History calls for an evaluation of the printed media: "The printed word is no match for the intensity of such dramatic film as came out of Vietnam," he said, "but on the other hand, the complexities of Vietnam cannot be adequately elucidated on a

¹Daniel C. Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11.

²Hallin's The Uncensored War, see footnote one. William M. Hammond, Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988); and Peter Braestrup Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

screen."³ For this reason, this thesis will examine the printed media's handling of the Vietnam War.

In order to investigate how the press portrayed the Vietnamese Conflict, I have examined the press reports of the war's most important events. The events are: the 2 and 4 August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incidents, the Pleiku attack of 6 February 1965, the Communist Tet offensive of 31 January 1968, the My Lai incident of 1968, Operation Linebacker II (the 1972 Christmas bombing), and the release of American prisoners of war, Operation Homecoming, in 1973. To see how the press reported these six events, two newspapers and four magazines were selected. The publications are: the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek, the National Review, and the New Republic.

Traditionally, these six journals have adhered to two opposing ideological and political schools of thought. The Washington Post, Newsweek, and the New Republic have consistently depicted the news with a "liberal" point of view. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, and the National Review have been recognized as "conservative" journals of opinion. The reason for selecting these two sets of publications is so that a fair and balanced picture of the

³Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (New York: Viking Press, 1983), x.

press's coverage of the war could be presented. Therefore, this selection of publications--three liberal and three conservative--serves as a way to assess the press's handling of American military involvement in the Vietnamese Conflict, from 1964-1973.

Before examining how these journals of opinion portrayed the events of the war, it is essential that we define what is meant by the terms "liberal" and "conservative."

The terms elude precise definition. Both embrace political views of enormous diversity and complexity, so that it is hard to draw the line accurately between liberals and conservatives.⁴ As Louis Filler, a well known scholar of American conservatism, has said: "A basic point which helps understanding is that conservatism and liberalism have intermingled as well as separated."⁵ For the purpose of this study, it is the differences between liberalism and conservatism that now receives our attention.

According to William Gerber, author of American Liberalism, "It would seem that any serious discussion of liberalism would need to be based on a common understanding

⁴William Gerber, American Liberalism (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 75.

⁵Louis Filler, Dictionary of American Conservatism (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987), 11.

of what liberalism is." He adds, "Yet many of those who have tried to formulate an acceptable definition of liberalism found the task so frustratingly difficult that they ended their effort in despair."⁶ Christopher Lasch also agreed with Gerber:

The term "liberal" is surely one of the most baffling in political discourse. It can mean almost anything, from a belief in rugged individualism to a belief in a welfare state. It can be used so as to take in almost everybody or so as to take in nobody but a few intellectuals.⁷

Although it may appear complicated to isolate the essence of the liberal viewpoint, there are certain features--as writers on the subject have pointed out--that have remained constant through the ages. The liberal framework, the one in which the Washington Post, Newsweek, and New Republic have traditionally held, involves a set of unchanging elements, which include concern for the welfare of the individual (as against the conservative dedication to the primacy of tradition, property, or church); allegiance to an open society (which can eliminate man-made barriers hindering utilization of differences in talent); and criticism of vested privilege.⁸ As Mary S. McAuliffe points

⁶Gerber, American Liberalism, 70.

⁷Ibid., 71. Lasch made the comment while teaching at the University of Iowa in 1962.

⁸Ibid., 73.

out, liberalism also includes "an identification with common people and antipathy toward big business, a faith in popular government, and a belief in progress and man's capacity for improvement, if not perfectibility."⁹

M. Stanton Evans, another writer on American liberalism, says the roots of liberalism run deep into the American culture. Evans defines the major principles of liberalism as a belief in increased centralization of power in the federal government, and in economic "planning" aimed at the creation of a welfare state. In foreign affairs, he adds, "Liberalism holds to the idea that Cold War problems can best be settled by 'reasoning' with the agents and principles of the Communist global conspiracy, and cooperating with the 'revolution of rising expectations' among less civilized countries."¹⁰

According to D. Joy Humes, liberalism is an abstract concept. But "while American liberalism may appear historically to have stood for different things at different times . . . Its underlining values have remained much the

⁹Mary S. McAuliffe, Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947-1954 (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 1.

¹⁰M. Stanton Evans, The Liberal Establishment (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1965), 13-14. Evans is a noted author on liberalism and conservatism.

same," Humes said.¹¹ He also argues that liberalism is highly individualistic. A man must obey his own beliefs and not become a mere item in the multitude. If the society leads the individual astray, then the society's social and political institutions are to blame.¹² Humes adds, "American liberalism appeals to the common man rather than to that of a select few." He stresses that liberalism "recognizes that men must live together in organized society and that the society shapes their destiny."¹³

Another important contributor to the definition of liberalism is Allen J. Matusow. He refers to liberalism as a "mood." He explained that this "mood" favored a strong civil rights position as demonstrated by the Kennedy administration's Fair Employment Practices Commission. This newly created agency in the early 1960s empowered the attorney general to file suits to protect individuals deprived of their constitutional rights.¹⁴

In summation, these preceding remarks by experts in the field of American liberalism agree that there is a generally

¹¹D. Joy Humes, Oswald Garrison Villard, Liberal of the 1920s (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1960), 22.

¹²Ibid., 18.

¹³Ibid., 19.

¹⁴Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 3, 63.

accepted body of principles common to the liberal school of thought. They agree that a liberal is someone who follows political views or policies that support civil liberties, democratic reforms, and use of governmental power to promote social progress. A liberal believes in a strong centralized government for the protection of civil rights. The liberal sees the primary role of the federal government as an institution that supports the freedom of individuals to act or express themselves as they choose. Therefore, the essence of liberalism is a devotion to individualism. It is this belief in the power of the individual as the true mover and shaker of society that distinguishes a liberal from a conservative, and it is this same belief that has historically guided the news reporting in the Washington Post, Newsweek, and New Republic.

Like liberalism, conservatism is one of the most confusing words in the glossary of political thought and oratory.¹⁵ Where a liberal promotes the necessity for change in society, a conservative, on the other hand, clings to tradition and fights to maintain the status quo. The following writers of conservative thought agree that a conservative places continuity over change and looks to the past in order to plan for the future.

¹⁵Clinton L. Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 4.

Conservatism has its own set of ideas.¹⁶ William R. Harbour defines these as a devotion to traditional views and values such as God, family life, love, friendship, and a spiritual fellowship among individuals.¹⁷ Harbour's idea of conservatism is a reverence of the past for the sake of guaranteeing a secure and prosperous future. Harbour said, "Conservatives are frequently optimistic about modern society when it comes to scientific and technological progress, while often pessimistic about the decline of many traditional values."¹⁸ When comparing conservatives to liberals, Harbour states: "Conservatives are enthusiastic about the space program and support nuclear energy, while a number of liberals are dubious about increasing public efforts in these areas."¹⁹

Conservatism is also an ideology of interrelated political theorems.²⁰ At the heart of these political concepts, the conservative believes in the status quo. Allen Guttmann quotes Samuel P. Huntington as saying that

¹⁶William R. Harbour, The Foundations of Conservative Thought: An Anglo-American Tradition in Perspective (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 1.

¹⁷Ibid., 183.

¹⁸Ibid., 182.

¹⁹Ibid., 181.

²⁰Allen Guttmann, The Conservative Tradition in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 6.

'The essence of conservatism is the passionate affirmation of the value of existing institutions.'²¹ Guttman clarifies the attitude of the conservative: "the conservative cherishes the status quo and defends established institutions against those who seek to transform them."²²

Roger Scruton elaborates on the attitude of the conservative:

In politics, the conservative attitude seeks above all for government, and regards no citizen as possessed of a natural right that transcends his obligation to be ruled. Even democracy--which corresponds neither to the natural nor to the supernatural yearnings of the normal citizen--can be discarded without detriment to the civil well-being as the conservative conceives it.²³

Clinton Rossiter provides an excellent summation of what conservatism truly means, and in practice one can agree that the Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, and National Review have adhered to the following essential traits of conservative thought:

Conservatism is committed to a discriminating defense of the social order against change and reform. The conservative knows that change is the rule of life among men and societies, but he insists that it be sure-footed and respectful of the past. He is pessimistic, though not always

²¹Ibid., 4.

²²Ibid.

²³Roger Scruton, The Meaning of Conservatism (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 16.

darkly so, about the possibilities of reform, and his natural preferences are for stability over change, continuity over experiment, the past over the future.²⁴

Although there are fundamental differences that separate conservatives from liberals, there are also similarities. Traditionally, liberals and conservatives believe in a strong national defense, a strong centralized government, and the rights of the individual. However, it is the extent at which the two political groups pursue these issues that establishes the dividing line between liberals and conservatives.

The preceding examination has sought to define the terms liberal and conservative. Although there are similarities between the two schools of thought, the thrust of this discussion has been to point out the major differences. We have examined the works by scholars and experts in the field of liberalism and conservatism, and they have spoken for themselves to explain the meaning of these two abstract terms. If the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, New Republic, and National Review are the journalistic representatives of the liberal and conservative camps, then who says these six publications are embodiments of liberal or conservative ideology? For the purposes of this thesis,

²⁴Rossiter, Conservatism in America, 12.

it is important that we mention a few writers on the press that regard these journals as liberal or conservative.

Roland E. Wolseley says the New Republic and the National Review are ideologically at opposite ends of the political spectrum. He is convinced that since its first issue in 1914 the articles in the New Republic have adhered to a liberal doctrine. The magazine is recognized as a liberal journal because it rose out of the Wilsonian era as a defender of civil liberties. It employed liberal editors such as Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann. The National Review, on the other hand, appeared in the late 1950s and in all the 1960s as a new voice for the conservative cause with a strong anti-communist and pro-defense position.²⁵

There are other students of the press that regard the New Republic as a symbol of the liberal tradition. Theodore Peterson refers to the magazine as an organ of liberalism. He recognizes the magazine as the "champion of the liberal cause."²⁶ Another author alludes to the magazine's liberal consistency and likewise believes that the journal is the

²⁵See Roland E. Wolseley, Understanding Magazines (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1969), 309-310. Also refer to Edwin and Michael Emery, The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), 335, 377.

²⁶Theodore Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 423, 425.

finest example of "a champion liberal magazine."²⁷ Lastly, in The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism David Seideman correctly asserts that "the New Republic serves as major forum for liberalism's trials and tribulations."²⁸

As for the National Review, it was established by William F. Buckley Jr. Buckley, known as one of the chief spokesmen for the conservatives, founded National Review in 1955. Buckley was convinced of the need "for a national publication to articulate conservative opinion in a respectable and literate format."²⁹ As founder and editor-in-chief of National Review, Buckley maintains that "The magazine was conceived as a vehicle for responsible, informed, and inspired conservative thought, and it has been exactly that. . . ."³⁰ Roland Wolseley comments that Buckley's National Review grew as a new conservative voice among the opinion magazines. He concludes that "The conservative viewpoint seemed at least to have found a

²⁷James Playsted Wood, Magazines in the United States (New York: Roland Press, 1956), 186-187.

²⁸David Seideman, The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism (New York: Praeger, 1986), x.

²⁹William F. Buckley Jr., The Jeweler's Eye (New York: Berkley, 1969), 6.

³⁰William F. Buckley Jr., Overdrive: A Personal Documentary (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 29.

consistent and not ill-natured voice in National Review."³¹

For many years the Washington Post and Newsweek have been recognized by journalists as two of the most influential members of the "liberal media elite." At a conference sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute, authorities debated the issue of the influences of the printed media on American domestic and foreign policy. A number of the experts, including the executive editor of the Washington Post Benjamin C. Bradlee (a position he has held since 1968), agreed that the United States has a domineering "liberal media elite" and that the Washington Post and Newsweek are two of the biggest publications within this elite.³² One of the reasons why these two publications share similar ideological beliefs is that both have been owned and operated by Katharine Meyer Graham since 1961.³³

On the other hand, the Wall Street Journal and U.S. News & World Report have been identified as a conservative newspaper and magazine. An official guide used by libraries

³¹Wolseley, Understanding Magazines, 310.

³²Nick Thimmesch, editor, A Liberal Media Elite? (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985). The panel's general consensus was that the Post, and Newsweek tended to be more liberal in their news and editorial coverage than other "liberal media elites" such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Time.

³³Philip L. and Katharine M. Graham purchased Newsweek from Malcolm Muir for \$9 million.

refers to the U.S. News & World Report as "primarily conservative, and not always objective."³⁴ Robert Wolseley says: "The arguments that revolve around U.S. News & World Report are based on its persistently conservative political and social position rather than on its journalistic techniques."³⁵ The Wall Street Journal's position is "definitely conservative," so says Donald Paneth.³⁶ Edward E. Scharff adds that the newspaper is "a cherished institution among conservatives, almost their daily bugle call!"³⁷

As this review of the literature on newspapers and magazines shows, the six publications considered in this thesis represent the liberal and conservative school of thought. Now let us move on to an examination of the six events to see if the publications reported the war with ideological biases. Knowing that the two groups--three

³⁴William A. and Linda S. Katz, Magazines for Libraries (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1982), 699. One of the most widely used references for identifying a magazine's political position.

³⁵Wolseley, Understanding Magazines, 282.

³⁶Donald Paneth, The Encyclopedia of American Journalism (New York: Facts on File Publications, Inc., 1983), 506.

³⁷Edward E. Scharff, Worldly Power: The Making of the Wall Street Journal (New York: Beaufort, 1986), 238. The first book, other than an occasional magazine article that covers the complete history of the Wall Street Journal, written by someone outside Dow Jones and Company.

liberal and three conservative--have traditionally demonstrated opposing views, it will be interesting to see how they reported these particular events. Our study begins with the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of August 1964.

Chapter I

The Coverage Begins: "We seek no wider war"³⁸

Few events in history have stirred the emotions of the American people more than the Gulf of Tonkin incidents and the Pleiku attack which escalated United States military involvement in Southeast Asia.

In response to the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of August 1964, President Lyndon Johnson initiated a limited retaliatory air strike against military targets in North Vietnam. However, the Gulf of Tonkin episode had been only six months old when a Viet Cong attack on an United States barracks and airfield outside the city of Pleiku in the central highlands of South Vietnam was met by another rapid retaliatory air strike against North Vietnam. The bombing following the Pleiku attack signified the implementation of air strikes on a much greater scale than before. Operation Flaming Dart, originally designed as a contingency plan for air strikes that were retaliatory in nature, eventually developed into a full scale bombing plan, code-named Rolling Thunder. After the Pleiku attack and initiation of Flaming

³⁸Taken from "Address to the Nation by President Johnson, August 4, 1964," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 51 (24 Aug. 1964), 259.

Dart, United States' participation in the Vietnam War escalated.

Gulf of Tonkin Incidents, 2 and 4 August 1964

Unfortunately for historians, a vast amount of information still remains classified regarding the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of early August 1964. Much of the controversy over Tonkin originated from the congressional testimony of government officials and the administration's statements given to the press corps after the events unfolded. Also adding to the confusion and obscurity of Tonkin has been the secretive nature in which the United States Navy conducted operations along the coast of North Vietnam. Many Americans wondered why American ships and aircraft were conducting military exercises so "danger close" to an enemy shore some 10,000 miles away from home if, indeed, the United States was not directly involved in the war. The historian George Herring points out in his study of the war that American ships were engaged in electronic espionage off the coast of North Vietnam when they encountered a group of North Vietnamese torpedo boats. He concludes that the United States could have provoked the

attacks.³⁹

There were two incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin one on 2 August and the other on 4 August 1964. Historians and journalists agree that the first attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on United States ships did occur. However, the second attack on 4 August is highly questionable. According to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, he claims that in August 1964 the United States Navy destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy were engaged in routine patrolling exercises between 25 and 30 miles off the coast of North Vietnam. The first attack on United States ships occurred at 15:08 (Washington time) on 2 August 1964. The Maddox was attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats (PT boats). The Maddox fired three warning shots from her five-inch battery, but the fast moving vessels keep approaching and subsequently launched two torpedoes toward the starboard side of the Maddox. The Maddox avoided the torpedoes while simultaneously receiving tactical air support from the

³⁹George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 119. The Pentagon Papers state that the United States Navy destroyers Maddox, Turner Joy, and the South Vietnamese were involved with DeSoto patrols off the coast of North Vietnam. DeSoto patrols were joint intelligence gathering operations managed by the commander-in-chief, pacific command (CINCPAC) with no participation by the Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV).

Aircraft Carrier Ticonderoga (see Map I, Gulf of Tonkin).⁴⁰

At 15:21, the Maddox scored a direct hit with her five-inch battery leaving one of three hostile PT boats dead in the water. McNamara stated that "at 15:29, the engagement terminated and the aircraft escorted the Maddox southward on its patrol course" to rendezvous with her sister ship the Turner Joy.⁴¹

After the first incident, the President determined that the North Vietnamese strike might have been an error. He was advised, therefore, not to retaliate.⁴² Unfortunately, less than 48 hours after the first attack, the Pentagon claimed that Navy ships were once again under torpedo attack from North Vietnamese PT boats.

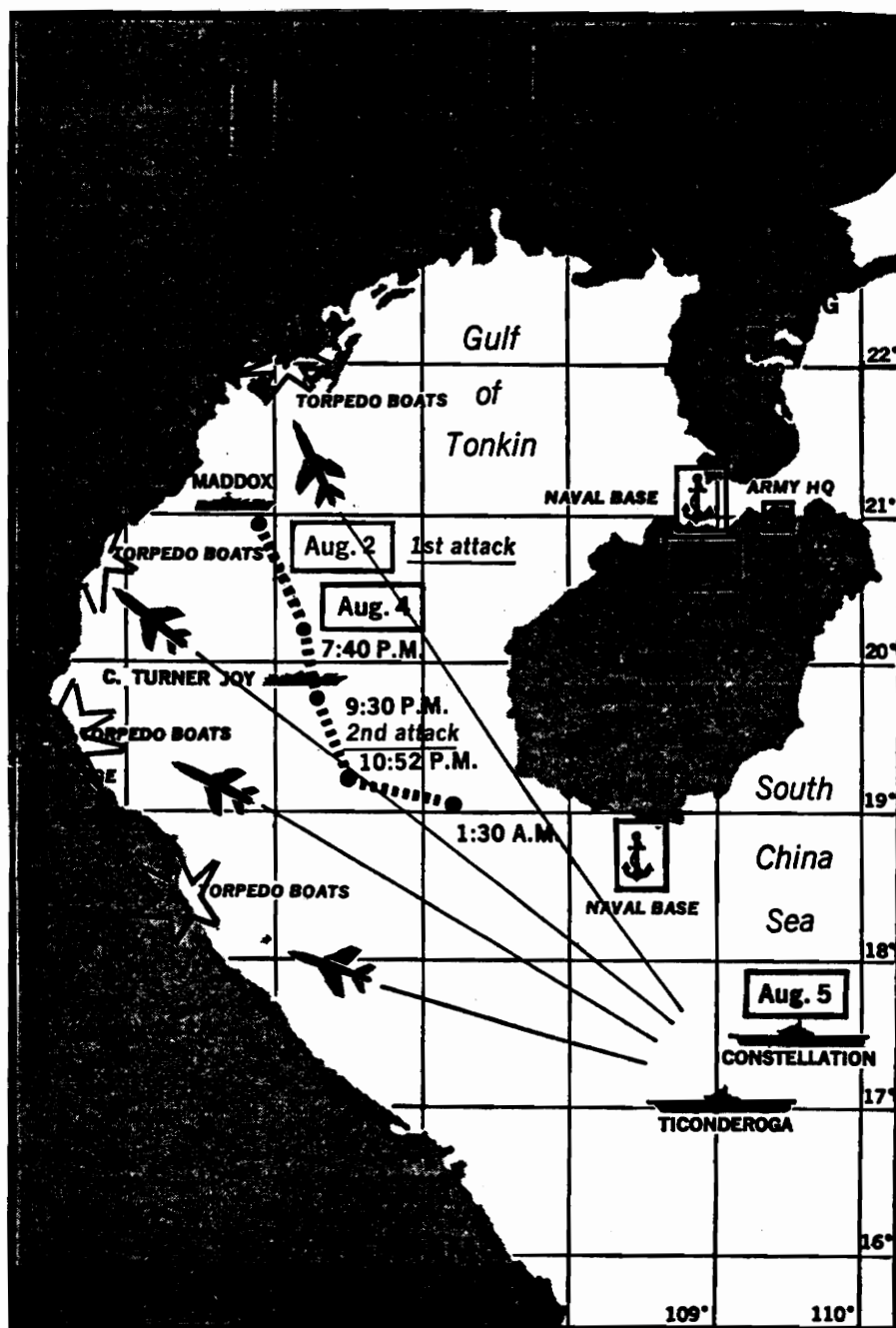
The actuality of the second Tonkin Gulf incident is debatable. The controversy surrounding the alleged second attack originated from Secretary McNamara's testimony before congress. McNamara testified that on 3 August 1964 at 19:40

⁴⁰"Sea Action: 'This is no drill,'" U.S. News & World Report (16 Aug. 1964), 20.

⁴¹Events of the first incident taken from Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's full statement given to the Joint Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate, Eighty-eight Congress, Second Session (6 Aug. 1964), 7-8. Henceforth, referred to as Hearings.

⁴²Lyndon Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969 (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 113.

Map I, Gulf of Tonkin⁴³



⁴³Taken from Newsweek, "Sea Action: 'This is no drill'" (17 Aug. 1964), 20.

(Washington time) the Maddox reported three unidentified surface vessels and two unidentified aircraft presumed to be hostile. At this time, the Maddox was running a parallel course with the Turner Joy approximately 65 miles from the coast of North Vietnam (see Map I, Gulf of Tonkin). At 20:36, aircraft from the Ticonderoga arrived to set up a defensive patrol over the Maddox and the Turner Joy. Both destroyers came under repeated torpedo attacks commencing at 21:52 and lasting nearly an hour. By midnight, the destroyers reported back to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC) that they had suffered no casualties nor damage and according to McNamara, "the defensive aircraft from the Ticonderoga were illuminating the area and attacking the enemy surface craft."⁴⁴ In addition to this, McNamara explained that further reports indicated that at least two enemy PT boats had been sunk by rounds from the destroyers' five-inch guns. CINCPAC received the final word from Maddox, Turner Joy, and the Ticonderoga at 01:30 (4 August 1964, Washington time) that the enemy had broken off the engagement and that all ships were reassuming their pre-attack course.

President Johnson reacted promptly to the second attack. The President, however, demanded to know if the

⁴⁴Robert McNamara, Hearings (6 Aug. 1964), 8-9.

second event had actually occurred. In his 1971 memoirs, Johnson stated, that "I instructed McNamara to investigate these reports and obtain clarification." The President added, "We wanted to be absolutely certain that our ships had actually been attacked before we retaliated."⁴⁵

Secretary McNamara contacted the CINCPAC commander, Admiral U. S. G. Sharp Jr., and both concluded that an attack on United States ships had indeed occurred.

George Herring, however, has reached a different conclusion. Herring believes that McNamara ignored the "belated uncertainty" of the men on the scene. He added, that McNamara "accepted at face value the judgement of Admiral Sharp, in Honolulu, whose certainty was based on the first reports from the Maddox and intercepts of North Vietnamese messages indicating that two patrol boats had been 'sacrificed.'" He continues: "McNamara and his military advisors did not knowingly lie about the alleged attacks, but they were obviously in a mood to retaliate and they seem to have selected from the evidence available to them those parts that confirmed what they wanted to believe."⁴⁶

After receiving the advice from Secretary McNamara,

⁴⁵Johnson, Vantage Point, 115.

⁴⁶Herring, America's Longest War, 121.

President Johnson authorized retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and oil storage facilities. The two newspapers under review in this thesis were the first to report the incidents in Tonkin Gulf.

The Wall Street Journal responded to the Gulf of Tonkin attack with a front page story on Monday, 3 August 1964. Wall Street Journal reported that the first incident in the Gulf of Tonkin was a deliberate attack on United States ships. It said, "the boats [PT boats] attacked the USS Maddox without provocation in international waters 30 miles from North Vietnam, using machine guns and torpedoes."⁴⁷ The next day on 4 August the Wall Street Journal added, "Strong retaliation against North Vietnam must be taken unless the U.S. wants to be branded a 'paper tiger.'"⁴⁸

The Washington Post's first story on the Tonkin incident was similar to the Wall Street Journal's front page news story. The Post described the incident as an "unprovoked attack on an American ship in international

⁴⁷"Three Torpedo Boats from North Vietnam Attacked a U.S. Destroyer," Wall Street Journal (3 Aug. 1964), 1.

⁴⁸"Naval Patrols Near North Vietnam Were Told To Destroy Any Attackers," Wall Street Journal (4 Aug. 1964), 1. The Communist Chinese coined the phrase "paper tiger," in reference to the United States' unwillingness to make a military stand in Vietnam. According to the Chinese, the United States had historically threatened the communist insurgents in Vietnam on paper only, without any exhibition of American military might.

waters."⁴⁹ Both newspapers made it clear that the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin was a deliberate attack at the hands of the North Vietnamese on the United States destroyer Maddox. Like the Wall Street Journal, the Post also said that the "U.S. will be branded a toothless 'paper tiger' unless it takes strong counter-action against the attack on the Maddox."⁵⁰

The U.S. News & World Report and Newsweek also expressed similar views on the attacks in Tonkin Gulf. U.S. News & World Report said that both incidents were deliberate attacks on United States naval vessels. In a 17 August 1964 story U.S. News & World Report stated that "Full-scale war loomed before the U.S. on August 2 and 4," and "In times past, nations have gone to war on less provocation." It added, "Here were deliberate attempts, in international waters, to torpedo U.S. destroyers." Moreover, "Success of the attacks would have meant heavy loss of American lives."⁵¹

In a related article U.S. News & World Report supported the President's decision for a retaliatory air strike. The

⁴⁹John G. Norris, "Navy Ordered To Wipe Out Any Attacking Force," Washington Post (4 Aug. 1964), 1.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹"Bigger War for U.S. in Asia," U.S. News & World Report (17 Aug. 1964), 21.

story raised the point that "As for the U.S., it seemed clear there was no intent to carry the war further unless pressed." It added, "But the way was left open for devastating retaliation if North Vietnam or Communist China pushed too far." Moreover, the U.S. News & World Report pointed out that the United States precedent had been set. It said, "Let the Chinese Communists beware."⁵²

On the same day of the U.S. News & World Report Tonkin story, Newsweek featured an almost identical account of the incidents. Newsweek believed that both attacks were deliberate and that the North Vietnamese must have realized the consequences of assaulting United States destroyers:

It was patently absurd to postulate that the wretched little nation of North Vietnam was trying to wage naval warfare against the mightiest sea-power in history; but it was just as obvious, once the second attack was launched, that the attacks were planned and deliberate, and that the attackers must have reckoned on the consequences.⁵³

Newsweek added, "There were no hawks crying for war, no doves cooing for peace . . . What there was, was a simple automatic agreement that the attackers must be taught a lesson."⁵⁴

⁵²"After the Battle of Tonkin Gulf--What Now," U.S. News & World Report (17 Aug. 1964), 25.

⁵³"Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War,'" Newsweek (17 Aug. 1964), 17.

⁵⁴Ibid.

The preceding discussion has clearly shown that the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, U.S. News & World Report, and Newsweek demonstrated similar views when they reported the Tonkin incidents of August 1964. The four publications plus the New Republic also gave similar explanations of why the North Vietnamese would attack United States destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The Wall Street Journal raised the question, "Why the attacks?" "Washington officials are frankly puzzled," the newspaper stated. Moreover, it could not understand, "as to just why the Reds should have made such a decision at this time when the war was going well for them."⁵⁵ The paper then proceeded to answer its own question by providing two explanations.

First, the newspaper quoted an unnamed United States strategist who claimed that the North Vietnamese torpedo attacks were 'a decision to hit something clearly and unmistakably American and see what our response would be.' The second explanation raised by the Wall Street Journal was that Hanoi wanted to "draw Peking into a large effort" and that "the attacks stem from a Peking desire to embarrass Russia by making it choose between a Communist nation under

⁵⁵Monroe W. Karmin, "Saigon Pressure May Draw U.S. Further Into Escalating Vietnam War," Wall Street Journal (6 Aug. 1964), 1.

U.S. fire and a continuing detente with Washington."⁵⁶

The Washington Post also wanted to know North Vietnam's motivation "in view of the fact that the United States obviously can bring superior air and naval power to bear against North Viet-Nam." Like the Wall Street Journal, the Post believed that the North Vietnamese, perhaps encouraged by the Chinese Communists, were "deliberately trying to provoke the United States into a direct retaliatory attack on North Vietnam . . . in order to confront the United States with the choice of attacking a city or being labeled a 'paper tiger.'"⁵⁷

U.S. News & World Report likewise attempted to explain why North Vietnamese PT boats deliberately attacked United States destroyers. In a lengthy five page story on 17 August 1964, the U.S. News referred to two members of the magazine's International Staff "who have followed the war in Vietnam from its beginning," to answer why the attacks transpired.⁵⁸

Staff reporter Robert P. Martin offered two reasons why the North Vietnamese attacked United States ships. First,

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷"U.S. Warships Attacked Again; 2 North Viet PTs Believed Sunk," Washington Post (5 Aug. 1964), 9.

⁵⁸"Bigger War for U.S. in Asia," U.S. News & World Report (17 Aug. 1964), 21.

he wrote, "The nature of the naval incidents indicated that the Communists were still pursuing a relatively cautious line." The North Vietnamese could have pursued a conventional conflict by escalating the ground war where they had superiority in numbers. Hence, the deliberate attacks could be seen as measures to test America's willingness to respond.⁵⁹ Secondly, and most importantly, Martin believed that the North Vietnamese must have anticipated achieving a psychological victory. If the attacks succeeded, the United States would have had to pull back its warships from the Gulf of Tonkin. A psychological victory for North Vietnam could have spelled disaster for the South Vietnamese armies. Morale was already high for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces, a boost to their fighting spirits in August 1964 could have greatly altered the course of the war.⁶⁰

Francis B. Stevens, a former career diplomat then on U.S. News & World Report's staff, raised the same question in an article entitled, "Why the Torpedo Attacks?" He added that the idea for the attacks could have come from China in order to see if the United States was a "paper tiger."⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹"Why the Torpedo Attacks?," U.S. News & World Report (17 Aug. 1964), 24.

The New Republic also explained the reason for the attacks by referring to China's claim of America as a "paper tiger". The magazine pointed out that "the Chinese Communists never tire of declaring the United States to be a 'paper tiger.'" It added, "It may be that what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin will cause the Chinese to reconsider."⁶²

On a similar note, Newsweek stated, "With China's image of itself as the Communist sword of wrath now lying at the bottom of the Gulf of Tonkin . . . The Gulf of Tonkin, in fact, begins to look like quite a large victory for President Johnson."⁶³

Collectively, the five publications placed the blame for the Tonkin incident on the Communist Chinese. They all agreed that North Vietnam's motivation for the attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin stemmed from Peking's desire to test the United States and see how it would respond. Therefore, regardless of liberal or conservative biases the five publications demonstrated a similar understanding of the Tonkin incident. To arrive at this conclusion the five publications relied on government press communiques as well as journalists specializing in international affairs.

Another interesting comparison between the liberal and

⁶²"Unmeasured Response," New Republic (22 Aug. 1964), 3.

⁶³"Back to Normal," Newsweek (24 Aug. 1964), 39.

conservative camps is that two of the six publications questioned the legitimacy of the second Tonkin attack of 4 August 1964. Both the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal stated that the second attack on United States ships might not have occurred. The Post quoted Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy who said that the attack 'might' not have occurred, thereby, placing doubt in the readers' mind about whether the event actually took place.⁶⁴ The National Review raised the same point for its readership. The magazine explained that the second incident could not have happened the way Secretary McNamara said it did. According to the administration, the second attack took place at 21:52 and lasted until 01:30. Based on McNamara's testimony, National Review asked, "How could they be engaged in fierce fighting with powerful U.S. destroyers for three hours on high seas more than sixty nautical miles off the coast?"⁶⁵

It is clearly evident after examining the three liberal and three conservative publications that they did not report the Tonkin incidents with any major differences. The publications raised the same questions and provided similar

⁶⁴"2nd Raid Held Deliberate: Possible Miscue Seen In Attack on Maddox," Washington Post (8 Aug. 1964), 1.

⁶⁵"The Tonkin Gulf Mystery," National Review (22 Sept. 1964), 799.

answers about why North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked American ships. Having demonstrated these and other similarities, one can conclude that the news analysis by the publications did not adhere to any liberal or conservative biases while covering the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Let us now examine how the liberal and conservative journals treated the Pleiku attack of February 1965.

The Pleiku Attack, 6 February 1965

The attack on Pleiku is truly significant for any study of the United States military presence in Vietnam. Following Pleiku, the United States launched a retaliatory air strike, code named Flaming Dart, which became the precursor for Operation Rolling Thunder. Also indirectly connected to the war's escalation after Pleiku, was the landing of America's first combat troops, United States Marines, on 8 March 1965. Moreover, as a result of Pleiku, the United States became a co-belligerent in a war it hoped would never escalate. For the first time in the war, "United States soldiers were the primary rather than the secondary targets for mortar fire."⁸⁶

Once a market town for the region's mountain tribes,

⁸⁶Kathleen J. Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 111.

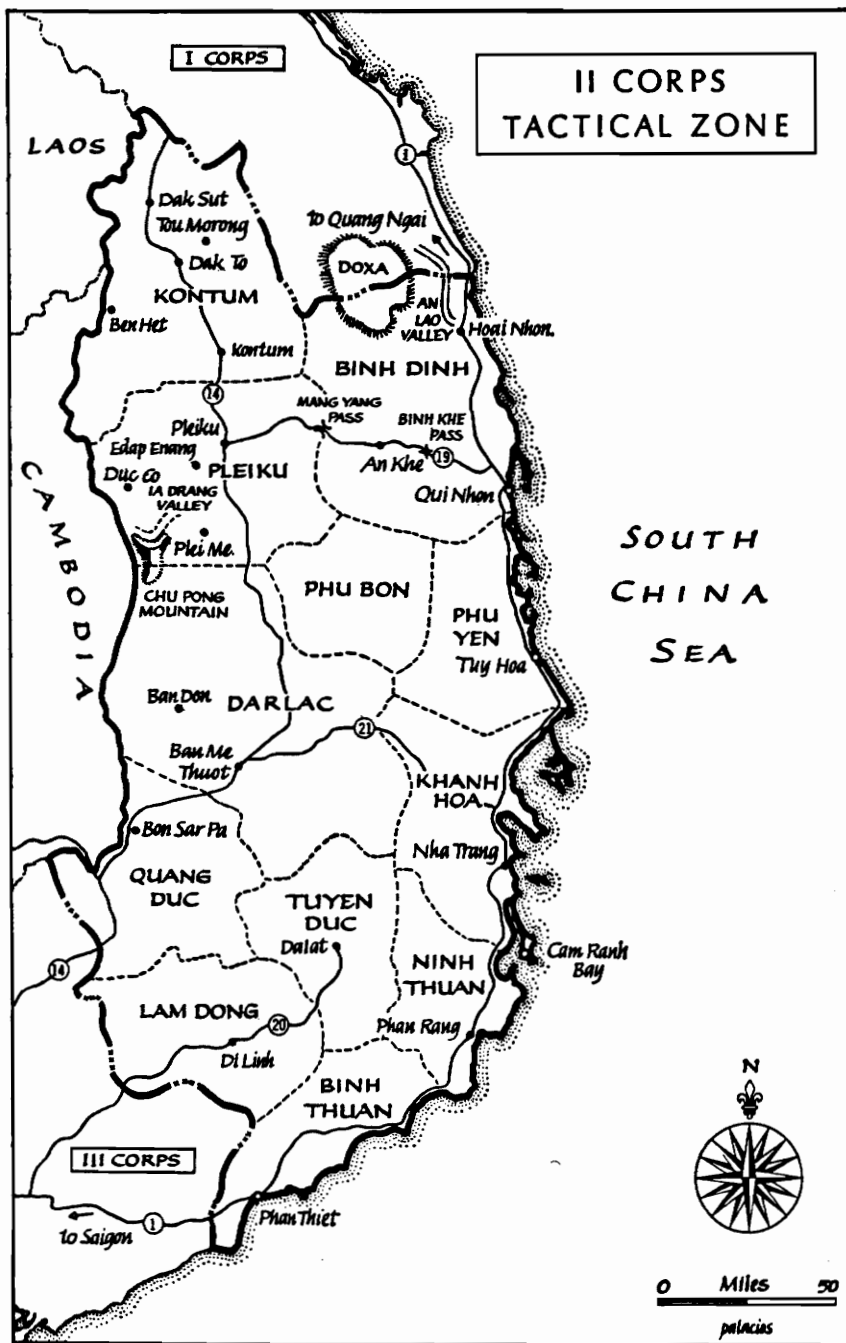
Pleiku had become by 1964 the home for an American airstrip called Camp Holloway (see Map II, II Corps Tactical Zone).⁶⁷ Pleiku was also headquarters for the South Vietnamese Second Corps. Camp Holloway and the South Vietnamese Second Corps had provided housing areas for American military personnel. United States helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft were also located at Camp Holloway. On Saturday, 6 February 1965, the Viet Cong launched two attacks simultaneously against the airstrip at Camp Holloway and the American billets in Pleiku.⁶⁸

The Viet Cong, using Soviet 81-mm. mortars, pounded the United States military compound at Pleiku. Camp Holloway suffered widespread destruction from Viet Cong small-arms fire, rifle grenades, demolition charges, and recoilless rifles. The Viet Cong attacks were typically quick and decisive. At the airstrip, 5 United States helicopters were destroyed, leaving 9 to 11 others damaged, and 6 fixed-wing aircraft were also damaged.⁶⁹ American casualties in the Pleiku area were seven killed, one hundred nine wounded, of

r Reports (New

t S. McNamara,
1. 52 (22 Feb.

Map II, II Corps Tactical Zone⁷⁰



⁷⁰Taken from A Soldier Reports, General William C. Westmoreland (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 6.

whom seventy-six required evacuation.⁷¹

In reference to the Pleiku attack, President Johnson made his famous "gun over the mantel" comparison in an urgently called meeting of the National Security Council on the evening of 6 February 1965:

We have kept our gun over the mantel and our shells in the cupboard for a long time now, . . . And what was the result? They are killing our men while they sleep in the night. I can't ask our American soldiers out there to continue to fight with one hand tied behind their backs.⁷²

President Johnson concluded, "After long discussion I authorized the strikes, provided the South Vietnamese government agreed."⁷³ The air strikes, code named Flaming Dart, were now operational with barracks and staging areas, in the southern portion of North Vietnam, as the specified retaliatory targets.⁷⁴ Later, reconnaissance photographs revealed that the bombings had been a complete success.

The first of the six publications to report on the

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Lyndon Johnson, Vantage Point, 125.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Flaming Dart was a tactical air strike designed to be retaliatory in nature. After 13 February 1965, the President implemented 'a program of measured and limited air action jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in the DRV [North Vietnam].' This bombing program became known as Rolling Thunder, when it commenced operations on 2 March 1965. See The Pentagon Papers, Sen. Gravel ed., Vol. III (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 270-271.

Pleiku attack was the Washington Post. In its page one 7 February article, the Post stayed with its non-analytical non-interpretative style of reporting--seen already with regards to Tonkin Gulf. Quoting administration officials in Washington, the Post story presented a possible reason for the Pleiku attack: "The Viet Cong's clandestine radio station announced during the holiday [lunar new year] that a reprisal would be made for the public execution in Saigon one week ago of 20-year-old Le Van Khuyen, a convicted Viet Cong terrorist. The Pleiku attack may have been this reprisal."⁷⁵ Out of the six publications, the Post would become the only one to offer this explanation for the Pleiku attack. The concern of the other publications was with the retaliatory air strikes and the growing American participation in the war.

The New Republic agreed with the President's decision for retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam. The magazine said, "the retaliatory bombings were inevitable, necessary and entirely successful."⁷⁶ Furthermore, the New Republic supported the President because the retaliatory air strikes were justifiable. At Pleiku, American lives had

⁷⁵"8 GIs Die, 61 Hurt In Viet Cong Attack," Washington Post (7 Feb. 1965), 1, 16.

⁷⁶Bill Mauldin, "According to informed sources . . ." New Republic (20 Feb. 1965), 6.

paid the price for a nation whose mission it was to advise and assist the South Vietnamese. For the New Republic, the honor of American ships on the high seas was debatable, but flag-draped coffins arriving at Travis Air Force Base were non-negotiable.

Although the six publications supported the President's retaliatory measures, Newsweek questioned the overall effectiveness of the air strikes. "Disappointingly, however, the attacks on North Vietnam had no visible deterrent effect," Newsweek stated. Moreover, "Hanoi Radio defiantly called on the Viet Cong to step up their attacks--and the guerrillas quickly obliged."⁷⁷

The overwhelming success of the retaliatory air strikes coupled with the President's decisiveness for action became definite indicators that the United States commitment in Vietnam had reached a turning point. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern affairs William Bundy best summed up the significance of this event: 'The Pleiku attack,' Bundy concludes, 'had produced a practicable point of departure.'⁷⁸ This portrayal of Pleiku as a turning point in the war received ample attention by the press. A general

⁷⁷"Pleiku and Qui Nhon: Decision Points," Newsweek (22 Feb. 1965), 33-34.

⁷⁸Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 413.

theme raised by the publications was that Pleiku made the intervention of American combat troops more likely.

The Wall Street Journal picked up with this "point of departure" theme by concluding its first article on Pleiku as follows: "While many tough men in Government are urging utmost caution, many military leaders seem convinced that the possibility of broadened action against the North has never been greater."⁷⁹ In a follow up article, dated 12 February, the Wall Street Journal specifically explained that at least three divisions of American combat troops might be needed in South Vietnam if a massed North Vietnamese army pushed south. The deployed American forces would protect South Vietnam's border from threatening North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces and thus could require an additional six divisions in order to deter this threat.⁸⁰

The National Review and U.S. News & World Report made the same point as the Wall Street Journal. The National Review, in its 23 February article on Pleiku, emphasized that "Conceivably the drift could be into a full-scale war that no one intended." The article concluded, "If we are to get out, then let's get out fast. It's not worth much more

⁷⁹"U.S. Risk in Vietnam," Wall Street Journal (8 Feb. 1965), 1, 6.

⁸⁰"Next Step in Vietnam," Wall Street Journal (12 Feb. 1965), 1.

of our soldiers' blood to get a face-saving formula to cover a capitulation."⁸¹ U.S. News & World Report best summed up the possibilities of an all out war in Vietnam: "Put all these factors together--the Communist buildup in Laos, the projected SEATO operation in Thailand, U.S. claims of North Vietnamese infiltration, and it is obvious that both sides are jockeying for position in a tense psychological conflict that could develop into bigger shooting war."⁸² Hence, the use of United States combat troops to fight the war in Vietnam.

In its issue of 15 February, the U.S. News & World Report conducted an interview with former United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge. The interviewer specifically asked Mr. Lodge about the potential use of United States combat troops in Vietnam.⁸³ The interviewer asked, "The U.S. is supposed to be their [South Vietnam] military helper. Why don't we help them attack North Vietnam?" Mr. Lodge responded, "Well, we have it in our power to change the nature of this struggle. It's a fateful decision to make." Again the interviewer asked, "Is

⁸¹"A Problem of Communication," National Review (23 Feb. 1965), 137.

⁸²"Last Days for South Vietnam? -Close Look at Latest Crisis," U.S. News & World Report (8 Feb. 1965), 36.

⁸³"Go on Fighting in Vietnam? Interview with Henry Cabot Lodge," U.S. News & World Report (15 Feb. 1965), 62.

it conceivable that we might someday do it?" Mr. Lodge replied, "Conceivable, yes."⁸⁴

In a later article (22 February), "In Vietnam: The Brink of All-Out War," U.S. News stated that in light of developments following Pleiku, "The U.S. has made its position quite clear":

It is prepared to go on fighting in South Vietnam at the present level, and would prefer not to broaden it. But the U.S. is ready to escalate the war by degrees if North Vietnam keeps stepping up its infiltration, or resorts to further attacks against Americans. If forced, the United States could bring in strategic power such as has never before been seen in war.⁸⁵

Besides the theme of combat troops, another prominent theme raised by the publications pertained to comparisons between Pleiku and Tonkin Gulf. The National Review contended that "These air strikes, indeed, like the Gulf of Tonkin episode last summer, can most readily be understood not as military actions but as attempts at communication, as a method of negotiating."⁸⁶ The Wall Street Journal asserted that obviously, the retaliatory air strike after Tonkin did not teach Hanoi a lesson, therefore; "the North Vietnamese are clearly on notice . . . that they [United

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵"In Vietnam: The Brink of All-Out War," U.S. News & World Report (22 Feb. 1965), 37.

⁸⁶"A Problem of Communication," National Review (23 Feb. 1965), 136.

States] are able and willing to counter in other ways."⁸⁷ Here again we see reference to the possible escalation of the war.

The U.S. News & World Report made a Gulf of Tonkin parallel in one of its 22 February articles. It stated, "Once again, as after the Tonkin Gulf attack last August, President Johnson responded to a 'clear test and challenge.' There were signs that, this time, the U.S. might go beyond simple retaliation."⁸⁸ In a related article U.S. News concluded that North Vietnam had made a grave error in believing that the United States would not retaliate after the Pleiku attack. It added, "Hanoi apparently figured that U.S. retaliation after the Tonkin incident was based on defending the doctrine of freedom of the seas more than on a relationship to the war in the South."⁸⁹ Indeed, Hanoi made a grave miscalculation.

Newsweek, in its comparison with the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, stated that "For one thing, the Tonkin Gulf attacks had been a clear violation of international law by the North Vietnamese whereas, overtly at least, the Pleiku

⁸⁷"U.S. Risk in Vietnam," Wall Street Journal (8 Feb. 1965), 6.

⁸⁸"What Vietnam War Means to U.S.," U.S. News & World Report (22 Feb. 1965), 35-36.

⁸⁹"In Vietnam: The Brink of All-Out War," U.S. News & World Report (22 Feb. 1965), 38.

attacks were not so."⁹⁰ Newsweek failed to comment on the preceding statement. One is inclined to ask, if Tonkin represented a violation of the rights of ships on the high seas, then what justified America's retaliatory air strikes following the Pleiku attacks? Newsweek provided an appropriate response in its next weekly issue dated 22 February. The first paragraph of the article eloquently implies that Tonkin and Pleiku were two different events and that the retaliatory bombing following Pleiku was justified because:

On a crisp California morning last week, the huge jet transports began touching down at Travis Air Force Base outside San Francisco and discharging their somber cargoes. First came the dead, in their flag-draped, regulation coffins, and then the wounded, strapped to their litters. These were the casualties of the heaviest Communist assaults yet against American installations in South Vietnam--the men whose agonies had triggered the U.S. Government, after months and years of weighing the consequences, into sending its bombers roaring in on repeated strikes against North Vietnam.⁹¹

It has been demonstrated in this thesis that the deliberate attacks--first, on American naval vessels in Tonkin Gulf and then on American installations at Pleiku--produced opinionated and emotionally stirring pieces of work within the six publications. Both events, if reported, and

⁹⁰"A Clear Test of Will," Newsweek (15 Feb. 1965), 38.

⁹¹"Pleiku and Qui Nhon: Decision Points," Newsweek (22 February 1965), 32.

edited properly, became explosive front page or lead story features. The six publications reported the two events without any regards to traditionally accepted liberal or conservative ideas. The publications' news coverage of Tonkin and Pleiku was not bias. Ideologically, the liberal and conservative publications made similar interpretations. It will become more evident in the following chapters that the respected publications did not adhere to any liberal or conservative labels, which other sources have placed on them, during the Vietnam War.

One must keep in mind that the press merely reported on the attacks at Tonkin and Pleiku, relying primarily on available information from government sources. It was not until the press could cover an event first hand--out in the field where reporters were seeing the event unfold before their very eyes--that their attitudes began to change about the President's handling of the war in Vietnam. As we shall see in the next chapter, the publications were highly critical of the United States military situation during the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Tet offensive of 1968.

Chapter II

The Coverage: "Disaster in Vietnam"⁹²

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong offensive in the winter and early spring of 1968, more commonly known as the Tet offensive, was a watershed for United States military involvement in Vietnam. Following Tet, the United States military presence in Vietnam gradually deescalated. This transition in American military commitments in Vietnam was appropriately revealed by the President during a televised address on 31 March 1968. After exactly two months of hard fighting, the events of Tet compelled President Johnson to announce a partial bombing halt and to offer peace talks. In the statement, moreover, the President proclaimed: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."⁹³

The six publications provided unprecedented war coverage of the Tet offensive, which raised doubts about the strengths of the United States military position in Vietnam. The publications questioned the president's policy and

⁹²"Disaster in Vietnam" taken from Peter Braestrup's Big Story (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), xi.

⁹³Johnson, Vantage Point, 429-430.

military strategy in Vietnam. The newspapers and magazines were filled with stories and pictures that indicated a military "disaster in Vietnam."⁹⁴ The journals focused on the military's loss of initiative in the face of an almost giant, uncompromising, unstoppable enemy. The devastation to South Vietnam cities and the deaths of innocent civilians at the hands of the American military became two of the most prominent issues in the three liberal and three conservative publications. Finally, the publications covered the besieged marine base at Khe Sanh with the majority of stories comparing the fate of Khe Sanh to the unfortunate French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. From "disaster in Vietnam" reporting to the comparisons of Khe Sanh with Dien Bien Phu, the press contributed to the shaping of the American public's perceptions about the war in Vietnam. According to Peter Braestrup, author of Big Story, who was the Washington Post's bureau chief in Saigon during the Tet offensive, "the news coverage from Vietnam demonstrably affected the perceptions and early reactions of political Washington, of the President's allies and his foes. . . ."⁹⁵

Like Braestrup's study, other authors have raised the issue of how the press portrayed the news of Tet. In a

⁹⁴Braestrup, Big Story, xi.

⁹⁵Ibid., xiii.

television interview, Braestrup remarked that the press coverage of Tet was "a never ending, never climatic unfolding story." Moreover, he added, "It was melodrama at its purest with visions of Dien Bien Phu."⁹⁶ William M. Hammond, in his study of the military and the media, stated that "Gloomy news stories began to surface in the United States within hours of the attack."⁹⁷ Daniel C. Hallin stated that "Tet appeared in the news as a dramatic and disastrous turn of events."⁹⁸ Herbert Y. Schandler, in his work on Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam, also commented on the press portrayal of the Tet offensive. Schandler said:

The official [military] cables from Saigon quickly showed the true nature of the military reaction to the enemy's attacks. The Viet Cong was suffering severe casualties. The South Vietnamese army was reacting well, and the civil populace was not rising up to greet and support the Viet Cong in the cities. But this situation was not being reflected in news reports or on television in the United States. Those reports continued to emphasize the shock, surprise, extent, and power of the unexpected enemy offensive.⁹⁹

⁹⁶Peter Braestrup in Michael Maclear's Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War (Informational Television Productions, Limited, 1980).

⁹⁷William M. Hammond, Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968 (Wash. D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1988), 345.

⁹⁸Daniel C. Hallin, The Uncensored War, 168.

⁹⁹Herbert Y. Schandler, The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 81.

All of the writers raised another important point with regards to the press's coverage of the Vietnam War. They state that the conflict in Vietnam suffered the inconveniences of an undeclared war. Unlike World War II, censorship was never imposed upon the press corps in Vietnam. Therefore, the war correspondent operated within a system that placed no constraints on his or her freedom to travel and gather information. Had earlier wars been uncensored, the reporting might have had some of the same coverage as the Vietnam War.

The majority of daily and weekly news that came out of Saigon, during the three months of the Tet offensive, lacked a sense of perspective, when placed into the larger context of the war. Generally, a news correspondent had little comprehension of the military aspects of the conflict because his journalistic tour of duty in Vietnam was short. Reporters rotated in and out of Vietnam. Twelve to eighteen months was considered a normal stay for a reporter. The reporter's lack of knowledge of operational and tactical matters inhibited him from giving an accurate report.¹⁰⁰ The media's failure to depict accurately the events without comparing them to the overall military situation was not done intentionally. Rather, it was an example of what could

¹⁰⁰Braestrup, Big Story, xi.

happen to war coverage in an undeclared, uncensored war.

The Tet Offensive, 31 January-31 March 1968

Before the outbreak of the Tet offensive, the overall attitude of the six publications was one of optimism about the war. The press had repeatedly been told by the military commanders in South Vietnam and in Washington that victory for the United States was near. General William C. Westmoreland the commander of the United States Military Assistance Command in Vietnam told reporters before the National Press Club on 21 November 1967: "I am absolutely certain that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing." He added, "There are indications that the Viet Cong and even Hanoi know this." The press certainly believed victory was near when Westmoreland said, "We have reached an important point when the end begins to come into view." "We are making progress," he added. Furthermore, "It [victory] lies within our grasp--the enemy's hopes are bankrupt."¹⁰¹

As late as 19 December 1967, the Washington Post quoted General Earle G. Wheeler the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

¹⁰¹William C. Westmoreland, "Progress Report on the War in Viet-Nam, 21 Nov. 1967 before the National Press Club, Wash. D.C." Department of State Bulletin. Vol. 57. (11 December 1967), 785-788.

Staff as saying, "We are winning the war in Vietnam."¹⁰² It is not surprising that the Tet offensive was a shock to the publications when the military had been reassuring the media that victory would soon be achieved in Vietnam.

The Wall Street Journal and the New Republic were also surprised by the Tet offensive. Before Tet, the two publications were calling for the United States and North Vietnam to begin peace negotiations. The Wall Street Journal said that there were many obstacles hindering a peaceful resolution of the war, but it was possible that peace could be achieved.¹⁰³ New Republic was convinced that the United Nations should initiate peace talks, and adding, "should all else fail," there should be, "an all-Asian conference [for] getting Americans out of Vietnam."¹⁰⁴

With great surprise the Tet offensive began in the early morning hours of 31 January 1968. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong offensive occurred on Tet, the Vietnamese holiday that ushers in the lunar New Year--in 1968, the Year of the Monkey. Unlike any previous North Vietnamese and Viet Cong assault, the Tet offensive struck

¹⁰²George C. Wilson, "Wheeler Reproves Critics," Washington Post (19 Dec. 1967), 1.

¹⁰³Peter R. Kann, "Peace: New Obstacle Course," Wall Street Journal (17 Jan. 1968), 12.

¹⁰⁴"Courage to Change," New Republic (1 April 1967), 4.

at the major population centers and military command installations throughout South Vietnam. General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of North Vietnamese forces, stated specifically that "The Tet offensive attacks were launched not on American troop units--in fact, they were ignored--but on American communication centers, headquarters and above all on American air installations."¹⁰⁵ All four of the allies' Corps Tactical Zones were attacked simultaneously by combined North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces (see Map III, The Tet Attacks).¹⁰⁶ Thirty-six of South Vietnam's forty-four provincial capitals; five of its six largest cities, and one-fourth of the country's 242 district capitals became the new battlegrounds for General Giap's gamble to win the war in Vietnam.¹⁰⁷

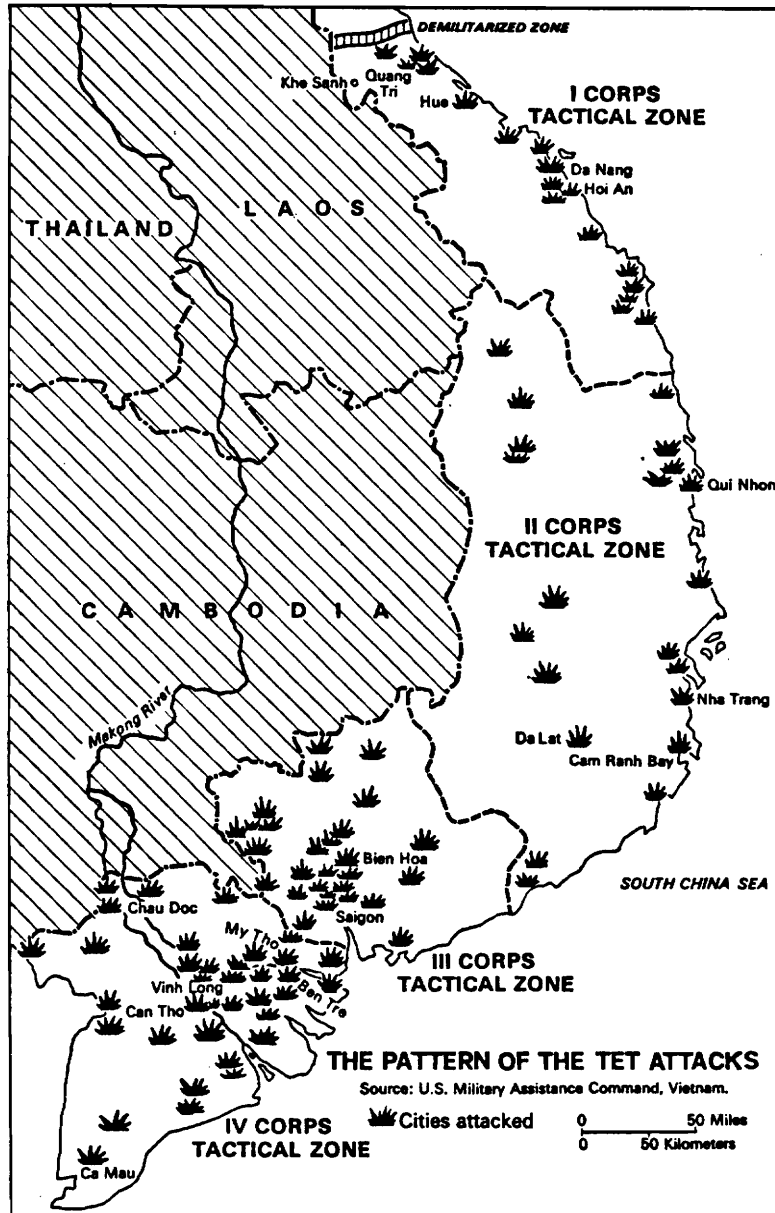
General Giap, modern Vietnam's foremost military figure who was the principal architect for the Vietnamese victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, planned and implemented the Tet offensive so as to coincide with the festivities of the lunar New Year. General Giap explained

¹⁰⁵Douglas Pike, War, Peace, and the Viet Cong (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969), 128. Pike was an expert on VC strategy, tactics, and terror methods. Furthermore, Pike quoted Gen. Giap as saying that the American communication-command-response structure was like a fine watch: "beautifully constructed but very sensitive and easily stopped."

¹⁰⁶Don Oberdorfer, Tet! (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 123.

¹⁰⁷Numbers taken from Johnson's Vantage Point, 382.

Map III, The Tet Attacks¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁸Taken from Tet!, Don Oberdorfer, 123.

in an interview in Hanoi after the war: "For us, you know, there is no such thing as a single strategy. Ours is always a synthesis, simultaneously military, political, and diplomatic--which is why, quite clearly, the Tet offensive had multiple objectives."¹⁰⁹

The primary objective of the Tet offensive was to cause a general uprising throughout South Vietnam's populace to coincide with the military attacks on civilian centers of authority and allied command installations. Therefore, if the communists could win over the hearts and minds of the people, then possibly they could drive a wedge between the Americans and the South Vietnamese, thus forcing the allies out of the rural sectors and into defensive city enclaves.¹¹⁰

The Tet offensive was part of the communist Winter - Spring campaign of 1967-1968. Distinctively, the assaults signified the start of Phase II of the campaign's operations, which lasted from January to March 1968. Phase II (Tet offensive) involved the use of "independent fighting methods." Douglas Pike, an expert on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong strategy, defined "independent fighting methods" as "large numbers of attacks by fairly small units, simultaneously, over a vast geographic area and using the

¹⁰⁹Karnow, Vietnam: A History, 535.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 536.

most refined and advanced techniques of guerrilla war."¹¹¹ The first of these enemy attacks came against the cities of Saigon and Hue, which received much of the initial press coverage. Rapidly, other assaults occurred on Tan San Nhut Air Base, the Presidential Palace, the South Vietnamese Army forces and Joint General Staff headquarters compound (including Westmoreland's headquarters at Tan San Nhut), and other government and military installations.¹¹²

The first affected city to draw the attention of the press corps was Saigon. The publications focused on the fifteen Viet Cong sappers who attacked the United States Embassy. Saigon and the Embassy compound received much of the initial coverage in the pages of the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal. Nearly every front page story in the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal in February focused on the unerring ability of the enemy in Saigon and Hue. Initial reports of the two newspapers predicted "disaster" for the American military at Saigon and Hue. The articles asked "Who held the initiative," "What next," and its focus was on the enemy and his capabilities for success.

¹¹¹Douglas Pike, The Viet-Cong Strategy of Terror (United States Mission, Viet-Nam, 1970), 25. Since 1958, Mr. Pike has been an officer of the U.S. Information Society in Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, and Hong Kong. In 1970, when he wrote this work, he was Special Assistant for Political Affairs to the director of the U.S. Information Service in Japan.

¹¹²Schandler, The Unmaking of a President, 74.

The articles attitude indicated that South Vietnam was in "critical" condition.

One of many Washington Post stories to address the capabilities of the enemy appeared on 2 February. Stanley Karnow, writing for the Washington Post, stated that the enemy's "capacity to pursue an array of related tactics underlines the reality in the communist doctrine." Therefore, he added: "Only time will tell the answer. But so far the communists have shown that if they lack the *strength* for a *clear-cut victory*, they are *dynamic* enough to stave off defeat."¹¹³

A 3 February article in the Post focused on the military feats of the enemy. It stated, "The past few days have shown that the Communists underground is as effective in Saigon as in the contested hamlets in the countryside. . . . The Communists have lost many troops, but the underground remains in *perfect shape* in Saigon." The Post added, "With all their planning and careful execution, the Communists carried out their Saigon assault only with the unintentional assistance by the Saigon authorities." Moreover, the Post determined that "The Communists proved to

¹¹³Stanley Karnow, "What are the Vietcong Trying to Prove?" Washington Post (2 Feb. 1968), 1, 18. Emphasis added.

be masters of the little details necessary for success."¹¹⁴

In the same issue, the Post continued to focus on the exploits of the enemy with an article by one of its most competent war correspondents, Lee Lescaze. Lescaze highlighted the enemy's capacity to stage a second series of attacks, pointing out that the enemy had the capability to recycle, with the same force, its attacks on other helpless South Vietnamese cities. Positioned beside the article, in the middle of the front page, was a photograph of United States Marines taking cover behind a tank in Hue. One marine lay dead along the superstructure of the tank, as Viet Cong snipers pinned down his comrades beneath him. In the picture, one could see the fear and uncertainty on the marines' faces. The sight of this photograph must have conveyed a message to the Post's readership that the military situation in South Vietnam was critical and nonreversible in light of such a formidable foe.¹¹⁵

Like the initial coverage of the Post, the Wall Street

¹¹⁴Peter Arnett, "How VC Infiltrated Saigon," Washington Post (3 Feb. 1968), 1, 22. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁵Lee Lescaze, "Siege Ebbs But Second Drive Seen," Washington Post (3 Feb. 1968), 1, 6. For example, other articles in the Post focusing on the enemy, "Hanoi" stories, were: "Hanoi's Leader Charges Allies Broke Tet Truce," (1 Feb.), 1; "Hanoi Says Foundation Is Laid for More Victories," (4 Feb.), 9; "North Vietnam Claims Complete Tet Victory," (20 Feb.), 15; "General Giap Foresees Fierce Phase of War," (24 Feb.), 8.

Journal devoted its attention to the exploits of the enemy, stating on 23 February, "We think the American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven't already, the prospect that the *whole Vietnam effort may be doomed*; it may be falling apart beneath our feet." It added that "The actual military situation may be making academic the philosophical arguments for the intervention in the first place."¹¹⁶

This article furthermore confronted the issue of America's loss of battlefield initiative, "Hence the question:" it stated, "Are developments on the ground making hash of our original, commendable objectives?" It answered this question by saying that "The U.S. went to keep South Vietnam out of Communist hands. But no matter what our forces do, they can't seem to do that." The article ended by suggesting that in light of recent events on the battlefield "the logic of the battlefield suggests that the U.S. could get forced out of an untenable position."¹¹⁷

In a different article of the 23 February issue, Alan L. Otten wrote an important piece on who was responsible for

¹¹⁶"The Logic of the Battlefield," Wall Street Journal (23 Feb. 1968), 14. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁷Ibid. Other articles, for example, focusing on the enemy in the Wall Street Journal were: "Vietcong invaded provincial capital, seized hospital before being routed," (6 Mar.), 1; "Enemy gunners shot down a U.S. plane near Khe Sanh, apparently killing 49 persons," (7 Mar.), 1.

America's failure in Vietnam in light of the Tet offensive.¹¹⁸ Otten concluded that if any one, it was the top military and civilian officials in Washington who both failed to predict when the attacks would occur and to deter them from happening. Otten accused the high ranking officials of having "battle fatigue." However, he quoted Secretary of State Dean Rusk as saying that the United States had succumbed to failure in Vietnam because the press, with its negative attitude about the war, had portrayed the Tet offensive as a victory for North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces and a defeat for the United States and her allies. In the article, Secretary of State Rusk asked a reporter, "why must this negative aspect be the one emphasized in the press?" Repeatedly, Otten's only defense for Rusk's accusation was that Rusk and others like him suffered from "battle fatigue."¹¹⁹

More importantly, even the President wanted to know why there was all the negative reporting by the press. While aboard Air Force One, the President chastised a press pool for not reporting that Ho Chi Minh had violated the planned Tet truce. Furthermore, he criticized reporters for not commenting on the high casualty rates inflicted upon the

¹¹⁸Alan L. Otten, "Battle Fatigue," Wall Street Journal (23 Feb. 1968), 14.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

enemy and for not giving praise to the South Vietnamese soldiers during the offensive.¹²⁰

The Washington Post and Wall Street Journal neglected to praise the South Vietnamese soldiers. Rather, they reported on how the enemy achieved the initiative in South Vietnam. It is evident that this type of coverage did not adhere to any liberal or conservative set of beliefs. Rather, the war correspondents for the two newspapers simply reported the events the way they saw them unfold. Therefore, to say the Washington Post reported Tet with a distinct set of liberal views and that the Wall Street Journal reported it with conservative views is incorrect.

The four magazines portrayed the same "disaster" image as the newspapers. The first story to appear in Newsweek indicated that Hanoi had "dealt the allies an incalculable psychological setback."¹²¹ After traveling through the IV Corps Tactical Zone, Newsweek's war correspondent Merton Perry reported: "The word in IV Corps is 'disaster.'" As far as Perry was concerned, "There are disaster information bulletins, disaster reports, disaster programs."¹²²

¹²⁰Kathleen J. Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 222.

¹²¹"Hanoi Attacks and Scores a Major Psychological Blow," Newsweek (12 Feb. 1968), 23.

¹²²"Man on the Spot," Newsweek (19 Feb. 1968), 33.

Like Newsweek, the U.S. News & World Report depicted the same "disaster" image. In one article, U.S. News compared the communist offensive to lightning striking and what followed throughout South Vietnam was "terrorism on the largest scale ever."¹²³ Another article portrayed disaster as the allies' inability to "protect cities and people-- anywhere in Vietnam--when the Communists decide to zero in." The tone of the article conveyed American military failure on a large scale. U.S. News quoted a United States expert on Vietnam who said: "'It is clear that after 2 1/2 years and 50 billion dollars, the U.S. still is *doomed* to the defensive because it lacks the manpower to respond to large Communist operations and, at the same time, pursue all its widespread logistical, pacification, search-and-destroy and other missions.'"¹²⁴

Newsweek and U.S. News also touched on the element of battlefield initiative. U.S. News stated that "It was the Communists who dropped the latest bombshell in Vietnam, once again seizing the initiative."¹²⁵ In an 11 March article, Newsweek stated that the Tet offensive "forced thousands of

¹²³"And Now What In Vietnam," U.S. News & World Report (19 Feb. 1968), 39.

¹²⁴"As Climax Mounts in Vietnam," U.S. News & World Report (12 Feb. 1968), 23-24.

¹²⁵Ibid., 23.

allied troops to withdraw to the defense of the cities and laid bare the South Vietnamese countryside to communist encroachments." Most important, Newsweek said, "by launching their Tet offensive, the communists seized the *battlefield initiative* from half a million U.S. troops and raised serious doubts in the minds of millions of Americans . . . about the future course of the war."¹²⁶

Except for the National Review, the publications concluded that the American military had lost its battlefield initiative in South Vietnam because too many troops were being tied down at the besieged marine base at Khe Sanh. Only the National Review had something positive to say about battlefield initiative. In an article for National Review Colonel James W. Graham said, "True, the allied losses and the toll of civilian victims are sobering. But there are 40,000 fewer Communists at the latest count than there were last month, and this is a decisive outcome in our favor by anybody's standards."¹²⁷ The Colonel stressed that the doves were wrong in their assessment of the Tet as "evidence of our own failure to date." On the contrary, he added, the United States achieved combat

¹²⁶"New Rules in Vietnam," Newsweek (11 Mar. 1968), 88. Emphasis added.

¹²⁷Col. James W. Graham, "The Score for the Tet Match," National Review (12 Mar. 1968), 226.

initiative, when its forces fought the Viet Cong outside the jungle and out in the open. He concluded: "If they [North Vietnamese] could insure us one such confrontation a month from now on, we could probably cease quibbling about negotiations and bombing halts and guarantee the war's end before Christmas."¹²⁸

The five other publications made comparisons of the besieged marine compound at Khe Sanh with the French at Dien Bien Phu. During the North Vietnamese siege of Khe Sanh, which lasted for 77 days from 21 January to 7 April, the publications stated that General Giap wanted the marines at Khe Sanh to experience the same devastating defeat that he had inflicted on the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The Washington Post editorialized disaster for the United States Marines at Khe Sanh reminding readers that "intense shelling--like that now aimed at Khe Sanh--eventually crippled French resupply."¹²⁹ Newsweek said history would repeat itself at Khe Sanh.¹³⁰ U.S. News stated that "Khe Sanh could turn into a *disaster*--an American Dien

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹"The Analogy of Dienbienphu," Washington Post (10 Feb. 1968), 6.

¹³⁰"The VC's Week of Terror," Newsweek (12 Feb. 1968), 29.

Bien Phu."¹³¹

New Republic also alluded to the tragedy at Dien Bien Phu, remarking: "Khesanh (sic) is being defended for reasons that are not worth the life of a single Marine, and the decision to stand there could easily end in a military *disaster*." "At Khesanh," moreover, "5,000 men are huddled together on a flat, *isolated* plateau surrounded by 20,000 North Vietnamese looking down from high ground." New Republic added, "The Khesanh (sic) garrison is like a goat tied to a stake."¹³² Focusing on the genius of the enemy and the incompetence of the American military, the article continued:

Giap recognized that weakness [U.S. position at Khe Sanh] while our military leaders were impelled not to. In Giap's military lexicon, like that of Mao Tse-tung, real estate as such has no value; an army should avoid battle where the *advantages lie with the enemy*, and retreat in the face of superior force is a mark of good sense rather than cowardice. . . . The American propensity to subordinate military to symbolic considerations is a great mistake and the *North Vietnamese* have *exploited* that *mistake* fully. . . . If Dienbienphu can be taken as a precedent, the North Vietnamese will keep a powerful array of artillery and anti-aircraft weaponry completely under wraps until just before an assault on

¹³¹"Khe Sanh: U.S. Girds For Red Blow," U.S. News & World Report (26 Feb. 1968), 29. Emphasis added.

¹³²Oliver E. Clubb Jr., "Johnson's Dienbienphu? Khe Sanh--A Goat Tied to a Stake," New Republic (6 April 1968), 9-10. Emphasis added.

Khesanh.¹³³

The decision to defend the Khe Sanh plateau was militarily and strategically sound.¹³⁴ Relinquishing the Khe Sanh area would have allowed the North Vietnamese to outflank allied positions south of the Demilitarized Zone. Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, remarked that "Khe Sanh was defended because it was the only logical thing to do." He added, "We were there, in a prepared position and in considerable strength." Moreover, "A well-fought battle would do the enemy a lot more damage than he could hope to inflict on us."¹³⁵

Geographically Dien Bien Phu, positioned in a valley, was more vulnerable than Khe Sanh, a plateau. The French at Dien Bien Phu controlled no hills; the marines at Khe Sanh held four of the surrounding hills. The French had no artillery support from the outside; Khe Sanh received fire

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴See Robert Pisor, The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 121. He stated: "Only very stupid military officers ignored these parallels; most thought of little else. Dienbienphu had dominated American planning and tactics from the beginning. On the day the French surrendered, in 1954, drill sergeants at Quantico, Va. lined up Marine trainees and announced grimly: 'Dienbienphu just fell. Your rifles had better be clean.'"

¹³⁵Edwin H. Simmons, The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973 (Wash. D.C.: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1985), 105.

support from three 105-mm howitzer, and one 155-mm howitzer batteries at Camp Carroll, fourteen miles away, but well within range. French air power was limited; the Americans relied upon massive B-52 strikes as well as tactical fighter-bomber air strikes. Logistically, the French lacked any form of aerial resupply; Khe Sanh had an air strip and could handle C-130 transports. The French had no helicopters; the marines had numerous helicopters used for resupply and medical evacuation. At Dien Bien Phu, the French had no way of evacuating the wounded. Subsequently, with no fire support, limited air support, no method of resupply, and no chance for evacuation, the defenders "lost all initiative" for continuing the fight and suffered defeat.¹³⁶

This thesis has shown that the liberal and conservative publications portrayed the Tet offensive with similar views. Why did these publications demonstrate similar views? One possible explanation for the similarity was the insufficient number of reporters. Geographically, the war correspondents could not cover all the cities under attack. The press competed among themselves for access to the battle areas.

¹³⁶The conclusion of "lost all initiative" came from Colonel Reamer Argo, command military historian for General Westmoreland. See, Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 338 and Pisor, The End of the Line, 140. For the comparisons of Dien Bien Phu with Khe Sanh, see Pisor's Chapter 5: "I Don't Want Any Damn Dinbinfoo," 120-142.

Subsequently, the reporters arrived at the scene of the conflict in large numbers. Obviously, during Tet, the reporters mostly covered the embattled areas of Saigon, Hue and Khe Sanh.

In Big Story, Peter Braestrup makes an attempt to answer the question. He writes, "One of the odd characteristics of American journalists is their tendency, on occasion, to vastly overrate their country's enemies."¹³⁷ By overrating their enemies, the journalists turned to "psychoanalysis." Psychoanalyzing the enemy explains why the reporters thought that they knew which army held the initiative during Tet. The war correspondents determined that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong controlled the battlefield because of unique guerilla warfare methods and terror tactics, something the majority of reporters knew very little about.

Another topic raised by the publications was the damage to South Vietnamese cities caused by the United States. On 3 February, the Post's Lee Lescaze noted: "There is no doubt that large numbers of civilians have been killed and wounded." He said, "American civilians in Saigon have suffered very few casualties but the Vietnamese here in the capital and across the country have been caught in cross

¹³⁷Peter Braestrup, Big Story, 143.

fires and hit by artillery and air strikes in many cases."¹³⁸ The next day, Lescaze continued: "The Vietcong infiltrate and they do considerable damage." Moreover, "When the government troops or the *Americans* arrive to fight the Vietcong, the battle *damage* is sometimes *enormous*."¹³⁹ On 10 March, after numerous trips through damaged cities, Lescaze reaffirmed his early February evaluations and wrote: "In city after city, they complain to a visitor that it was not necessary to knock down their houses, because only a few Vietcong were nearby." He added, however, "Whether or not they are right does not matter. They believe the *damage* was *unnecessary* and they know most of the damage was done by South Vietnamese troops and Americans."¹⁴⁰

Peter R. Kann, the Wall Street Journal's reporter for the events of Tet, repeated the same United States devastation theme as the Post. In a 7 February issue, he said that "some are enraged at allied bombing and strafing in and around heavily populated areas." Moreover, "An American visiting one seriously damaged section of Saigon three days ago was met with stony stares from Vietnamese

¹³⁸Lee Lescaze, "Allied Figures on Casualties Are Thrown into Question," Washington Post, (3 Feb. 1968), 1.

¹³⁹Lee Lescaze, "Enemy Is Able to Hit Anew," Washington Post (4 Feb. 1968), 1. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁰Lee Lescaze, "Allies Trying to Seize Offensive in the Delta," Washington Post (10 Mar. 1968), 27. Emphasis added.

residents." In particular, he said, "A child shouted the normal greeting--"OK"--but its mother raised her hand as if to slap the child and shushed it."¹⁴¹

As for Newsweek, Peter Braestrup said the magazine went to extremes in reporting the devastation in South Vietnam.¹⁴² Like the Post's articles, Newsweek focused on the comments of the Vietnamese about unnecessary United States devastation to their cities. Immediately following the American recapture of Hue, which the Viet Cong occupied for 25 days and was the scene of some of the bitterest fighting of the war, Newsweek's Maynard Parker interviewed a resident of Hue. "We understand why you [American military] had to do it," the citizen of Hue told Parker, "but we can never forgive you for it--for all the *destruction* and *death* you caused."¹⁴³ In a later article, Newsweek's Merton Perry interviewed a surgeon in Can Tho, the Mekong Delta's chief city, who stated that when the fighting started "about 50 per cent of the civilian casualties were caused by the Viet

¹⁴¹Peter Kann, "Saigon Takes Stock: Americans, Vietnamese Try to Weigh Damage From Vietcong Assaults," Wall Street Journal (7 Feb. 1968), 23.

¹⁴²Braestrup, Big Story, 216. Braestrup is probably the most qualified person to make such an accusation. He was the Post's bureau chief in South Vietnam, with offices in Saigon. Philip and Katherine Graham owned and operated both the Washington Post and Newsweek.

¹⁴³"The Death of Hue," Newsweek (11 Mar. 1968), 58. Emphasis added.

Cong and about 50 per cent caused by the U.S. and South Vietnamese." The doctor added, "But as the U.S. began counterattacking with its immense fire power, it also began accounting for almost all of the casualties."¹⁴⁴

The U.S. News & World Report also focused on casualties stating that the South Vietnamese blamed the Americans "for many of the civilian casualties caused by artillery and air strikes on the cities."¹⁴⁵

For Newsweek, Maynard Parker toured the ruined city of Hue. Not only did he interview Vietnamese civilians, he also interviewed American soldiers. He then had this to say:

It was not a triumphal parade. On all sides, as the marines marched along, all they could see was *destruction*. No one knows how many bombs, how much napalm was dropped on Hue. But it was enough. 'We used everything but nuclear weapons on this town,' recalled a marine. And what the bombs did not destroy, the soldiers and marines--both U.S. and Vietnamese--finished off in a week-long binge of looting. 'There ain't much left of Hue,' said another U.S. Marine.¹⁴⁶

Similar to the Newsweek account of United States Marines at Hue, the New Republic remarked on a comment made by an American Air Force pilot after a tactical air strike

¹⁴⁴"Man on the Spot," Newsweek, 39.

¹⁴⁵"And Now What In Vietnam," U.S. News & World Report, 39.

¹⁴⁶"The Death of Hue," Newsweek, 60. Emphasis added.

over Ben Tre. In a statement to the Associated Press, Air Force Major Chester L. Brown explained that "'it became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it' and it was 'a pity about the civilians,' of whom about 1,000 were killed and 8,000 left homeless."¹⁴⁷ The New Republic and other five publications built up this statement as an example and a symbol of America's slaughter of noncombatants.

The six publications also exhibited similar views while reporting on the massacre by the communists at Hue. Following the twenty four day Viet Cong control of Hue, the allies found approximately 1,200 bodies of people who had been executed or buried alive by local communist cadres.¹⁴⁸ Instead of addressing the massacre at Hue, the publications focused on American destruction of the city. One must ask: why was there considerable attention on devastation caused by United States forces and no coverage of the atrocities committed by the communists? Peter Braestrup arrived at some interesting explanations. He stressed that the press

¹⁴⁷"The Slaughter Goes On," New Republic (24 Feb. 1968), 13.

¹⁴⁸Pike, The Viet-Cong Strategy of Terror, 27-33. Pike believed the order for the executions came from higher up the communist chain of command. At Hue, Pike said, "the communists made a major effort to hide their deeds." Furthermore, Pike hypothesized on the VC strategy and method for execution: "as communist plans during the Battle of Hue changed so did the nature of the death orders issued."

might have been preoccupied with the plight of the living, not the dead or missing. Possibly, they could have viewed the massacre as propaganda of the United States military. According to Braestrup (himself a newspaper bureau chief), a majority of the newsmen in South Vietnam actually believed that the Viet Cong only practiced "selective terror."¹⁴⁹

There are a few explanations why the publications showed similar views when covering the Tet offensive. For one thing, the news bureaus of all six publications were under staffed and they relied upon each other for information. The offices of the six publications were located within the same building and news material circulated among the bureaus. The news bureaus were small and with only one to three reporters from each publication, most of the men wanted to cover the same event, either Saigon, Hue, or Khe Sanh. Unfortunately, the reporter would determine what was happening throughout South Vietnam by witnessing a particular event in Saigon, Hue, or Khe Sanh. Therefore, a reporter's evaluation of the entire Tet offensive was derived from his sharing of information with fellow journalists and his observations from one of the three battle sites.

¹⁴⁹Braestrup, Big Story, 215. Braestrup's examination of the press included: New York Times, Washington Post, Life, Time, Newsweek, ABC, NBC, and CBS.

Kathleen J. Turner makes a similar point in her study of the press and the Vietnam War. She states, "as the battles continued through February, the lack of familiarity with the Vietnamese language, culture, and countryside compounded the problem of a lack of mobility, which hampered both the ability and the inclination of many reporters to see the wider context of the offensive."¹⁵⁰

Peter Braestrup observes in his study of Tet that 90 percent of the press accounts focused on Saigon, Khe Sanh, and Hue, where the news bureaus were established. Moreover, news reports on the rest of the war, which entailed 85 percent of the American troop deployments and 80 percent of American casualties, were based largely on government information and the journalistic grapevine.¹⁵¹

Peter Braestrup suggests yet another reason for the similarities. He states that the war correspondents used a "projection-analysis" technique which produced pervasive distortions within the press, where "projection" represented the event itself and "analysis" embraced the unreserved commentary of the event. More appropriately, Braestrup concluded that "undisciplined 'analysis' and 'projection'-- underlay the overall failure of the press and TV to cope

¹⁵⁰Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War, 218.

¹⁵¹See Braestrup's Big Story, Chapter 8. Also, Kathleen Turner's Dual War, 218.

with the formidable circumstances of February-March 1968." He adds, "As often happens, these initial journalistic reactions set the tone and supplied the themes assigned to the crisis over the entire period."¹⁵² If one compares the analysis of Kathleen Turner with the observations of Peter Braestrup, it is easy to see how the publications did not line up on the political spectrum as opposing journals of traditionally accepted conservative or liberal thought. Rather, the journals projected similar views.

In short, the six publications presented a politically unbiased report of the Communist Tet offensive of 1968. If one takes into consideration the economic, managerial, language, and mobility constraints confronting the reporters representing these six publications, then the news coverage of Tet was fair and justifiable.

After the Tet offensive, United States military involvement in Vietnam gradually deescalated. During this phase of the war, Americans experienced the revelation of the My Lai massacre and the resumption of bombing over North Vietnam. Also, with the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty, Hanoi released the remaining 587 American prisoners of war. These three events and how the publications portrayed them will now receive our attention in the following chapter.

¹⁵²Braestrup, Big Story, 516-517.

Chapter III

The Coverage Ends: 'Peace Is at Hand'¹⁵³

Like the publications' coverage of Tet, the three liberal and three conservative journals did not demonstrate opposing political and ideological views, when they reported on and editorialized about the My Lai incident, the 1972 Christmas bombing, and the conclusion of Operation Homecoming in 1973. These respective publications expressed similar views about the three events. Chronologically, the first of these events was the My Lai massacre of 1968.

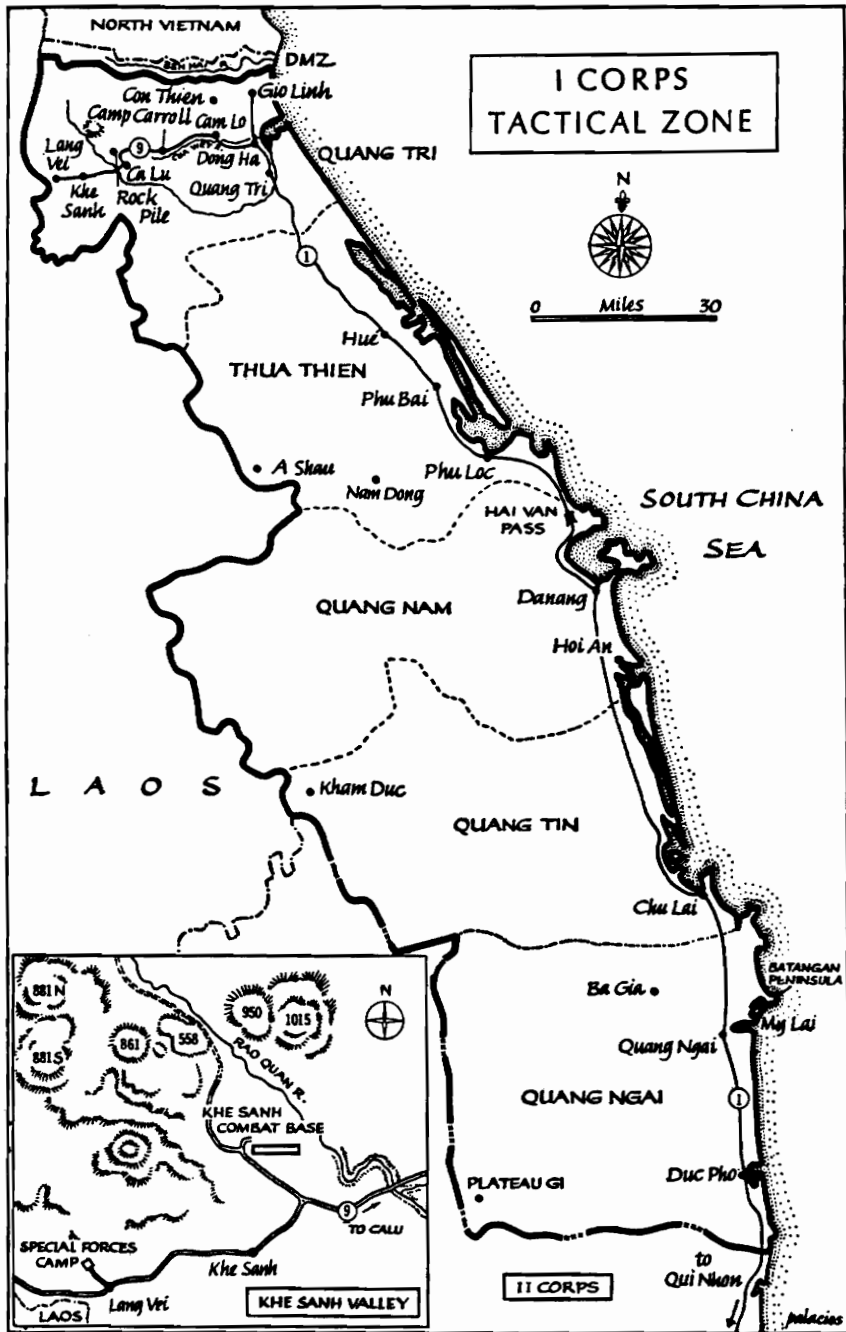
Lieutenant William L. Calley and the My Lai Incident

On 16 March 1968, Charlie Company (Company C), of Task Force Barker, assaulted the hamlets at My Lai (part of Son My village in the Son Tich district of Quang Ngai province, I Corps Tactical Zone, see Map IV).¹⁵⁴ C Company's First Platoon leader, William L. Calley, touched down at approximately 07:30 in an area west of My Lai-4 with his

¹⁵³Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1979). Title to Chapter XXXIII, pages 1395-1470.

¹⁵⁴General William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 5.

Map IV, I Corps Tactical Zone¹⁵⁵



¹⁵⁵Taken from A Soldier Reports, General William C. Westmoreland, 5.

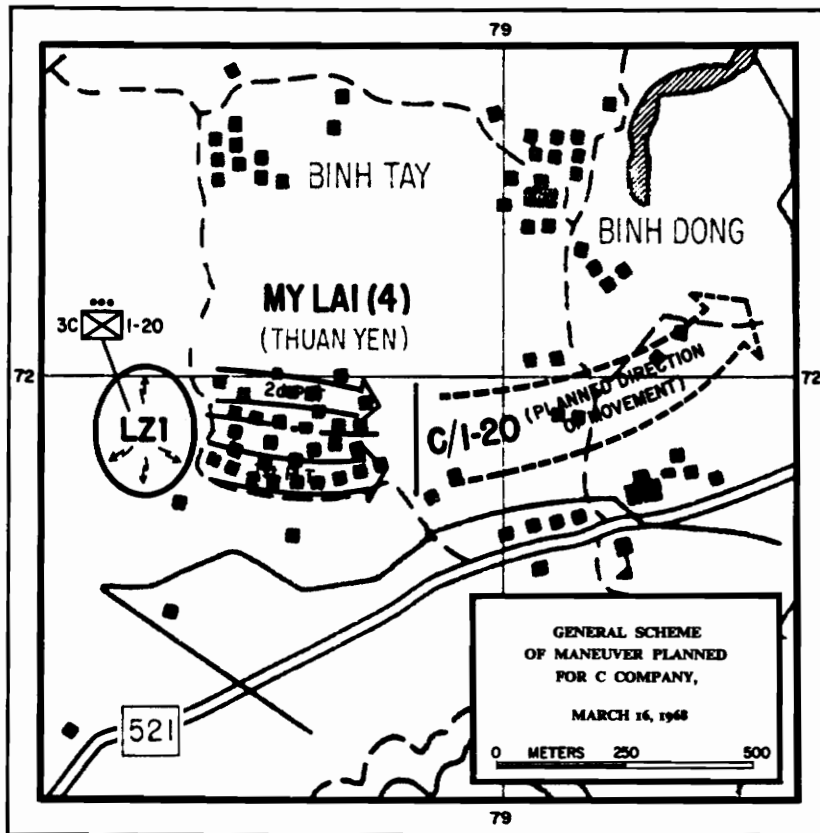
small group of 25 men (see Map V, My Lai-4).¹⁵⁶ Prior to the operation, G-2, the Intelligence segment of Task Force Barker, had confirmed the presence of the 48th Viet Cong Battalion in and around the My Lai area. Calley carried out his search-and-destroy mission on the hamlets of My Lai-4. Calley and his men killed the villagers, burned the houses, killed the livestock, and destroyed the food stuffs within the entire My Lai area.¹⁵⁷ When the assault ended at 13:30 and First Platoon left My Lai to link up with Second Platoon, Calley and his men had killed 175 to 200 of the inhabitants. All of the people at My Lai were old men, women, and young children.

Lieutenant Calley's platoon was one of Task Force Barker's reconnaissance units for conducting search-and-destroy operations in the Son My area. Charlie Company Commander Ernest L. Medina instructed Lieutenant Calley to seek out and destroy enemy forces. Prior to the order, Calley's unit had suffered casualties from land mines and booby traps while on similar search-and-destroy operations in the Son My area. Within Calley's operation order was his mission statement which clearly indicated that he was to

¹⁵⁶Lt. Gen. W.R. Peers, The My Lai Inquiry (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 172. Normally, an infantry rifle platoon has 4 squads (30 to 50 men). Calley had only 2 squads (25 men) at My Lai-4. Map taken from page 171.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 170.

Map V, My Lai-4¹⁵⁸



¹⁵⁸Taken from The My Lai Inquiry, Lt. Gen. William R. Peers (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1979), 171.

eliminate all enemy forces at My Lai. The operation order did not mention the killing of noncombatants such as old men, women, and children. The incident was covered up by the men who participated, and details of the massacre were not revealed until March of the following year.

On 29 March 1969, a serviceman, Ronald L. Ridenhour, who had heard stories from numerous eyewitnesses, sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense and a congressman stating that he had names of soldiers who participated in the My Lai massacre. The government commenced a full scale investigation. But before it began, New York Times reporter Seymour M. Hersh broke the story through the Dispatch News Service in October 1969.¹⁵⁹ One month later, on 26 November 1969, the Department of the Army sent a memorandum to Lieutenant General William R. Peers, informing him of the 16 March 1968 incident at My Lai, and authorizing him to begin a formal investigation.¹⁶⁰ Acting as head of the Criminal Investigation Division, General Peers carried out a four-month-long inquiry into the events at My Lai. The Peers Inquiry uncovered testimonial evidence to accuse Calley of

¹⁵⁹Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, The Press and America, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 352. Hersh won the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for his investigative reporting of the My Lai incident.

¹⁶⁰Joseph Goldstein and Burke Marshall, The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-Up: Beyond the Reach of Law? (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 33.

109 counts of murder.

Calley's trial lasted for nearly two years, the longest court-martial proceedings in the history of the United States Army, as a jury of six Army officers rejected his defense that he was only following orders of a superior officer. The military tribunal found him guilty of "premeditated" murder of at least 22 persons. On 31 March 1971, the military court sentenced him to life in prison at hard labor.

After Calley received his sentence, his defense lawyers filed an appeal. However, the President intervened, and as commander-in-chief, he reduced the life sentence at hard labor to a sentence of twenty years in prison. In 1975, Calley was released on parole and today he lives in Georgia.

The six publications portrayed the Calley case in a similar manner, concentrating most of their coverage on two topics. First, the publications focused on the question of where responsibility for the massacre lay and whether Calley was simply following orders when he killed the inhabitants of My Lai. Second, the publications commented on the dilemmas of jungle warfare, pointing out that it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe while conducting search and destroy operations.

The Washington Post gave the Calley case enormous coverage. At the height of its My Lai coverage in 1971, it

featured 121 stories about Calley. Of the 121, 105 appeared in Section A of the paper. Thirty-one of the articles in Section A were front page stories.

The Washington Post took the position that Calley and his men should be held responsible for the atrocity at My Lai. The Post said that although Calley obeyed the orders of the next higher officer, the Lieutenant demonstrated poor judgement in carrying out the order. Furthermore, at My Lai more discretion should have been used.¹⁶¹

During Calley's trial the Post made an important observation. It said it was odd how Calley could make a high speed assault across a hot landing zone, through a supposedly Viet Cong infested village at My Lai-4, inflicting death and destruction on the enemy, without acquiring one American casualty.¹⁶² Therefore, it believed enough evidence existed to hold Lieutenant Calley responsible for the atrocity at My Lai.

In response to the guilty verdict given to Calley, the Post agreed with the jury's decision in an editorial on 31 March 1971. It said:

¹⁶¹William Greider, "Calley on My Lai: 'It Wasn't Any Big Deal,'" Washington Post (25 Feb. 1971), 13. Also see, Greider's "Calley: Good GI, Killer or a Fluke?," Washington Post (28 Feb. 1971), 20.

¹⁶²Ibid., "Calley on My Lai." One of Calley's men shot himself in the foot.

The Calley verdict, it seems to us, is properly interpreted as the judgement of the experienced military combat leaders that the young lieutenant wilfully and knowingly violated the laws of the United States and the international code of warfare. The court martial held that by slaughtering at least 22 civilians, who were his prisoners by almost any standard Lt. Calley went far beyond the rules under which a military force in the field must operate.

Furthermore, the Post believed no one up the chain of command should be responsible for the incident at My Lai. It added, "We do not see in this verdict the image of Calley as a scapegoat."¹⁶³

Like the Post, the Wall Street Journal found individuals responsible for the atrocities at My Lai--not the military establishment and its war policy. It argued that Americans needed to keep the My Lai incident in some kind of perspective. Specifically, it stated that "this kind of action is the work of individuals and not an application of basic U.S. policy for Vietnam. That policy, "however misguided in practice and strategy, is beneficent in concept."¹⁶⁴ In a separate piece, it added: "The wisest words on Song My we have read came from the Italian newspaper La Stampa of Turin, 'The civilization of a people is judged above all by the courage and severity with which

¹⁶³"Lt. Calley and War Crimes," Washington Post (31 Mar. 1971), 20.

¹⁶⁴"Atrocities and Policies," Wall Street Journal (1 Dec. 1969), 22.

it isolates certain individuals and denounces their crimes.'"¹⁶⁵

The preceding evidence from the Post and the Wall Street Journal shows that the newspapers had similar perceptions about who was responsible for the My Lai incident. Both agreed that Lieutenant Calley was responsible for what transpired at My Lai-4.

Another issue raised by the publications involved the difficulty of American soldiers to distinguish friend from foe. Because Vietnam was a guerilla war, the enemy could appear anywhere, at anytime, as old men, women, or children. Faced with this dilemma, unable to identify a combatant from a noncombatant, American soldiers also had to conduct search-and-destroy operations in areas designated as free-fire zones, which the Post described as an area in which it is presumed "that anyone found in the vicinity is potential enemy." Therefore, "Techniques such as 'reconnaissance by fire' are acceptable," but, it added, "Anyone running across a rice paddy is liable to be chalked up in the body count as 'evasive VCs' or Vietcong suspect."¹⁶⁶

The Wall Street Journal also focused on the problem of

¹⁶⁵"The Beast Within," Wall Street Journal (10 Dec. 1969), 22.

¹⁶⁶William Greider, "'Mere Gook Rule' Haunts Calley Trial," Washington Post (14 Mar. 1971), 14.

an unidentifiable enemy. In one editorial, it made the point "In Vietnam the civilian by day is often the combatant by night." Furthermore, "It is nearly impossible to tell friend from foe." The newspaper explained: "That smiling child may indeed be carrying a grenade. Civilian villages quickly become combat fortresses."¹⁶⁷

Both Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report reported how difficult it was to distinguish between combatant and noncombatant. Newsweek informed its readers that American soldiers in earlier wars could more easily differentiate between the enemy and friendly civilians because wars had established front-lines. It added, "the enemy, by definition, was on the other side of it [the front-line]." Therefore, with no front-lines in Vietnam, Newsweek concluded, "there is often no way to tell friend from foe, and the constant suspicion sometimes prods tired and frustrated soldiers into rash actions."¹⁶⁸

In U.S. News & World Report, David Lawrence the magazine's owner and publisher stated that 'War Is Hell' and as "troops approach villages where the enemy may be present, civilians can have arms and can throw hand grenades or trip

¹⁶⁷"The Beast Within," Wall Street Journal (10 Dec. 1969), 22.

¹⁶⁸"GI's in Battle: The 'Dink' Complex," Newsweek (1 Dec. 1969), 37.

mines."¹⁶⁹ As for what American soldiers could have done to help themselves distinguish friend from foe, Lawrence did not know:

Civilians have not only been casualties but have been participants. Frequently, American servicemen have encountered innocent-looking individuals who have suddenly thrown hand grenades. Under circumstances like these, how can one tell who is truly civilian and who is a military opponent?¹⁷⁰

The difficulty of recognizing friend from foe was also raised by the New Republic and National Review. The New Republic advised its readers not to worry about the My Lai massacre because an incident like My Lai occurs in every war. It called for "hawks" and "doves" alike to realize that the conflict in Vietnam was, indeed, a war. Moreover, the war in Southeast-Asia was a guerrilla confrontation, something the United States had limited experience in conducting. The magazine believed that because of this unfamiliarity with guerrilla warfare the United States would have less experience in recognizing friend from foe and be more apt to commit mistakes such as the one by Calley at My Lai.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹David Lawrence, owner and publisher of the U.S. News & World Report, in "War Is Hell" (26 April 1971), 96.

¹⁷⁰David Lawrence, "Why the Calley Case Opens Up Worldwide Debate," U.S. News & World Report (12 April 1971), 96.

¹⁷¹Edward M. Opton, Jr. and Robert Duckles, "Mental Gymnastics," New Republic (21 Feb. 1970), 14-16.

National Review took the same position as the New Republic. In an article by William F. Buckley Jr., it stated that although the killings at My Lai were a mistake, they can also be justifiable, taking into consideration the pressures of war placed on Lieutenant Calley and his men. Buckley stressed that the incident at My Lai-4 was understandable given the reality of the Vietnam War. Buckley defined this "Vietnam reality" as a war with an indistinguishable enemy fought by unconventional methods. He wrote: "If the war is to be fought, the combat soldier must deal with the Vietnamese reality; but as he does so, he risks being judged by standards which seriously falsify that reality."¹⁷²

Like the New Republic and the other publications, National Review made it clear that Calley and the My Lai incident was a complex matter because of the difficulty of identifying the enemy. William Buckley made the point that even one of the avowed heroes of the Vietcong was a "small child who deliberately blew himself to smithereens in the act of destroying an ammunition dump and a score of enemy troops."¹⁷³ He reaffirmed the National Review's understanding that American soldiers faced an almost

¹⁷²William F. Buckley Jr., "Calley: The Existential Problem," National Review (9 Mar. 1971), 246.

¹⁷³Ibid.

impossible situation in distinguishing friend from foe:

In Mao's classic formulation, the guerrilla swims among the people like a fish in the sea. The white-robed monk may be concealing an AK-47 and the old woman with the marketbasket may present you with a live grenade. The countryside contains guerrillas, part-time guerrillas, terrorists, double-agents--and large numbers of genuine civilians who do not wish to be conquered by Hanoi.¹⁷⁴

In a later issue of National Review Ernest Van Den Haag examined the Vietcong strategy of unrestricted terrorism. Haag was a war correspondent for National Review who journeyed to Indochina to investigate United States war crimes. In the jungles and hamlets of South Vietnam, Van Den Haag witnessed how the enemy deliberately made himself and herself indistinguishable from local peasants. He elaborated:

Some of the peasants help the guerrillas. Most are too terrified to oppose them; few dare give them away. American soldiers have the frequent experience, if they survive; of seeing a man who seemed a harmless peasant suddenly throw a hand grenade at them. Or of being welcomed into an apparently peaceful, friendly village only to have their buddies killed by booby traps. Or of being suddenly fired upon from what appeared to be a cluster of huts inhabited by peasant families. Or of being ambushed in seemingly friendly territory. Such experiences make our soldiers hostile enough to obliterate distinctions between civilians and guerrillas, friendly, indifferent or irreconcilable peasants. The enemy has deliberately made these distinctions hard. He has won a political victory by causing most American soldiers to feel suspicious of all Vietnamese, and

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

to blur the line between suspicion and hostility.¹⁷⁵

One may now ask, how does the treatment of the My Lai incident by the six publications support the main argument of this thesis? How does it happen that the six journals reported on and editorialized about My Lai irrespective of ideological and political beliefs? The articles and editorials on My Lai clearly show that the respective publications treated the incident the same. The labels liberal and conservative have no apparent meaning when applied to the My Lai incident. The journals from the two ideological camps, three liberal and three conservative, shared the same opinions about the massacre at My Lai-4. Instead of reporting the incident at My Lai with opposing views, it was evident the six journals adhered to non-ideological ideas for interpreting the issues surrounding the Calley case.

Like the My Lai incident, the 1972 Christmas bombing was also highly controversial. Let us now turn to the six publications' coverage of Linebacker II.

18-29 December 1972 Christmas Bombing (Linebacker II)

Henry Kissinger's famous remark on 26 October 1972,

¹⁷⁵Ernest Van Den Haag, "U.S. Crimes in Vietnam," National Review (22 Oct. 1971), 1175-1176.

"Peace is at hand," would later come back to haunt the United States national security advisor. While acting in the capacity as the United States' chief negotiator at Paris, Kissinger assured the world that peace between the United States and North Vietnam was inevitable. Earlier on 8 October 1972, Kissinger and his North Vietnamese counterpart Le Duc Tho had already reached a peace settlement, but South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu opposed the agreement. Thus, the Paris peace talks resumed on 20 November with the hope for a settlement. But on 13 December 1972, the negotiations broke off. The North Vietnamese left the bargaining table and President Thieu also opposed the agreement because it would have allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam.

Failing to reach an immediate settlement and North Vietnam's unwillingness to negotiate, President Nixon sought other options for bringing Hanoi back to the negotiating table.¹⁷⁶ Kissinger favored the resumption of bombing over all of North Vietnam. Alexander Haig, former NATO Commander and an influential member of Kissinger's national security

¹⁷⁶Nixon depicts Kissinger's outrage: "Gritting his teeth and clenching his fists, Kissinger said, 'They're just a bunch of shits. Tawdry, filthy shits. They make the Russians look good, compared to the way the Russians make the Chinese look good when it comes to negotiating in a responsible and decent way!'" See Richard M. Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 733.

staff, wanted to concentrate bombing, using B-52s, north of the twentieth parallel on specific military targets. Nixon decided to reseed the mines of Haiphong Harbor and resume full scale bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. According to Kissinger, Nixon, Haig, and he agreed that "only a massive shock could bring Hanoi back to the conference table."¹⁷⁷ Kissinger explained: "We had only two choices: taking a massive, shocking step to impose our will on events and end the war quickly, or letting matters drift into another round of inconclusive negotiations, prolonged warfare, bitter national divisions, and mounting casualties." He added, "There were no other options."¹⁷⁸

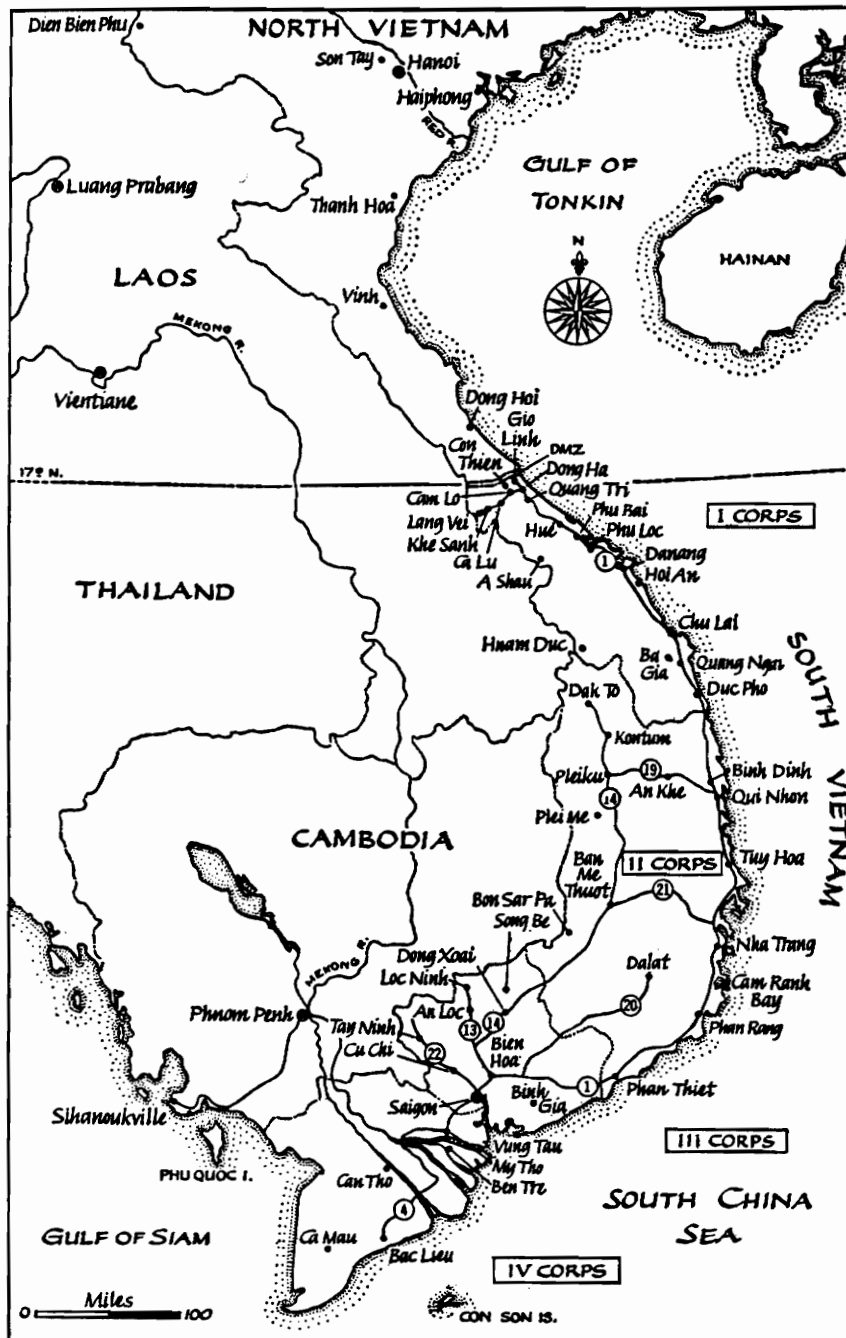
President Nixon, therefore, unleashed Operation Linebacker II (Christmas bombing of 1972) in response to Hanoi's unwillingness to negotiate a peace settlement for ending the conflict in Vietnam. Except for Christmas Day, bombing over Hanoi and Haiphong lasted for eleven days and nights (See Map VI, Southeast Asia).¹⁷⁹ The Navy and Air

¹⁷⁷Kissinger, White House Years, 1448.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹General William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 1.

Map VI, Southeast Asia¹⁸⁰



¹⁸⁰Taken from A Soldier Reports, General William C. Westmoreland, 1.

Force combined to dispatch hundreds of strategical and tactical air craft. The tactical fighter-bombers, F-105s, F-4s, and F-111s, flew more than 1,000 attack sorties. From air bases in Thailand and as far away as Guam, the B-52s, the Air Force's high altitude strategic bomber, flew 740 sorties over the Hanoi-Haiphong region. Jointly, the B-52s and tactical fighter-bombers dropped over 30,000 tons of bombs. The military targets within the Hanoi-Haiphong complex included rail yards, warehouses, power plants, transportation terminals, communication facilities, air fields, air defense radars, ammunition supply areas, and Haiphong's docks and shipping facilities.¹⁸¹

The President's decision to execute the heaviest aerial assault of the war was a difficult one. In his memoirs, the President explained: "I had reluctantly decided that we had reached the point where only the strongest action would have any effect in convincing Hanoi that negotiating a fair settlement with us was a better option for them than continuing the war." The President continued, "The order to renew bombing the week before Christmas was the most difficult decision I made during the entire war; at the same time, however, it was also one of the most clear-cut and

¹⁸¹Carl Berger, editor, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973 (Wash., D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977), 98.

necessary ones."¹⁸²

As shall be pointed out, the publications did not agree with the President's decision to bomb North Vietnam. Nor did they understand the twofold purpose of the Christmas bombing: (1) as a way to force Hanoi to negotiate with the United States for the termination of the war; (2) as a means of destroying North Vietnam's capacity to make war.

When the bombing started on 18 December 1972, President Nixon refrained from going public to explain his actions. The press spokesmen for the President also did not inform the public of the President's intentions. In his memoirs, the President explained why he maintained his silence during the December bombing:

If I had announced that we were resuming bombing for the purpose of forcing the North Vietnamese to negotiate, their national pride and their ideological fanaticism would never have allowed them to accept the international loss of face involved in caving to such an ultimatum.¹⁸³

The only published work on the press's coverage of the Christmas bombing was written by Martin F. Herz. While teaching at the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University in Washington, Herz examined the American prestige media which included the New York Times, Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, and the three networks, ABC, CBS, and

¹⁸²Nixon, Memoirs, 733-734.

¹⁸³Ibid., 736.

NBC. He pointed out that President Nixon made the right decision to adopt a tight-lipped posture during the crucial 18-29 December period. He added that this relatively silent posture of the Nixon administration, however, caused the news media to look elsewhere for information. Therefore, part of what these publications reported focused on the reactions of foreign countries.¹⁸⁴

The Washington Post quoted Cuba's Fidel Castro as saying that Nixon's bombing was 'thoughtless bloodshed, barbarous destruction and diplomatic perfidy.'¹⁸⁵ Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme called the bombing an 'outrage on a level with Nazi massacres of World War II.'¹⁸⁶

Other foreign criticisms in the Post included those by British, West German, Belgian, and Japanese state officials. Roy Jenkins, former British Labor Party chancellor of the exchequer, stated in the London Daily Mirror that Prime Minister Heath must strike out against this 'wave of terror.' He added that 'President Nixon had launched one of

¹⁸⁴Martin F. Hertz, The Prestige Press and the Christmas Bombing, 1972 (Wash., D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 66-67.

¹⁸⁵"Raids Go On: Hanoi Says Hospital Hit," Washington Post (23 Dec. 1972), 6.

¹⁸⁶"Worldwide Protests Mounted on Bombing," Washington Post (24 Dec. 1972), 4.

the most cold-blooded actions in recent history.'¹⁸⁷ Six members of the West German parliament demanded President Nixon halt the 'terror bombing against the defenseless civilian Vietnamese people.'¹⁸⁸ Belgium's acting foreign minister, Henri Fayat, said that there was 'deep emotion and public shock' in his country over the rising death toll in North Vietnam.¹⁸⁹ Even the diplomatically silent Japanese were critical of the President's decision. The Japanese stated, 'We believe that what President Nixon is trying to achieve in Vietnam is nothing more than imperialism, colonialism, and genocide.'¹⁹⁰

Like the Post, the Wall Street Journal and U.S. News & World Report also focused on foreign reaction, specifically the remarks made by the Soviet Union. In the Wall Street Journal, Brezhnev called the renewed bombing 'barbarian acts,' and reiterated Soviet support for Hanoi. Brezhnev added, 'the future of U.S. Soviet relations hinges on an end to the Indochina war.'¹⁹¹ U.S. News & World Report quoted

¹⁸⁷Murrey Marder, "Bombing Criticism Mounts," Washington Post (30 Dec. 1972), 4.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

¹⁹¹"Five More B-52s Crashed: North Vietnam Said POW Camps Were Hit," Wall Street Journal (22 Dec. 1972), 1.

Tass, the Soviet news agency, as saying that the United States had committed 'terror bombing' against civilian centers in Hanoi.¹⁹²

Newsweek reported the comments made by the Agence France Presse in Hanoi. France's views of the bombing was similar to other world-wide opinion. According to Newsweek, France saw no hope for peace because the number of dead in North Vietnam was too high. The French report said, "damage was widespread." Thousands of homes in North Vietnam had been destroyed, and the area near the airport looked like "a lunar landscape."¹⁹³

The Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal referred to the raids over North Vietnam as indiscriminate "carpet bombing" or as acts of "barbarism." The Washington Post featured an editorial that argued that "the United States was carpet bombing its way across downtown Hanoi with B-52s."¹⁹⁴ The Wall Street Journal said the bombing was a "worthless instrument of barbarism."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²"Why Vietnam War Drags On," U.S. News & World Report (1 Jan. 1973), 10.

¹⁹³"What Went Wrong," Newsweek (1 Jan. 1973), 8.

¹⁹⁴"Terror Bombing in the Name of Peace," Washington Post (28 Dec. 1972).

¹⁹⁵"About the Bombing," Wall Street Journal (27 Dec. 1972). Taken from Herz's The Prestige Press and the Christmas Bombing, 1972 page 95.

The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report reported that United States air strikes on Hanoi had resulted in casualties among American pilots held in the main prisoner of war camp, nicknamed the Hanoi Hilton, in the North Vietnamese capital. At the time, the Nixon administration said that no prisoners of war camp had been accidentally bombed. Later, these four publications would be proven incorrect when American prisoners of war returned home.¹⁹⁶

They also featured a story on the damage done to the Bach Mai Hospital in Hanoi. They claimed that the hospital was completely destroyed by B-52s. Furthermore, the journals raised the point that the bombing of the hospital served as a fine example of America's intentions to deliberately attack civilian sectors.¹⁹⁷ An American eyewitness, however, made a different observation. Telford Taylor, who was chief prosecutor at the Nurmberg trials, stated after his visit to Hanoi in January 1973 that the

¹⁹⁶See individual articles: "B52s Pound N. Vietnam For 7th Day," Post (24 Dec. 1972), 1; "Five More B-52s Crashed," Wall Street Journal (22 Dec. 1972), 1; "Why Vietnam War Drags On," U.S. News & World Report (1 Jan. 1973), 10; and "What the Bombing Did," Newsweek (8 Jan. 1973), 11.

¹⁹⁷See individual articles: "Raids Go On; Hanoi Says Hospital Hit," Post (23 Dec. 1972), 1; "U.S. Forces Lost Two More B-52s In Continuing Raid Over North Vietnam," Wall Street Journal (29 Dec. 1972), 1; "Why Vietnam War Drags On," U.S. News & World Report (1 Jan. 1973), 10; and "What the Bombing Did," Newsweek (8 Jan. 1973), 11.

hospital received only partial damage. This account discredited the reports in these publications that the hospital had been completely leveled by American bombs.

The publications did not investigate for themselves the legitimacy of their foreign information. While being satisfied with foreign news reports, they never informed their readers that the hospital was located about one thousand yards from the Bach Mai airstrip and a North Vietnamese barracks. The barracks and the airstrip were the primary military targets, not the Bach Mai Hospital. Their reports therefore, made the incident seem as though the United States had targeted the hospital.

The publications also did not point out that it was the ground supporting fighter-bombers that attacked the Bach Mai area, not the high altitude B-52s. Guenter Lewy concluded that the hospital bombing incident was a result of damaged bomb fins dropped by fighter-bombers. The bombs had strayed out of the fall pattern and accidentally hit the hospital complex.¹⁹⁸

A story in the National Review stressed that the United States could have avoided civilian casualties by abiding by the two bombing principles of "discrimination" and "proportionality." The magazine defined "discrimination" as

¹⁹⁸Lewy, America in Vietnam, 414-415.

follows: "A combatant shall discriminate between civilian and military targets, aiming only at the latter, though derivative damage to the former is not excluded." It defined "proportionality" by saying that "The good to be anticipated from fighting, or from particular military action, must outweigh, on reasonable estimate, the death and destruction entailed."¹⁹⁹ The article said that the United States had failed to abide by the standards defined by these principles. Newsweek, however, depicted the raids as "terror bombing." Newsweek elaborated: "Indeed there was such civilian damage in Hanoi and Haiphong that the relentless raids seemed to amount to a campaign of terror against North Vietnam."²⁰⁰

In short, the publications, liberal and conservative alike, depicted the American bombing of North Vietnam in the same manner. However, the references to "carpet bombing" and "terror bombing" is not what actually happened during Linebacker II. There was no "carpet bombing" of Hanoi. The Air Force did not use B-52s to bomb the inner cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. The Air Force used tactical fighter-bombers to attack military, not civilian, targets within the two cities. Civilian areas were not deliberately targeted.

¹⁹⁹"The Bombing and Morality," National Review (19 Jan. 1973), 74.

²⁰⁰"What the Bombing Did," Newsweek (8 Jan. 1973), 11.

Bombs falling outside the proximity of the military target did inflict minor damage to civilian areas. However, the death toll was relatively low with only 1,623 killed.

Instead of focusing on foreign opinion, the claims of the enemy, and the North Vietnamese reports of civilian damage, the publications could have balanced their news reports with explanations of the United States' motive for resuming the bombing of North Vietnam. There were numerous senators and representatives who could have provided additional information to them. Guenter Lewy stressed that at the time of the bombing there was available evidence for the publications to make accurate interpretations.²⁰¹

Finally, the publications did not address two important points: First, the low casualty rate in Hanoi and Haiphong was due to the fact that before the bombing commenced, the North Vietnamese had evacuated two thirds of the population. During the bombing, the North Vietnamese managed to evacuate three fourths of the remaining population. Therefore, the cities sustained few civilian casualties from the American bombers. Secondly, a large portion of the damage to the civilian sectors was caused by surface to air missiles (SAMs) launched by the North Vietnamese. Of the 1,242 SAMs fired, only 1.7 percent hit their intended target. The

²⁰¹Lewy, America in Vietnam, 413.

remaining SAMs did considerable damage to civilian sectors in the Hanoi and Haiphong region.²⁰²

This examination of Linebacker II has shown that regardless of liberal or conservative beliefs, the publications expressed similar views. However, despite the publications' portrayal of Linebacker II, the Christmas bombing did achieve its principal objective: Hanoi returned to the negotiating table and signed an agreement that led to the cease-fire of 27 January 1973. The terms of the peace treaty guaranteed the release of American prisoners of war.

Operation Homecoming, Return of American Prisoners of War

The 1973 Treaty of Paris, ending the Vietnamese Conflict, also resulted in the release of 587 American prisoners of war. The first group of prisoners of war arrived in the United States on 12 February 1973 as part of an Air Force exercise code named Operation Homecoming. By 1 April 1973, all of them had returned home. The publications, however, did not feature detailed coverage of the event until after 1 April, when all of the prisoners of war had returned home safely. The returning prisoners of

²⁰²See James R. McCarthy and George B. Allison, Linebacker II: A View From the Rock (Montgomery, Ala.: Published under the auspices of the Airpower Research Institute, Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, 1979), 172-173. Also see, Lewy, America in Vietnam, 413.

war vowed not to tell their stories until all of them had been released.

When they began telling their stories, the liberal and conservative publications focused on how the prisoners had been treated. The Washington Post featured a story on "The Horror of Pow Life." The Post quoted a former prisoner of war as saying that "Ten of 27 American prisoners died during his five and a half years of captivity, their bodies wasted by starvation, malnutrition and disease." The Post added that some of those who managed to survive the inhumane conditions "were tortured and broken down by physical and mental abuse until many made antiwar statements."²⁰³

This newspaper and the Wall Street Journal also reported on the comment made by Jane Fonda about the returning prisoners of war. Fonda stated that the American prisoners of war were 'hypocrites and liars' who were not tortured by their North Vietnamese captors. In response to this remark, the Post quoted Colonel Thomas H. Kirk, a former prisoner of war, who said, "he would let Americans decide 'whether the 480 of us were lying (about the torture) or whether she is misinformed.'"²⁰⁴ The Post also quoted the Secretary of Defense Elliot L. Richardson. He said, 'That

²⁰³Ken Ringle, "The Horror of POW Life," Washington Post (5 April 1973), 1.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 13.

remark by Jane Fonda was an egregious insult to all of our returning prisoners.' He added that a person making such a judgement is 'badly motivated or simply fails to want to understand what he or she can plainly perceive.'²⁰⁵

The Wall Street Journal editorialized on the Jane Fonda statement. The newspaper said that "Jane Fonda is more surely a prisoner than the POWs ever were throughout their isolated and tortured existence--an existence Miss Fonda and others had insisted was actually quite comfortable under the care of the humanitarian North Vietnamese."²⁰⁶

Two of the magazines, New Republic and National Review, had no stories on the experiences of the American prisoners of war, however; U.S. News & World Report and Newsweek featured stories on the hardships of the prisoners. U.S. News & World Report interviewed eight returned prisoners of war. The magazine summarized what all eight had encountered in the prisoner of war camps:

Prisoners were often beaten daily, permanently crippling many and, according to the testimony, killing others. Prisoners were deprived of food and sleep for days at a time to break their will. Prisoners were held for months and even years in complete isolation from fellow captives. Prisoners were shackled to heavy iron bars or chains, and forced to sit, stand or lie down in unnatural position. Some were roped and

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶"Beyond the Limit," Wall Street Journal (11 April 1973), 22.

hung head-down from the ceiling of their cells. Prisoners were denied medical treatment or it was insufficient to heal injuries and wounds.²⁰⁷

Newsweek's story of the agony of the POWs was almost identical to the U.S News and World Report's article.

Newsweek said that the "POW's told of tortures that broke their bodies, bent their minds and left them only their troubled souls--and a will to survive." "Survival," Newsweek added, "was a matter of will, endurance, imagination and just plain luck."²⁰⁸

The stories of how the prisoners of war were treated by their North Vietnamese captors were all similar in the four publications. The liberal journals did not portray the events of Operation Homecoming any differently than the way the conservative journals depicted it. The publications demonstrated the same coverage regardless of political and ideological biases.

In summation, this chapter has examined some of the major issues surrounding the My Lai incident, Linebacker II, and Operation Homecoming. Although three of the publications are liberal and the other three are conservative, this, however, evidently played no part in the

²⁰⁷"POW's Tell the Inside Story," U.S. News & World Report (9 April 1973), 33.

²⁰⁸"The Secret Agony of the POW's," Newsweek (9 April 1973), 30-36.

publications' depiction of the events. The two newspapers and four magazines expressed similar opinions and reached the same conclusions regardless of traditionally held ideological or political beliefs.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the coverage by six publications of six events of the war in Vietnam. The publications showed that they did not depict Tonkin Gulf, Pleiku, Tet, My Lai, Linebacker II, and Homecoming with ideologically opposed views. Rather, the six journals demonstrated similar convictions.

One reason why the publications reported the war without drastically differing in opinion was the fact that each of the six journals had access to the same type of information. They relied on the daily Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) press release communiques because each publication had its own correspondent in Saigon. If the two newspapers and four magazines received the same type of data, it is logical to conclude that they might interpret and report the news in the same way.

The similar treatment of the war by these six publications can also be explained by the fact that the news bureaus experienced the same economic, managerial, and manpower limitations.²⁰⁹ Vietnam, some 12,000 miles away from the home office of each of these publications, created

²⁰⁹By the 1968 Tet offensive, the Washington Post had five war correspondents in South Vietnam. The other five journals had one reporter each.

a strain on the news bureau's ability to collect and process information. Faced with the same difficulties, nearly all members of the Saigon press corps relied upon each other for gathering intelligence. Collectively, the six publications received and processed almost identical material. The offices of the two newspapers and four magazines were also housed within the same building in downtown Saigon. Working in the same building, sharing facts and figures, even employing the same people to obtain the news, it is no wonder the six publications filled their pages with similar views.²¹⁰

David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit pointed out in The American Journalist that the interactions among reporters was important for shaping values. They said, "Of various factors that may play a part in shaping the professional values of journalists, the newsroom environment appeared to be the most important." Moreover, "The day-to-day interactions with editors and colleagues is perceived by the journalists themselves to be the most powerful force over their conceptions of values, ethics, and professional

²¹⁰Because of budget constraints and lack of personnel the news agencies in Saigon purchased stories from American and foreign stringers. Stringers were merely roaming reporters without a parent news bureau. Stringers sold stories to any newspaper or magazine for a price.

practice."²¹¹ Therefore, this daily interaction among reporters must have had an impact on how the war correspondents perceived and reported the events of the Vietnamese Conflict.

In summation, this thesis has found that the two newspapers and four magazines did not report the news from any ideological or political point of view. Rather, they portrayed the war to the American reader in a similar manner with little editorializing except in the editorial pages.

This examination has relied heavily on the news columns and not the editorial sections. Because of a wealth of material, only the news stories that appeared during the time of the event were used in this thesis. Daniel C. Hallin points out in his study of the media in Vietnam that the front page news stories were more important to the American readership than the editorial sections. Hallin revealed that on the average only twenty-five percent of all newspaper readers actually read the editorial sections. The remaining seventy-five percent reads the front page news columns.²¹² Therefore, using the news articles in place of the editorials makes sense given the fact that they are read

²¹¹David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986), 144.

²¹²Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media in Vietnam, 227 (footnote 30).

more frequently.

After examining the articles and editorials, one can conclude that the publications reported the Vietnam War to the best of their ability. If the publications made mistakes in reporting, it was not the result of a publication's being biased, but rather a result of brevity, which requires simplification and haste. To this, Tom Wicker an associate editor and political columnist for the New York Times points out that stories are left out not because a publication is biased but because stories are hastily prepared. Wicker states:

There is absolutely no question that what is not printed shapes the atmosphere of events as well as what is printed. But an editor, or group of editors, is confronted, night after night, with a great number of choices. Those choices have to be made in haste, and with inadequate knowledge. Even before yesterday's news has been completely digested, a whole new avalanche of today's news starts pouring in. Inevitably, stories are left out of the paper that should be there. But I do not agree with the implication that stories are deliberately left out for ideological or other reasons.²¹³

In retrospect, this thesis has been a difficult undertaking. The issues surrounding the press and its treatment of the Vietnam War are a complex and controversial matter. For one reason the events of the Vietnam era have

²¹³Tom Wicker in John Charles Daly, The Press and Public Policy (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), 34. Wicker is author of On Press (New York: Viking Press, 1978).

occurred too recently for historians to make accurate interpretations. Moreover, as the historian Alonzo L. Hamby writes, "The writing of contemporary history is at best a difficult business." He adds, "The very recent past is too close to us to allow the easy development of a sense of dealing with a distinctively different period, possessing its peculiar values and priorities."²¹⁴ Thereby, the "recentness" of the Vietnam War combined with the controversy surrounding it has made this examination of the six publications a challenging yet rewarding experience.

Although this has been a difficult topic to write about, the war correspondents faced an even greater challenge. The reporters faced the challenge of covering a war in a foreign country and being unfamiliar with its language and culture. Reporters also had the problem of a lack of mobility, which hampered their ability to see the war torn areas of South and North Vietnam.

Kathleen Turner makes the point in her book that because the conflict in Vietnam was a guerilla war the reporters faced difficulties. She said:

Moreover, Vietnam was difficult for Americans to fathom, with its cultural, political, and historical contexts so different from Western tradition. Reporters thus encountered a full-blown version of the problem faced by most foreign

²¹⁴Alonzo L. Hamby, Liberalism and Its Challengers: FDR to Reagan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

reporters: having too much to cover while lacking the background on the country with which to do an adequate job. That the coverage concerned a guerrilla war, unlike the battles of World Wars I and II, further complicated the correspondent's task.²¹⁵

As early as 1964, Malcolm Browne an Associated Press correspondent in Saigon noticed the problem of reporting about Vietnam. As Browne observed:

Viet Nam does not lend itself to numerical reporting, or even to the kind of simple, narrative statement required of the average newspaper lead. There are too many uncertainties, too many shades of gray, too many dangers of applying English-language cliches to a situation that cannot be described by cliches.

To this remark, Kathleen Turner adds, "The complexities of reporting the conflict in Vietnam corresponded to the difficulties of Americans trying to understand it, and more especially, to United States involvement there."²¹⁶

Not only is it difficult to understand the United States involvement in Vietnam, but it is also difficult to assess the press's treatment of the war. This in turn accounts for the few works that deal exclusively with the press and the Vietnamese conflict. Therefore, one hopes this thesis has made a contribution to the small sampling of works that examine the Vietnam War and the press.

²¹⁵Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War, 5.

²¹⁶Ibid., 57-58.

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