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A Picture and A Hundred Thousand Words:

The Vietnam War's Influence on the Rise of Long-form Journalism

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Abstract

Journalists played an important role in the Vietnam War through their critique and analysis of how the war progressed. Their writing in newspapers and magazines influenced public and government opinion about the war. Journalists did not just write newspaper or magazine articles, or record interviews for television, they wrote books about their experiences, interviews and research. These books, long-form journalism, explored many aspects of the Vietnam War, analytically and critically. The Vietnam War influenced the rise of this type of journalism through the detail and context that journalists were able to provide about a war that lasted nineteen years and would see America unable to prevent the fall of South Vietnam to communism. The historiography of the media and the Vietnam War overwhelmingly focuses on information and analysis that appeared in newspapers, magazines and on television. There is a distinct lack of analysis on long-form works as a medium in the Vietnam War. This research shows that the Vietnam War created a situation whereby traditional mediums were insufficient to fully explain the Vietnam War. The war necessitated journalistic investigation and criticism. This led to the writing of many popular and successful long-form works that presented, examined and criticised the Vietnam War. Journalists examined in long-form the secrecy inherent in the war such as the control of information and perception of how the war progressed. They also examined in detail the failure of policy and military strategy in South Vietnam which led to the withdrawal of America and to victory for North Vietnam.

Abbreviations

AP: Associated Press

ARVN: Army of the South Vietnam

MACV: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

NYT: The New York Times

NVN: North Vietnamese Army

UPI: United Press International

US: United States of America

VC: Viet Cong

Introduction

Journalists as the Fourth Estate have for a long time been observers and speakers for society, playing a crucial role in the dissemination of information that might not have been easily accessible in the public domain. In this role journalists can increase public awareness and understanding of the news that they report. The Vietnam War challenged the normal role of journalists as traditional short-form reporting was insufficient for an expansive understanding of the Vietnam War. Because of this an alternate method of explanation was needed. Long-form journalism was one of the main mechanisms which journalists used to address the Vietnam War. Long-form - new journalism, literary nonfiction - is an expansion upon traditional journalistic practices of research and analysis of current events found in short-form work but with more emphasis on author opinion and analysis. The purpose of long-form journalism is to present and explain in detail a news story.

The Vietnam War influenced the rise of long-form journalism due to the need of the journalists to not only present the facts of what occurred in Vietnam but to try to explain them in the wider context of the war. The American ambassador to Vietnam asked *Newsweek* correspondent Francois Sully "why, *Monsieur* Sully, do you always see the hole in the doughnut?"¹ Sully replied, "because, *Monsieur l'Ambassadeur*, ... there is a hole in the doughnut."² Long-form journalism sought to explain the hole in the doughnut, rather than just identify it. This long-form writing was influenced by two main factors of the Vietnam War that journalists chose to examine. These were the secrecy of the war and the failure of American policy and strategy. Journalists examined secrecy in Vietnam by investigating the manipulation of facts to cover up military and political failure and the inflation of the numbers of enemies killed, as well as to present the untold experiences of Vietnam veterans. American policy in Vietnam was studied in detail by journalists who looked at the origin of Vietnam

¹ William Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War: David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Peter Arnett – Young War Correspondents and Their Early Vietnam Battles*. New York, Vintage Books, 1995 p. 50.

² Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 50.

policies, the progression of troop deployment, the accompanying strategy that it maintained and rewarded and the failure of the strategic hamlet program as a symptom of the manipulation of fact by the American and Vietnamese governments.

Vietnam presented a new challenge for correspondents in covering the war as the view of the war of many correspondents differed to that of much of the American leadership. Those criticised would tell the journalists to “Get on the team.”³ However, to fully deconstruct, analyse and then synthesise what lay behind the different sets of information required a different method than the newspapers and magazines of the day provided through short-form articles. A front page in a newspaper or a half dozen pages in a magazine was not sufficient to explain the Vietnam War to readers in depth. What journalists required to examine in detail and depth the Vietnam War was a medium which allowed them to present their exhaustive wealth of information on a war that they had been a part of and seen develop, providing extensive evidence through researched sources and experiences. It required long-form journalism, the written presentation of journalistic research as a published book. This is the primary source material analysed to investigate how the Vietnam War influenced the rise of long-form journalism. By examining the Vietnam War in the comprehensive manner allowed by long-form journalism, journalists presented in detail key aspects of the wars.

Many war correspondents wrote long-form journalism about the Vietnam War: Neil Sheehan, Michael Herr, Frances Fitzgerald, Wallace Terry, David Lamb, David Halberstam, Joseph Galloway and Hugh Lunn. The works by David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Wallace Terry and Michael Herr are however most appropriate in examining long-form journalism’s rise due to their scope of coverage and popularity. Long-form journalism has multiple definitions regarding a broad spectrum of work, however a general definition of long-form is given in order to assess what is and is not long-form, and how similar works with different content fit into the same category. The importance of long-form journalism is that for journalists seeking to give explanations

³ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*. New York, Random House, 1972, p. 205.

of the Vietnam War it gives greater freedom, both in depth, limited stylistic design and publishing constrictions. Because of this, journalists are freed to fully explore their area of research. The authors themselves are examined to provide background details of their lives and influences and to give a general representation of the work that they have created. Journalists explored the differing of opinions and interpretations of the journalists and the American government surrounding these elements of the Vietnam War which had continued for over a decade. By examining the war through long-form, journalists can address in detail the issues of the war in a wider context.

A Definition of Long-form Journalism

Journalistic books have a varied and broad definition from literary nonfiction, nonfiction reportage, and new journalism to long-form to book-length journalism.⁴ It is important to define long-form journalism to avoid confusion and to separate out the work that is being studied from other forms of journalism. Long-form journalism shall be defined as:

*“Where practitioners use journalistic methods to research and write independently about contemporary people, events and issues at book length in a timely manner for a broad audience they are engaged in book-length journalism.”*⁵

- Mathew Ricketson.

While this is a very general definition of a debated medium, it explores common features in long-form journalistic writing such as extensive and broad research, the constraints of time as well as a necessary broad appeal.⁶ These factors are important because they all speak to the common qualities of very different bodies of work. They thus accept a broad range of work as long-form journalism while retaining elements necessary to still be defined as journalism. In contrast, short-form journalism encompasses traditional reporting in newspapers and magazines, focusing on presenting facts with minimum commentary and analysis and with a focus on the immediate.

⁴ Heather Gilbert. “Books as Journalism,” in *Encyclopedia of Journalism: A – C*, ed. Christopher H. Sterling, 173 – 176. Los Angeles, Sage Publications Inc., 2009, p. 173.

⁵ Mathew Ricketson, “The New Appreciation of Long-Form Journalism in a Short-Form World,” in *Australian Journalism Today*, ed. Mathew Ricketson, 217 – 233. South Yarra, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 219.

⁶ Gilbert. “Books as Journalism,” p. 173; The Encyclopedia also addresses common elements of long-form such as research and the purpose of long-form books as tools of news presentation. It also presents arguments about who can or cannot write long-form and whether or not the work must be fiction or nonfiction, as well as presenting the difficulty of assigning the long-form its own genre due to the diversity of those writing and their style. Because of this a broad definition has been used.

Chapter 1: Why Long-form Journalism is important.

Long-form journalism played an important role in journalistic examination and critique of the Vietnam War. The historiography surrounding the role of the media within the Vietnam War is broad with authors such as Phillip Knightly and Daniel Hallin covering the role and influence of the media in the war.⁷ Their works focus predominantly on short-form coverage of the war and the role of journalists in this regard. They do not explore the long-form works of Vietnam correspondents, focusing on the influence of short-form writing and television broadcasts over the course of the war.⁸ The exclusion of long-form overlooks an important tool of journalistic critique that was integral to the investigation of the Vietnam War.

Long-form journalism serves to broaden the scope of journalistic inquiry. It lessens the limitations on journalists necessitated by the media that their work appears in. Unlike short-form journalism, which then appeared primarily in newspapers, long-form journalism allows a reporter greater freedom in how they wish to present their opinions and arguments. By presenting information in this manner journalists are able to include more than just facts and statistics. They are able to present their own opinions, analysis and conclusions across a wider span of time, be it months or many years, and go into much greater depth. This is critical when analysing a war as long as Vietnam as to convey the missteps and their consequences, explanation and deep analysis require length. In particular the opinions of journalists, often missing from the pages of newspapers or magazines is captured, presented and expanded upon in long-form journalism. By presenting their opinions, journalists are able to convey unique perspectives of the war, based on not just their research of the events but also their own experiences.

Long-form journalism and the process of writing a book thus allows for greater forethought and consideration of one's writing. The benefits of length in long-form

⁷ Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Los Angeles, University of California Press., 1989, P. 213.

⁸ Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, pp. 211-213.

journalism allow authors more freedom to explore their topic than a copy editor at the desk of a daily publication would allow. War correspondents like Neil Sheehan are able to produce books of over 800 pages describing, analysing, questioning and concluding on events that they experienced in the Vietnam War. For Sheehan as a wire service reporter, constantly constrained by a deadline and the rush to be first in getting a story from Vietnam onto a press in America, long-form allows for a much broader and more in-depth look at his experiences. In short-form it is simply not possible for authors to go into this level of detail.

Long-form journalism frees an author stylistically. In long-form an author is able to write and convey information in a manner that might be unacceptable in a conventional short-form setting that requires adherence to a simplistic/specific informative style. Long-form allows writers to expand and develop the ideas they investigate and present more information and opinion about their topic. David Halberstam's particular style of writing and exposition often frustrated the editors at the New York Times.⁹ Similarly, *Dispatches* could not have been written as a short-form because his unique writing style does more to present his opinion and experiences than it does to convey the standard factual information required for a newspaper article. The stylistic choices made by Michael Herr contrast sharply with standard combat reporting. His anecdotal, fictionalising and figurative addressing of events and characters are developed and fleshed out thanks to the freedom provided by the long-form medium.

Lastly, long-form affords journalists more independence. When publishing articles under the banner of a news media company, certain perspectives may not be accepted. The publishing of a book independent of a journalist's normal news publisher ensures some degree of insulation from censure, both of facts that the author presents and opinions that have been formed, opinions that are often absent from traditional short-form publication.¹⁰ By publishing independently of a traditional news media company journalists are able to challenge greater institutional

⁹ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 177.

¹⁰ Prochnau, pp. 83-84.

boundaries. Journalists publishing work as long-form ensures they are not beholden to an employer who may be influenced by institutional or governmental forces.

Chapter 2: Journalism During the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was a unique war for the United States of America. It was at the time the longest war that America had participated in. Their involvement having started in 1950 while the French were still fighting the First Indochina War which ended in 1954 with French defeat. America did not at this time deploy combat troops to Vietnam, rather they provided financial and material aid to France's efforts against the Viet Minh who were fighting for impendence from French rule.¹¹ At that time the issues in Vietnam were not as prevalent as those occupying America in the Korean War. This was where the action was and the sharp spike of 270 journalists entering Korea to report on the war in August of 1950 forecast what would take place at the height of the Vietnam War.¹² Korea showed that despite the support correspondents had given the government during World War Two, they could still be critical of American war efforts. This was demonstrated by news reports of poorly armed American soldiers retreating in the face of Soviet made tanks reaching America and the military leadership.¹³ This criticism came from a desire to see America win, rather than criticism of the necessity of the war, a distinction that would be important for journalists covering the Vietnam War in the early years.¹⁴

The Korean War was over quickly enough that hard questions about America's role and actions in the war could not be seriously asked of the government by journalists. The Viet Minh's success against the French in 1954 and the separation of Vietnam into North and South Vietnam led to continued American support for the non-communist regime, due to the American desire to halt the spread of communism in South East Asia.¹⁵ It would still be years before war correspondents arrived in South Vietnam in any number to cover the American involvement. The lack of correspondents did not mean that nothing was happening, rather that the American

¹¹ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1979, p. 17.

¹² Phillip Knightly. *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*. The United States of American, 1975. P. 338; Herring, p. 17.

¹³ Knightly. *The First Casualty*, p. 337.

¹⁴ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 142.

¹⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 17.

government under Eisenhower was unwilling to make a great commitment to Vietnam. This commitment would not be expanded upon till Kennedy's administration slowly and quietly ramped up support. While American soldiers were not heavily deployed in front line positions as they were in the latter years of the war, the military advisors were more involved with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) combat operations than the government let on.¹⁶ This demonstrated an early moment of misinformation by the American government regarding the status of American support of the Diem regime. For the reporters, it signified the development of a war.

The beginning trickle of correspondents began around 1960 when officers in the ARVN attempted to depose the president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was installed/elected by the United States after the French withdrew from Vietnam.¹⁷ The coup attempt highlighted Vietnam internationally and thus drew a small group of journalists to the country to cover the issues in Vietnam. These early reporters would be some of the first to see the lay of the land in Vietnam, and how America and the Diem government of South Vietnam were failing to maintain a stable country. Homer Bigart of *The New York Times (NYT)*, a war correspondent who had covered both World War Two and the Korean War, Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press (AP), Ray Herndon of United Press International (UPI) and Francois Sully of *Newsweek* (who had lived in Vietnam for thirteen years) were all the early comers to the Vietnam conflict.¹⁸ Bigart would not stay long but would heavily condemn the Vietnam government and America's involvement before leaving Vietnam.¹⁹ Sully too would leave but not voluntarily, as after one critical piece too many about the Ngo family's leadership he was expelled from the country by the Diem regime.²⁰ These early correspondents would not last till the war's end in 1975 but would pave the way for others through their initial perceptions and critique of Vietnam but also the

¹⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 86.

¹⁷ Jessica Chapman, *Cauldrons of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, The United States and 1950s Southern Vietnam*. London, Cornell University Press, 2013. p. 188.

¹⁸ Knightly. *The First Casualty*, p. 374.

¹⁹ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 45.

²⁰ Prochnau, p. 126.

contacts and sources they cultivated within the country and the rules that they established on reporting in Vietnam.²¹ Bigart would attest to this image as although he did not spend as much time covering Vietnam as those correspondents who would follow him, he quickly identified that what was happening in Vietnam under American eyes “doesn’t work.”²² This legacy is what would spur further questioning of the methods and eventually the validity itself of the war by future correspondents whose careers would be made by their coverage of the war. Like the American muckrakers of the 1900s such as Lincoln Steffens who “savagely exposed grafting politicians, criminal police,”²³ in the cities of America, journalists in Vietnam would confront the dishonesty and failure of the American system in Vietnam and bring word of it to the world.

²¹ Peter Arnett, *Live From the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994, p. 75.

²² Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 54.

²³ Louis Filler, *The Muckrakers*. Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1939, p. 9.

Chapter 3: The Long-form Journalists

Neil Sheehan entered Vietnam in April 1962, working for UPI. The twenty six year old Sheehan had earned a scholarship to Harvard where he was a journalist for one of Harvard's student publications.²⁴ He then had a short career in the Army as a reporter for the Army's *Stars and Stripes*, would work initially for UPI and later *NYT*, and would cover the Vietnam War for over 10 years.²⁵ As a journalist Sheehan worked as a stringer, wiring out his reporting and coverage of the Vietnam conflict in daily competition with other publications, primarily Malcolm Browne's AP. Sheehan thrived in Vietnam and covered many of the events of the war, before the American public even became wholly aware of America's involvement in Vietnam. This included his coverage of the Battle of Ap Bac, where the ARVN demonstrated themselves incompetent on the field of battle and America sustained some of its first loses in combat to Viet Cong forces.²⁶ Sheehan would go on to cover the Buddhist crisis and the fall of the Diem regime in 1963.²⁷ In 1965 Sheehan would leave UPI and go to work for *NYT* and would continue to work for them as a reporter covering the Pentagon, the White House, the Vietnam War and its intensification. In 1972 he began work on his book *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* which would be published and receive a Pulitzer prize in 1989.²⁸

The twenty eight year old Harvard educated David Halberstam arrived in Vietnam on the same day that Francois Sully was expelled from the country by the Diem government 1963.²⁹ Halberstam had previously been the editor of a student publication at Harvard and then reported for *NYT* as a war correspondent on the conflict in the Congo. In Vietnam Halberstam was not a stringer like Sheehan. He remained unconstrained by daily deadlines and the immediate demands from his

²⁴ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 96-97.

²⁵ Prochnau, p. 90.

²⁶ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*. London, Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1989, p. 263.

²⁷ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 334; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 359.

²⁸ 'The Pulitzer Prizes,' <http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/neil-sheehan>, (accessed 11 July 2017).

²⁹ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 128.

company's foreign desk. Perhaps more than anyone else Halberstam took up the mantle that Bigart had left behind. Halberstam reported tirelessly on a critical bent, like the muckrakers before him, and the American government attacked him for it. They challenged his patriotism and went so far as to suggest his removal from Vietnam.³⁰ Halberstam left Vietnam in 1964 and returned only once more during the war. Halberstam's coverage of the Buddhist crisis and *coup d'état* against Diem were reported on the front pages of *NYT*.³¹ For his reporting Halberstam received the Pulitzer prize for international reporting in 1964 alongside Malcolm Browne.³² Halberstam continued to work for *NYT* and would publish in 1972 *The Best and the Brightest*, his damning critique of American actions and policy in Vietnam. It received excellent reviews from Victor Navasky, calling the book Halberstam's "most impressive and important."³³

Wallace Terry was sent to Vietnam in by *Time* magazine in 1967 to report on the role of black soldiers in the Vietnam War and would be part of the cadre of reporters venturing to Vietnam at the height of the conflict.³⁴ Before being sent by *Time* to Vietnam he had worked at *The Washington Post* and been the editor of the Brown University student newspaper. At 29 years old Terry was older than the majority of enlisted men and draftees that he would report on. Before Vietnam Terry had been covering the civil rights movement for *Time* and this focus on black rights and attitudes would carry over into his reporting. Terry would spend two years (1967-1969) in Vietnam covering the war. After the war, he would continue to research the role of black Americans in Vietnam, conducting extensive interviews for a PBS *Frontline* show on Vietnam, which drew on his well received book, *Bloods: An*

³⁰ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 130.

³¹David Halberstam, 'The New York Times: Coup in Saigon Article Preview.'
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9802E6D9113CEF3BBC4E53DFB7678388679EDE&legacy=true> (accessed 12 July 2017).

³² 'The Pulitzer Prizes,
<http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/malcolm-w-browne-and-david-halberstam>, (accessed 11 July 2017).

³³ Victor Navasky, 'The New York Times on the Web: Books,'
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/15/home/halberstam-best.html>, (accessed 12 July 2017).

³⁴ Wallace Terry, Introduction to *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*. New York, Random House, 1984, p. xv.

*Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans.*³⁵

Michael Herr asked to go to Vietnam in 1967 as a reporter for *Esquire* magazine.³⁶ Herr was an independent contractor for *Esquire* and like Halberstam, was not under pressure to wire out daily reports and had a lot of freedom within Vietnam. Like Sheehan, Halberstam and Terry, Herr had university education at Syracuse University and had also written articles in his high school magazine, indicating his interest in writing and journalism. Upon coming to Vietnam he focused his attention on the soldiers and the peculiarities of their lives, and his, in Vietnam. He sought to move away from the normalities of reporting in Vietnam, the day to day current events. His published book *Dispatches* was received with wide acclaim, being called by John le Carré “The best book I have ever read on men and war in our time.”³⁷

³⁵ Terry, *Bloods*, back cover quotation.

³⁶ ‘NPR,’

<http://www.npr.org/2016/06/28/483776202/remembers-michael-herr-whose-dispatches-brought-the-war-in-vietnam-home>, 2016, (accessed 12 July 2017).

³⁷ Michael Herr, *Dispatches*. New York, Alfred Knopf Inc., 1977, cover quotation; Cain, Sian. ‘The Guardian’

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/24/michael-herr-author-of-dispatches-dies-aged-76>, 2016, (accessed 11 July 2017).

Chapter 4: Long-Form Journalism and Secrecy in Vietnam War

The secrecy of the Vietnam War was a contributing factor to the rise of long-form journalism due to journalists' exposure of the depth of the American government's concealment and manipulation of information. Efforts were made by the American government in order to limit knowledge of actual progress of American involvement in Vietnam during Kennedy's term due to an institutional desire to present the image of success.³⁸ Journalists writing long-form about the Vietnam War focus on a few key elements of secrecy. Both Halberstam and Sheehan cover the failings of the Diem government and the battle of Ap Bac as instances of American deception. A recurring element among their work was the ever suspicious body count used by the American and South Vietnamese governments which both Terry and Herr address at the height of the war. The failure of war meant that further celebration of the service of Vietnam veterans was limited by the government and public acceptance and knowledge of veteran issues was limited. The secrecy surrounding the initial American involvement was a major contributing factor to the writing of long-form accounts of the Vietnam War as it demonstrated American duplicity in obfuscating the facts that journalists would report on. Stringers like Sheehan shed light on the institutional dishonesty of the American mission in Vietnam in their daily and weekly wires but it is through the process of long-form journalism that the secrecy of Vietnam was explored in detail.

Halberstam investigated the covering up of failure in the Vietnam War by examining American responses to negative criticism. The American involvement in Vietnam during Kennedy's term was through political support for Diem, providing weapons and funding for the ARVN and Diem's regime and the limited deployment of American troops as advisors to the ARVN. Despite this the ARVN repeatedly failed to successfully engage Viet Cong forces and the Diem government failed to secure the support of the South Vietnamese people, which was heavily criticised by the media.

³⁸ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 177.

Halberstam addresses the attempts to conceal negative information between the military and political side of Vietnam through examining a special reporting mission to Vietnam, ordered by President John F. Kennedy.³⁹ This fact finding mission, which operated in two parts, was conducted by Major General Victor Krulak and Joseph Mendenhall of the Foreign Service.⁴⁰ The mission produced such radically different reports of success and failure of the war respectively that Kennedy asked “You two did visit the same country, didn’t you?”⁴¹ Halberstam uses this to show how committed parts of the American leadership, particularly the military, were to preventing knowledge of failure leaking out of Vietnam. Halberstam identifies that punitive measures were taken against those who gave the negative information to Mendenhall and that the military doubled down on presenting a positive image of the war and the importance of Diem.⁴² The military and political situation in Vietnam was not favourable to the American mission, however it was not presented this way to the correspondents in Vietnam, to the public or to the President of the United States of America.

Halberstam showed in his reporting through *NYT* that covering the American mission meant receiving false information from American and Vietnamese officials about the conduct and progress of the war. Halberstam’s criticism of the war was disputed in a report written by General Richard Stillwell which contradicted everything that Halberstam addressed in his reporting, “indeed ‘the picture is precisely the opposite,’ Stillwell reported.”⁴³ Halberstam attributed this to the American relationship with the Diem government. Halberstam collates the fabricated evidence of success of the Diem and American government in his long-form writing and presents it as the American inability to recognise that they had begun to believe their own lies, as he notes that Diem’s “reporting became our reporting, his statistics our statistics, finally his lies our lies.”⁴⁴ Halberstam identified that this led to the belief that Diem was a “miracle

³⁹ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 277.

⁴⁰ Halberstam, p. 276.

⁴¹ Halberstam, p. 277.

⁴² Halberstam, p. 279-80.

⁴³ Halberstam, p. 280.

⁴⁴ Halberstam, p. 183.

man”⁴⁵ who America could work with and rely on to halt the spread of communism. Halberstam argues that in the wider context of the war the secrecy maintained by the military was detrimental to the war effort but became part of the institution that encouraged loyalty to career over President, integrity or subordinates and a system of “fuck up and move up.”⁴⁶

Sheehan and Halberstam both examined how the depiction of the Battle of Ap Bac was a symptom of a larger issue of a false portrayal of military success. The Battle of Ap Bac occurred on the 2nd of January 1963, and was a battle in which ARVN forces superior in number and equipment were defeated by a well-entrenched and informed Viet Cong force.⁴⁷ The battle resulted in the ARVN forces suffering heavy casualties, five helicopters lost and three American advisors killed, a major defeat for the ARVN and America.⁴⁸ General Paul Harkins, the commander of all American forces in Vietnam (through the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam or MACV), told reporters that “we’ve got [the Viet Cong] in a trap and we’re going to spring it in half an hour.”⁴⁹ The battle was hailed as a victory for the ARVN side by the official American cables to Washington and by the Saigon regime.⁵⁰ Through their exposure of this failure Halberstam and Sheehan not only present the truth about the defeat but demonstrate the impact of the battle in the wider context of the war - how despite the incompetence and clear defeat of the ARVN a narrative of positivity and success was coming out of the American embassy and MACV leadership after Ap Bac. By addressing the situation in Long-form Halberstam and Sheehan demonstrate the commitment to the image of positivity at the expense of acknowledging the issues of incompetence in the ARVN and the Diem government.

In addressing this Halberstam and Sheehan are able to show how the flow of information out of Vietnam was corrupted. The chain of communication for the

⁴⁵ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 93.

⁴⁶ Halberstam, p. 281.

⁴⁷ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 204.

⁴⁸ Sheehan, p. 263.

⁴⁹ Sheehan, pp. 275 – 276.

⁵⁰ Sheehan, p. 276; Sheehan, p. 290.

military, through General Harkins, Major General Vicktor Krulak and General Max Taylor, prevented many dissenting opinions on the conduct of the war from getting out. Journalists' long-form writing allows for this analysis of the internal processes of the American institutions involved in Vietnam. Sheehan explores this through a briefing prepared by Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann. The briefing was about his service in Vietnam in 1963 and his recommendations for the war. It was extremely critical of how the war was progressing and went into many of the problems that Vann had encountered. It was in stark contrast to the reports coming from Harkins.⁵¹ However, just before Vann was to present his briefing to the Joint Chiefs of Staff providing contradictory evidence to the assertion that the war in Vietnam was going well, it was cancelled on orders from Taylor.⁵² In examining secrecy in their long-form work Halberstam and Sheehan show how officers like Taylor and Harkins suppressed information and criticism to maintain the perception of success in Vietnam. They also showed how secrecy was used by officers to prevent valid criticism impeding or staining their careers. In this way Halberstam and Sheehan provide greater context to the role and impact of secrecy in the Vietnam War and its influence on the progression of the war, documenting the complete refusal by the military leadership to accept any notion that the Vietnam War was not progressing well, as well as the continuing influence of institutional loyalty to career.

As the war progressed another major element of secrecy that emerged was the growing claims of kills or the body count. This was the way that the success and progress of the war was measured. Terry, Herr and Halberstam address the malleable nature of these statistics in their examination of the Vietnam War and show how the tracking of the numbers of enemies killed only further misrepresented how successful the war actually was. With the deployment of more American combat troops under President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, the public started to become aware of the American involvement in a country that many had never heard of and some in government had been unable to place on a map.⁵³ Thus the exploration of the body

⁵¹ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 340 - 341.

⁵² Sheehan, pp. 340- 341.

⁵³ Sheehan, p. 536.

count over the course of the war through long-form was necessary for a greater understanding. Herr tells of how a “special forces captain was telling me about it. ‘I went out and killed one VC and liberated a prisoner. Next day the major called me in and told me that I’d killed fourteen VC and liberated six prisoners. You want to see the medal?’”⁵⁴ Herr demonstrates that the falsified success in this instance was rewarded with a medal. This helps to reinforce Halberstam’s concept of promotion through failure, where the misrepresentation of fact results in career progression. This is similar to Terry’s telling of Luther Benton III’s experience where Benton expresses that “They said I killed 47 of them. I don’t really believe it. They always exaggerated the body count. The whole thing in Vietnam was how many people you kill.”⁵⁵

The kill ratio measurement was ultimately unsuccessful in presenting an image of success, as Terry shows how Arthur Woodley believed that “I don’t think America lost. I think they gave up. They surrendered.”⁵⁶ The manipulated figures of enemies killed were used to demonstrate the success of attrition against the Viet Cong. Herr identifies how this dedication to false numbers led to a war whereby, “you got to a point where you could sit there in the evening and listen to the man say that American casualties for the week had reached a six-week low, only eighty GI’s had died in combat, and you’d feel like you’d just gotten a bargain.”⁵⁷ Herr criticised the manipulation of the body counts as “A story ... men hunting men, a hideous war and all kinds of victims. But there was also a Command that didn’t feel this, that rode us into fictional kill rations, and an Administration that believed the Command, a cross-fertilization of ignorance.”⁵⁸ This long-form analysis shows that the exaggerated claims of kills did not create a better measure for success, but rather demonstrated a failure to properly take account of the progress of the war. Halberstam critically addressed the futility of body count when he said “there were 30,000 Viet Cong when I arrived ... There were 30,000 killed when I was there and there were 30,000

⁵⁴ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 172.

⁵⁵ Terry, *Bloods*, p. 78.

⁵⁶ Terry, p. 264.

⁵⁷ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 215.

⁵⁸ Herr, p. 214.

Viet Cong when I left.”⁵⁹ This demonstrated the extent of misreporting of the numbers of killed and thus the misreporting of the war’s success. In a war that lasted as long as the Vietnam War with so many people killed, the manipulation of statistics to present the idea that the war was being won, was an integral element of criticism in long-form writing by journalists. When addressing the amounts of enemy forces killed via short-form reporting, journalists were helping to present the image of success and desired by the American and Vietnamese governments. In effect, “they also legitimized them.”⁶⁰ By exploring the issue of the body count in more detail, journalists were able to demonstrate its fraudulence and the negative impact it had on the war.

In investigating the secrecy of the Vietnam War Terry looked at how the experiences of Vietnam veterans were not part of the public’s wider knowledge. By exploring this through long-form Terry is able to not just present the stories of Vietnam veterans but also explain why their stories went largely unreported. At the peak of the war 536,000 American soldiers were deployed at one time to Vietnam, a war that cost over 50,000 American lives.⁶¹ All these soldiers had unique stories of their experiences. Soldiers’ untold experiences of the Vietnam War were a contributing factor to the rise of long-form journalism due to journalists’ interest in how “there were no flags waving or drums beating upon the return of any Vietnam veterans.”⁶² While previous wars, such as World War Two, also produced soldiers’ memoirs and tales of heroism and sacrifice, the loss of the Vietnam War meant that many veterans’ experiences were unknown to the wider public.

In exploring secrecy during the Vietnam War Terry looks at the untold experiences of Vietnam by examining how black veterans were treated upon their return to America

⁵⁹ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 214.

⁶¹ Allan Millett, *A short History of the Vietnam War*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978. p. 130; ‘The U.S. National Archives,’ <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html>, 2008, (accessed 16 August 2017).

⁶² Terry, Introduction to *Bloods*, p. xvii.

after the Vietnam War. Terry notes that “these stories are not to be found in the expanding body of Vietnam literature.”⁶³ Terry seeks to tell stories that would otherwise be ignored and show why they were ignored. He explores the different reactions to returning veterans. He shows how many faced difficulty reintegrating into society, not just because of their experiences in war, that soldiers who fought in the World Wars or Korea might have had, but because the American population was specifically against Vietnam veterans because of their role in the war. Terry shows this through Joe Biggers’ experience where “One day I wore my uniform over to Howard University in Washington ... Howard is a black school ... I thought I would feel at home. The guys poked fun at me calling me Uncle Sam’s flunky. ... They would see the purple heart and ask me what was I trying to prove. The women wouldn’t talk to you either. ... I felt like I was completely out of it.”⁶⁴ Terry gives another example of Robert Mountain who lost his leg in Vietnam and whose experience demonstrated the lack of public awareness about the war. “When I got back to the real world, it seemed nobody cared that you’d been to Vietnam. As a matter of fact, everybody would be wondering where have you been for so long.”⁶⁵ Terry shows how soldiers in the Vietnam war, particularly black soldiers, were not accepted back into civilian society. By exploring these issues of the Vietnam War through long-form journalism Terry is able to give an in-depth picture of another impact of the secrecy and misinformation, the impact it had on returning Vietnam veterans.

Terry shows the reason for this through an interview with Joseph Anderson. “Career officers and enlisted men like me did not go back to a hostile environment in America ... The others were rejected, because the nation experienced a defeat.”⁶⁶ Because of America’s defeat in Vietnam those who fought in the war were looked down upon. “The nation heard stories of atrocities, of drugs. Everyone who was in Vietnam was suspect.”⁶⁷ Despite that generalisation being unfair in its application to

⁶³ Terry, Introduction to *Bloods*, p. xvii.

⁶⁴ Terry, p. 122.

⁶⁵ Terry, p. 186.

⁶⁶ Terry, p. 233.

⁶⁷ Terry, p. 233.

all veterans who experienced Vietnam, it was enough to blemish their records. By examining the secrecy surrounding the experiences of Vietnam veterans through long-form journalism Terry is able to explain how in the wider context of the war the Vietnam veterans were not always accepted by society, despite the honourable service of many, both those who chose to fight and those who were drafted.

Chapter 5: Policy and Strategy and Long-form Journalism

The American policy and strategy for the Vietnam War was an element that influenced the rise of long-form journalism due to journalists revealing how and why these policies and strategies failed. The American policy in Vietnam was developed by multiple American and South Vietnamese governments. The course of American policy in South East Asia was set by America's inability to prevent the fall of China to communism in 1949. American support for the French in Vietnam began slowly after this set back. Under Eisenhower, the South Vietnamese regime under Diem was given material aid and limited military advisory support.⁶⁸ Under Kennedy this support was stepped up through the policy of troop deployment. At the time of Kennedy's death in 1964 there were just over 16,000 American troops in Vietnam.⁶⁹ Under President Lyndon Johnson these numbers would increase exponentially, to over 500,000 at the height of the Vietnam War. These numbers would subside once Richard Nixon became president in 1969.⁷⁰ Accompanying this was the policy of attrition, which was carried out as a search and destroy strategy. Other policies like the Strategic Hamlet Program were and indicator of America's inability to institute effective social reform in Vietnam with Diem in power and demonstrated the system by which the failure of other policy would occur. The Vietnam War was the culmination of years of policy failure and strategic mismanagement. For correspondents covering the war these failures were a ball of information to be unravelled and examined.

In addressing Vietnam policy in long-form writing Halberstam focuses on how the failure of American policy to prevent the establishment of Communist China in 1949 influenced the policy of the Vietnam War.⁷¹ Halberstam notes that Kennedy "did not want to cut off aid to Vietnam because that might start events comparable to those preceding the fall of China, and that was the last thing he wanted."⁷² In his

⁶⁸ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 17.

⁶⁹ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 299.

⁷⁰ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 729-731.

⁷¹ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*. New York, Ballantine Books, 1985, p. 57.

⁷² Halberstam, p. 104.

examination of the Vietnam War's policy origins Halberstam blames America's failure in China as the primary reason for Kennedy's support for South Vietnam. Halberstam explains that America's failure to prevent the fall of China to communism and the rabid anti-communist attacks of the McCarthy era contributed heavily to future American administrations' decisions in South East Asia.⁷³ Halberstam states that despite the failure in China, "a remarkable hubris permeated this entire time."⁷⁴ America's involvement in Vietnam demonstrated a failure to learn from the past and the hubristic notion that inevitably, they would win. This is a key component of Halberstam's long-form analysis of the Vietnam War's policy decisions. In examining the decisions made a decade before Kennedy's choice to support the Diem regime, Halberstam is able to show how this choice was influenced by past events.

Herr also addresses the war's origins, highlighting the difficulty in saying when the war began for America. He notes that "you couldn't find two people who agreed when it began" and presents examples such as 1954 after the French left, from World War Two and the Japanese occupation to the military advisors deployment in 1961 or the post-Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1965.⁷⁵ Herr presents the start of the Vietnam War as indefinable, with each moment in history a step toward the war's further development. However for all these moments in history, catalogued and referenced by those who had come before, "something wasn't answered, it wasn't even asked."⁷⁶ Herr questions why, with all the information that America had on the past of Vietnam, "not a single life was saved by the information."⁷⁷ Both Halberstam and Herr address at length the origins of the Vietnam policy and its importance on the American mission in Vietnam. They do it uniquely; Halberstam addressing the origins empirically through researched information, while Herr is cautious and inconclusive, leaving the reader to answer rhetorical questions themselves. Both works are unique in style, yet both authors approach the war's origins and examine the impact of the past on the future. By examining the war in depth through long-

⁷³ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 103.

⁷⁴ Halberstam, p. 123.

⁷⁵ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ Herr, p. 49.

⁷⁷ Herr, p. 49.

form, Halberstam and Herr are able to address the policy origins of the war in greater detail over an extended period of time demonstrating the path from the Chinese Civil War to what would become the Vietnam War.

Journalists examined in detail the development of Vietnam policy through troop deployments across a decade of conflict in long-form writing. The deployment of troops to South Vietnam was an indicator of American support for the war and of the strategy that the American generals would support, that of a war of attrition. For journalists, it was important to demonstrate how America had gone from a meagre deployment of soldiers to assist ARVN operations to full scale frontline combat within six years. Halberstam shows how the first steps towards troop deployment were made swiftly by Kennedy in 1961. Kennedy's sending of General Maxwell Taylor to Vietnam to assess the situation in South Vietnam and the need for combat troops was the first step on a slippery slope to a full scale deployment of American troops.⁷⁸ Halberstam indicates that the recommendation of combat troops was not expected as "the recommendations shocked Kennedy to such an extent that Taylor's report was closely guarded and in some cases called back."⁷⁹ Halberstam shows that Kennedy was not expecting the recommendation, nor did he particularly want to go through with it. He also highlights the other issues of the recommendation, that of Taylor's inept comparison of Vietnam to Korea.⁸⁰ In exploring this early development of the war Halberstam examines in greater detail the development of the troop deployment policy. He highlights the failure of the administration to properly prepare for the increase of support to the Diem regime. Halberstam draws attention to this as it is demonstrative of the failing of the leadership of the American military to foresee, and thus adapt, to the new war they would be fighting.

The Vietnam War was a new type of war, fought unconventionally. It was a guerrilla war that would be fought as a war of attrition. The extensive analysis of troop deployment by Sheehan and Halberstam examines how and why hundreds of

⁷⁸ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 169.

⁷⁹ Halberstam, p. 169.

⁸⁰ Halberstam, p. 171.

thousands of American soldiers were not enough to win the Vietnam War. General Taylor initially requested the deployment of eight thousand as an initial force to support the ARNV in their combat operations.⁸¹ Halberstam uses this to demonstrate the Kennedy administration's lack of realisation of how this military commitment could grow. This is seen in how Halberstam shows that Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defence noted in 1962 that "I believe we can safely assume the maximum U.S. Forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men."⁸² Many in government did not believe that the numbers would grow this large, but Halberstam identifies that there were also detractors of this policy. A principal opponent was George Ball, the Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs. He had observed the French during their war with the Viet Minh and so was well aware of the historical parallels between America and France.⁸³ He recognised that "if they went ahead with the proposals, the commitment would not stay small. They would have 300,000 men in there within five years."⁸⁴ This deployment of troops was symptomatic of the American military's attrition strategy for the war. Sheehan addresses the reasons for the deployment of additional men to Vietnam extensively through long-form writing. The American strategy of attrition was one of the main influences for the deployment of additional American fighting troops after Kennedy's death.⁸⁵ Sheehan argues that the strategy of attrition proved inefficient against the North Vietnamese enemy. In 1967, already with 450,000 men, when Westmoreland requested an additional 200,000, he did so with the caveat that even then "the war might go on for as long as two years. If not ... it could last five years or longer."⁸⁶ This shows that even with over half a million men Westmoreland was still unable to guarantee a military victory. These incremental increases in the length of the war were at this point par for the course with the same statements having been made previously by Harkins.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, pp. 173-4.

⁸² Halberstam, p. 173.

⁸³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 125.

⁸⁴ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 174.

⁸⁵ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 484-5.

⁸⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 156.

⁸⁷ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 568.

Sheehan addresses the issue of increased troop deployments as a symptom of the American policy of attrition, which began during Harkins' time in command of the military in Vietnam. By 1965 General Krulak, who had initially supported the policy under General Harkins, became critical of it and wrote a paper discussing the issues of the attrition policy. Krulak criticised the policy due to the amount of lives it would cost (over 170,000) just to deplete the North Vietnamese forces by just twenty percent.⁸⁸ Sheehan's analysis of the policy of attrition shows how it was one of the most influential of the war as it highlighted the dogged persistence of those in command of the Vietnam War. In the end, Johnson did not approve additional men for Westmoreland on the basis of public opinion.⁸⁹ America was also fighting an enemy in Ho Chi Minh who had expressed the view that "you would kill 10 of my men and 1 of yours. But even at that rate you would be unable to hold on, and in the end I would carry the day."⁹⁰ This highlights the foolishness of the commitment to the strategy of attrition that journalists explored in their long-form writing, as America was clearly fighting an enemy willing to sacrifice a generation of their people to win the war. Herr also points to the results of the war of attrition through beliefs of the Marine Corps, "that one marine was better than ten slopes saw Marine squads fed against known NVA platoons ... and on and on ... that belief was undying, but the grunt was not, and the Corps came to be called by many the finest instrument ever devised for the killing of young Americans."⁹¹ In examining these policies in their books, journalists criticised the deployment of troops as an unsuccessful and costly attempt to bleed the Viet Cong dry through attrition. By addressing the main policy that paved the way to American failure in Vietnam, journalists show the extent to which American commanders' insight into the war was limited by their own volition. In exploring the policy of troop deployment to Vietnam and the strategy it supported, journalists address a central theme of the Vietnam War: the official opinion that the war could be won by grinding the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese down in a war of attrition, when in reality as Krulak noted "You

⁸⁸ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 630.

⁸⁹ Sheehan, p. 628.

⁹⁰ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 159.

⁹¹ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 102.

cannot win militarily,' ... 'You have to win totally, or you are not winning at all.'"⁹²

Herr and Sheehan both examine the lack of a mission plan other than that of search and destroy under the banner of the war of attrition to demonstrate the mismanagement of policy during the war. Herr criticises the lack of alternate effective strategies to that of search and destroy. "We never announced any policy at all, apart from finding and destroying the enemy, and we proceeded in the most obvious way."⁹³ Herr uses this to show that the American military failed to adopt alternate effective measures against the Viet Cong. Sheehan notes that the pacification program, which focused American efforts on gaining the support of peasants through land, social and governmental reform was not supported by Westmoreland, and thus was largely ignored by the American Command. General Krulak spearheaded this program, believing that the prize of the war was the Vietnamese people.⁹⁴ "Without the sustenance they provided through the local guerrillas and the clandestine Viet Cong government, the Communist regulars could not exist."⁹⁵ The focus on search and destroy over the pacification program severely limited the American capacity for success and represented grievous policy mismanagement. The focus on attrition and search and destroy meant that for Krulak, "The big-unit fighting with the Main Force Viet Cong and the NVA 'could move to another planet today and we would still not have won the war.'"⁹⁶ By exploring the emphasis on a single military policy through long-form, Sheehan and Herr demonstrate how the American command mismanaged strategy due to Westmoreland's lack of imagination, and how the administration's trust in Westmoreland ensured that the policy continued without deviation. As Sheehan notes "Men of limited imagination who rise as high as Westmoreland had tend to play blindly to their strength ... Westmoreland's strength was military action."⁹⁷

⁹² Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 637.

⁹³ Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 153.

⁹⁴ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 631.

⁹⁵ Sheehan, p. 631.

⁹⁶ Sheehan, p. 631.

⁹⁷ Sheehan, p. 558.

Halberstam and Sheehan both investigated the Strategic Hamlet Program in their long-form writing as a policy representation of the issues of secrecy and misinformation that existed during the Vietnam War. Under Diem and future South Vietnamese governments millions of Vietnamese peasants were relocated into purpose built villages, to protect them from Viet Cong aggression and ensure that populaces could be controlled and monitored to prevent infiltration and the recruitment of South Vietnamese peasants into the Viet Cong.⁹⁸ The idea was borne from British experiences in Malaya and the Philippines. The strategic hamlets were implemented at the behest of American advisors in Vietnam.⁹⁹ The strategic hamlet program was however symbolic of other policy failures in Vietnam. Many peasants were forcibly displaced off their land and into encampments created to ensure government control of the peasants as much as their protection. The Diem government viewed the program in this way, as another mechanism to establish and maintain control over the South Vietnamese peasant population. The program continued apace from its inception in 1962 and by the end of that year over 2800 hamlets had been constructed.¹⁰⁰ Long—form analysis showed that despite this the program was undeniably flawed as peasants did not appreciate being taken off their land, and the ability of infiltrators to access peasants was not effectively impeded.¹⁰¹ If anything, peasants were more likely to join the Viet Cong as a means to return to their land.

In analysing the failure of the strategic hamlet program Halberstam and Sheehan both identify that the American response was symptomatic of the past and future responses to policy failure.¹⁰² There was complete unwillingness on the American side to accept the degree of failure of the system, best demonstrated by Halberstam in how, when the subject of overstated Vietnamese figures was brought up by Lieutenant Colonel Fred Ladd, Harkins “upbraided him for challenging the word of a

⁹⁸ Herring, *America's Longest War*, pp. 88-89.

⁹⁹ Herring, p. 85.

¹⁰⁰ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 289.

¹⁰¹ Sheehan, p. 310.

¹⁰² Sheehan, p. 310; Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 275.

Vietnamese officer ... Ladd looked at him for a long time and said simply 'I thought we were talking American to American.'"¹⁰³ The refusal to address these fabricated numbers at the source meant that these numbers would be conveyed up the chain of command, and thus become official, perpetrating the myth of success. In explaining in detail the failure of the Strategic Hamlet Program, Halberstam and Sheehan sought to bring to light the greater symptom of misinformation propagated by the American and Vietnamese governments and how the Hamlet Program was symbolic of wider American failure in Vietnam.

¹⁰³ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 188.

Conclusion

The Vietnam War influenced the rise of long-form journalism due to journalists' in-depth exploration of facts in the wider context of the war that was not found in short-form reporting. In examining the war with long-form, journalists look in greater detail at both "the inside and outside of an event."¹⁰⁴ Robin Collingwood defines the inside and outside of events in *The Idea of History*. "By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements ... By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought."¹⁰⁵ Collingwood applies this idea to the study of history in that "the historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other."¹⁰⁶ However, it is also applicable to the examination of journalists' long-form investigation of the Vietnam War.

In short-form writing journalists are primarily concerned with the outside of events. For war correspondents in particular, whose work was edited before it appeared in newspapers the inclusion of inside analysis of events could be difficult. This was especially applicable to Halberstam, whose work was often edited at the foreign desk of *NYT* to eliminate "the dreaded point of view that found its way into his articles."¹⁰⁷ By writing about the Vietnam War in long-form, journalists could examine with more freedom both the outside of events and the inside. Journalists writing long-form serve to bridge the gap between journalists writing short-form work, concerned with immediate issues of the day, and historians who deal with the distant to near distant past. It is the opinions and analyses of journalists who experienced and lived through the war, while at the same time researching and covering it, that allows their long-form writing to explore the wider context of the Vietnam War.

¹⁰⁴ Robin G. Collingwood. *The Idea of History*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 213.

¹⁰⁵ Collingwood. *Idea of History*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁶ Collingwood, p. 213.

¹⁰⁷ Prochnau, *Once Upon A distant War*, p. 83.

Journalists explored key areas of the Vietnam War through long-form writing, researching and synthesising information into a critical analysis. Journalists examined the secrecy and policies of the American government through long-form journalism as a way to show the immediate and long-term effects of actions across the long timeframe of the war. The covering up and withholding of information about the Diem regime meant that Kennedy “told aides that he could not believe a word that the military was telling him, that he had to read the newspapers to find out what was going on.”¹⁰⁸ By examining this cover up in long-form, journalists can examine wider aspects of the inside of events by getting details about the thoughts, misgivings and certainties of those who governed America. Journalists analysed the American policy in pre-communist China and demonstrated that the failure of American policy in China only exacerbated issues of American commitment to stopping the spread of communism in South East Asia. This was only buoyed by the McCarthy period of American politics which ensured that the lessons of China would swiftly be forgotten.

The misinformation engineered within Vietnam for consumption by the American government and the public was predicated on the back of initial military failures that were tidied up and misconstrued by the military, requiring a more comprehensive analysis than short-form journalism could provide. By examining in greater detail both the initial facts and the chain through which information passed, journalists demonstrated the deliberate intention to mislead the government and public, about the course of the war. When the reality of the situation later came to light, the deployment of American troops to Vietnam in a combat role became a major issue of policy for the American government. This policy focused on continuing and propagating the military strategy of attrition. Journalists demonstrated through their investigations that the strategy of attrition alone was insufficient to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, and that to truly secure South Vietnam as an independent nation in its own right, a broader policy of political and social reform

¹⁰⁸ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 282.

was necessary. Journalists showed how the results of the war generated silence around the acknowledgement of Vietnam veterans and the experiences that they had during the war. The American defeat in the war meant that experiences of the war were often untold. Journalists' exposure of Vietnam veterans' experiences in long-form writing generated greater public knowledge and awareness about veterans' issues from the war.

Journalists' critique of the lack of reform and focus on the sole objective of attrition highlighted the limited scope of the American mission to Vietnam and the failure to adapt strategy or admit that the efforts being undertaken were unsuccessful.

Journalists' exploration of the kill ratio and strategic hamlet program, supported by General Harkins and General Westmoreland, demonstrated how the continued mismanagement of numbers was used to present a misleading image of success for the war. In particular, the success of a kill ratio was used to demonstrate the success of the policy of attrition. Journalists showed that the lack of a broader strategy limited American success in Vietnam and consigned America to defeat as in the words of Joseph Anderson, "Long before Saigon fell, it was clear to me the United States was not willing to win the war, So the only alternative is to lose the war."¹⁰⁹

Long-form journalism was the key component of criticism and analysis used by journalists who covered the Vietnam War. By writing long-form instead of traditional newspaper or magazine articles, journalists were among the first to provide a detailed examination of the Vietnam War, not just presenting facts and news about the war itself but explaining, criticising and questioning the war. Long-form provided journalists with a method whereby extensive critique of the war could be conducted.

The deceitful practices, failed policies and strategies witnessed by journalists during the Vietnam War spurred them to use long-form journalism to express and examine what they saw. They sought to present the reality of the war in a way that they had been unable to do through the pages of a newspaper. Other wars had presented similar issues for journalists to study, but never before had journalism

¹⁰⁹ Terry, *Bloods*, p. 233.

experienced what it did during the Vietnam War. War correspondents were reporting on America's slow fall into ever greater and more deadly failure, helped on by a degree of secrecy and misinformation that permeated almost every level of military command and government position and a comprehensive failure of policy and strategy due to inflexibility and a refusal to address the failures of the past. This culminated in the ignominious American departure from South Vietnam that was investigated and examined by journalists who for years had watched this graceless descent into disaster. The long, slow failure of the Vietnam War made long-form journalism, with its depth, stylistic freedom and independence, the preferred medium for many journalists to present their conclusions on the wider context of the war.

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