



Government admits lied about Vietnam

Mike Feinsilber
Associated Press

A book published by the Army says the American people often got more straight information about the Vietnam War from the press than from the government.

The government lied to the people, the book says, although it avoids using that blunt word.

On one issue, "the facts were different" from what was put out by the Defense Department, it says. On another occasion, U.S. officials "dissembled" about what Americans were actually doing at a time they were in Vietnam as "advisers."

That is rare official candor. Even 20 years after the fact, it is unusual for the government to own up to misleading the people.

Candor's author is William M. Hammond, a civilian historian on the Pentagon payroll. His book, "Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968," issued by the Government Printing Office, is part of a series the Army is publishing on every aspect of its role in the Vietnam War.

In recounting the tortured history of relations between the government and the press during the war, Hammond illustrates the perils when a democracy wages a second-hand war that the Congress hasn't declared and the people haven't committed themselves to.

Because neither public nor legislative backing had been won, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations felt compelled toward constant optimism. Until it became a mocking phrase, Washington had constantly to report that "the light at the end of the tunnel" was in sight.

One Continental Army Command memo cabled to Saigon, borrowing a line from songwriter Johnny Mercer, urged American advisers to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative."

Reporters weren't under such restraints. If Buddhists were setting fire to themselves to oppose a repressive Ngo Dinh Diem regime, or if the American-advised and ill-led South Vietnamese army refused to engage an enemy it outnumbered and outgunned, reporters felt free to so report — no matter what frustrations resulted in Washington or what tensions were aggravated between the U.S. Embassy and the presidential palace in Saigon.

Policy makers in Washington refused to allow information officers in Vietnam to acknowledge the use of napalm because they didn't want the Communists to make propaganda from it.

"But newsmen went into the field served napalm exploding and rearing its effects with their cameras," Hammond writes.

One early-in-the-war dispatch by New York Times' David Halberstam reporting gains by an "almost cocky" Cong in the Mekong Delta, so undermined the official view of progress Secretary of State Dean Rusk picked apart at a news conference.

But when Halberstam's story was back to Saigon for an autopsy, the military, while disputing some of the tails, "failed to contradict the report's main point — that the war in the delta was going against the South Vietnamese," Hammond reports.

It wasn't that reporters were more than the military. Instead, the U.S. mission in Saigon, eager to placate Washington and buck up the South Vietnamese, ignored the same evidence that newsmen found.

Vietnam was the first unexcused modern American war. The Kennedy administration toyed with censorship but ultimately felt it could not without the inevitable charge that it was allowing Americans to perish in a "clandestine war." When the Saigon government tried to kick out troublesome reporters, the U.S. Mission felt bound to support the reporters' defense.

Hammond reaches this conclusion:

"Critics of the press within the military paid great attention to the mistakes of the news media but little to the work of the majority of reporters, who attempted conscientiously to tell all sides of the story. . . . What alienated the American public, in both the Korea and Vietnam Wars, was not news coverage but casualties. Public support for each war dropped inexorably by 15 percentage points whenever total U.S. casualties increased by a factor of 10."

Information officers were in an impossible position. They could not do what reporters could see for themselves despite pressure from Washington to keep the news out of Saigon from contradicting official optimism.

But the American government denied the truth. In lying to the public, it lied to itself too, and at a terrible price.

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Woodstock '89: The Yuppie Generation

We've heard a lot about the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival in the past weeks, because it's the 20th anniversary of the "weekend of peace, love and music," as its promoters called it. Yet even 20 years after the event, many people don't remember Woodstock as anything more than the bird in the Peanuts comic strip.

If something like Woodstock happened today, would it be anything more than comical? As Woodstock was a symbol of the '60s generation, Woodstock '89 would be a symbol of our generation.

Woodstock, New York, has unpredictable weather, so it should be held somewhere where the climate is dependable — like Palm Springs, but we'd still call it "Woodstock." But instead of holding it in Palm Springs, it'd be held 45 miles a way at a place with a lot of parking — maybe a mall.

The biggest battles would be over who gets the movie rights and who would be the biggest sponsor. Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi, IBM vs. AT&T, Miller vs. Coors — who would win? The fans, I'm sure. Trojan would surely be a major backer, supplying condom machines for the hundreds of thousands of fans. And the Red Cross would have to be on hand to provide AIDS testing — no more of that "free love" bit.

Instead of "three days of peace and music" as the theme, the theme could be "getting a piece of the pie, love of money and video music." Or they could be honest with the theme and instead of calling it "three days of peace, love and music," call it "three days of sex, money and self-gratification."

Everyone would show up early in their BMWs and private planes. None of this free nonsense, the charge would be a \$30 minimum to cover expenses (Visa and Mastercard accepted but no American Express.) And despite the heavy corporate sponsorship, a percentage of the profits from the extravaganza would have to go to charity, so it wouldn't look like they were doing it for the money.

Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix probably wouldn't show up, but many of the old greats would. The Who, the guys



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who didn't die before they got old, could put on a set, but I doubt anybody'd be able to hear them, including Townshend.

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young would probably perform, but David Crosby would have to be under the watchful eyes of his parole officer and the people at Nutri-Systems. Jefferson Airplane (or is it Jefferson Starship, or is it just Starship?) might fly in but Grace Slick's voice would be *in absentia*.

The Grateful Dead might play, but the audience might be better off dead than listening to Santa Claus (oops, I mean Jerry Garcia) try to play "Uncle John's Band" at the age of 135.

Gone would be the Indian gurus. Woodstock '89 could feature the spiritual leader of contemporary pop, Debbie Gibson. Our teenage pundit could show by example that it is possible to be quite popular with eighth-grade lyrics. Her right-hand men could be any of the Euro-dance groups such as New Order.

The stage would be easy to set up because everything would be computer-generated. In fact, most of the show could proceed without the use of a single guitar or a drum set.

The dance/pop "music" segment could conclude with a rousing performance by Depeche Mode highlighted by a band member playing the synthesizer with his teeth and then setting it on fire and smashing it against the stage.

Next could come the poser-metal portion of the entertainment. Twenty years after Ten Years After's Alvin Lee dazzled the crowd with what were called "the fastest fingers at Woodstock," the gals from Poison, devoid of talent, could strum their way into the hearts of those

spectators who are devoid of musical taste.

Of course Posin' (oops, Poison) couldn't compare to the big stars of the festival, Pistils 'N Flowers and Bon Jovi, singing songs that are incomprehensible but obviously sexual.

There is always a chance that rap music would rear its ugly head at the '89 festivities. Highlights of the show would be the Eazy E.'s performance featuring an actual drive-by killing and Run D.M.C.'s on the spot filming of an Adidas commercial.

Whereas almost everybody at Woodstock was on drugs, most of the people at the '89 festival would be on diets. Instead of the "freakout tent" for people on bad acid trips, they'd have the "freakout tent" for people who had broken their diets and had eaten real ice cream instead of yogurt. An announcement over the loudspeakers: "The brown yogurt now circulating among us is not specifically too good."

On Sunday morning they'd have to have the "breakfast in bed for 400,000" but this time it would be egg McMuffins and diet Coke, special-ordered from the local McDonald's.

Eventually the music groups would finish and the crowds would wander back to their suburbs, but the youth of our generation would have a symbol to rally around for 20 years or more. Well, maybe.

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