

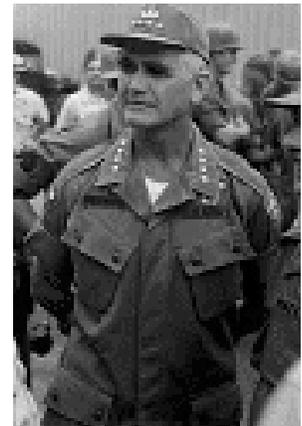
Chapter 11

Was the 'Whole Thing a Lie' or a 'Noble Crusade'

"If Vietnam was such a mistake, how come the leaders of our country, the wisest men we have, the men we elected in free and democratic votes, the men who have all the facts, how come they sent us in?"²⁴

This chapter presents two totally different points of view on the U.S. role in Vietnam. General William Westmoreland, U.S. commander during the escalation of the conflict, presents the 'hawks' side. Westmoreland firmly believed in the cause for which the war was being fought. After retiring from the army he became a spokesperson supporting U.S. actions in Vietnam. He believed the main issue of the war, in John F. Kennedy's words, was "to assure the survival and success of liberty."

Donald Duncan, formerly a master sergeant in the Special Forces, presents the 'dove' position. A once gung-ho member of an elite fighting team, Duncan became increasingly disillusioned by what he saw in Vietnam, eventually concluding that "there was no freedom to preserve in Vietnam . . . only anti-Communism." He turned down a field commission to the rank of Captain and retired from the army in 1965. His was one of the first outspoken criticisms voiced against our Vietnam policy, and it caused quite a stir when it was first published in 1966.



**General
Westmoreland**

General William Westmoreland: A Noble Crusade

History may judge that American aid to South Vietnam constituted one of man's more noble crusades, one that had less to do with the domino theory and a strategic interest for the United States than with the simple equation of a strong nation helping an aspiring nation to reach a point where it had some reasonable chance to achieve and keep a degree of freedom and human dignity. Even though American resolve fell short in the end, it remains a fact that few countries have ever engaged in such idealistic magnanimity and no gain nor attempted gain for human freedom can be discounted.

Sergeant Donald Duncan: The Whole Thing Was a Lie

The whole thing was a lie. We weren't preserving freedom in South Vietnam. There was no freedom to preserve. To voice opposition to the government (in South Vietnam) meant jail or death. Neutralism was forbidden and punished. Newspapers that didn't say the right thing were closed down. People are not even free to leave, and Vietnam is one of those rare countries that don't fill its America visa quota. Its all there to see once the red film is removed from the eyes. We are the Russian tanks blasting the hopes of an Asian Hungary (a European country that the USSR invaded in 1956.)

²⁴ Quoted in Murray Polner, *No More Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veteran*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1971, p. 37.

²⁵ William Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, Doublday, New York, 1980, p. 422

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If only the Communists are to assist people of emerging nations, what hope is there for those who aspired to freedom? We may well be unable to afford to be the world's policemen, but neither can we afford to fail to live up to the responsibilities that the accidents of a wealthy land and generous fate have placed upon us. We tend in this age of cynicism to put down idealism, patriotism, and zeal; but if there are to be no more Vietnams, is there to be no more support of aspiring freedom, or protection of the weak against the strong? What of John F. Kennedy's stirring pledge to "assure the survival of liberty?" As many have observed, the price of freedom is never cheap, nor is even the survival of existing freedom.²⁵

It is not democracy we brought to Vietnam – its anti-Communism. This is the only choice the people of the village have. This is why most of them have embraced the Viet Cong and shunned the alternative [in this case Diem's rule] The people remember that when they were fighting the French for their national independence it was the Americans who helped the French. It's the American anti-Communist bombs that kill their children. It's American anti-Communism that has supported one dictator after another in Saigon. When anti-Communist napalm burns their children it matters little that the anti-Communist Special Forces medic comes to apply bandages.

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Student Exercises:

1. Answer each of the following as completely as you can.
 - a. What do you imagine were the different military experiences of Sergeant Duncan and General Westmoreland?
 - b. – c. What were the major arguments made by General Westmoreland?
 - d. – e. . What were the major arguments made by Sergeant Duncan?
 - f. Review other information you have about Vietnam and come to class prepared to share it.

2. Do you think that Vietnam was "a lie from the beginning," "a noble crusade," or "a well-intentioned mistake." Briefly explain your argument, and cite examples from what you have studied in this unit.

3. If your teacher directs, expand your argument into a major essay of about 600 words. Your essay should cover three of the following topics:
 - A. **The reasons the U.S. became involved in the war:**
Did the U.S. have good reasons for getting involved?
 - B. **Comparison of the two sides:**
Did the U.S. make the right decision in supporting the South Vietnamese government?
 - C. **The means the U.S. used to fight the war:**
Did the U.S. use the best available methods?
 - D. **The outcome of the war:**
What is the final lesson can be learned from or outcome?

Your essay should contain:

- a. A thesis statement, an outline foreshadowing your major argument) (about 50 words)
- b. A main body which develops your arguments with a strong connective tissue of facts and logic (about 450 words) covering at least three of the suggested topics.

26 Donald Duncan, "The Whole Thing Was a Lie," Ramparts, February, 1966, pp. 23-24.

c. A major summary which restates your position, and (if you wish) a conclusion which states the lessons the U.S. should have learned from the war (about 100 words.)

Extra Credit: Comparisons with Iraq

Use your knowledge of what you learned about Vietnam and what you know about the war in Iraq to answer one or both of the following questions:

What would Sergeant Duncan and General Westmoreland most likely have to say about the Iraq war?? With whom do you agree, and why? Your answer should point to the major similarities and/or differences between the two wars.

Come to class with an essay of not fewer than 150 words to support your views and be prepared to present them, listen to those who disagree and either defend or change your opinion.