

The making of a quagmire: book review essay sample

[Countries](#), [Vietnam](#)



David Halberstam was a reporter assigned to the Vietnam conflict during 1962 and 1963. After graduating from Harvard University, David Halberstam went on to work for various newspapers. He went to work for the New York Times Washington bureau in 1960. In the fall of 1962, Halberstam was assigned to the Vietnam conflict. David Halberstam's book is an attempt to put into retrospect the portrait of the American experience in Vietnam, to capture the details of the Diem period, and the errors made that shaped American foreign policy until the collapse of South Vietnam.

Vietnam had been a troubled land generations before the conflict between North and South Vietnam escalated. The French occupied and colonized Vietnam causing a major revolution to free then Indochina, and take back the land they had owned before the French had taken it. Years after the Indochina War and Vietnam gained independence from France, Communism began to rise in the North, and the Ngo family in the South was ruling like a dictatorship. These differences became means for a conflict. Relations between the press and the Government were rocky. The Ngo family had reporters fired for what they thought were offensive articles.

Even the relations between the American military and the American press had become a dichotomy. The dichotomy was around during the Indochina war and continued throughout the conflict. The alliance between South Vietnam and America was strange in the fact that the virtually the South wanted the same as the North, control of all of Vietnam. America's involvement was to stop communism while the Diem regime wanted to concur all of Vietnam. American's had taught the Vietnamese to fight the

war conventionally and neglected to teach guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare. Little things like this caused big trouble in the Delta.

America in the delta was fighting two battles, one against the Vietcong, but also the ARVN. One of the biggest problems here was the lack of care by the ARVN to the recommendations of the American government. The Government fought the war only during the day and calling off missions at night. This gave the enemy a chance to regroup and to completely evacuate an area. Americans would trap the Vietcong in the tree lines and the Government would turn their troops. The South Vietnamese army did not care what suggestions the Americans had, they just wanted to use the American forces for supplies and more numbers.

Americans also made themselves out to be the enemy when they would go into villages to find the Vietcong. Civilian peasants listened to communist propaganda, using America's actions against them and calling the Americans badly. Americans and the South Vietnamese would kill people who would run from them, its pretty obvious the effects it had on the people of the villages. Most of the time when troops would go to the villages to question the people, they would not take any supplies from them, but some soldiers. Did steal supplies such as food. This was one more thing that put the peasants of the village's allies to the Vietcong army. The Vietcong had the aid of the peasants, and it gave them enough cover up to turn the Government and the Americans in circles. The turning point to the war in the Delta was the battle of Ap Bac. If the Government would of listened to the suggestions of the American's, the battle would have been theirs to take. When the Americans

wanted to continue to attack, the Government would pull back. These actions along with the telegraphing of what the Government planned to do with their troops lost the battle of Ap Bac.

The Buddhist crisis became the turning point and fall of the Diem regime. It all started with a conflict between the Buddhists and the Catholics of the Ngo family. Masses of protests and demonstrations took place to try to stop the prosecution of the Buddhist believers. The crisis was an inner religious conflict between the two religious groups that did nothing but divide the Southern region once again. Along with this and the all around abuse of the buddihists of the regime caused it to fall.

When Halberstam returned to Vietnam in late 1967, the illusion that had once dominated the land of optimism was apparently gone. He begins to realize that winning the war was slipping through our hands. Halberstam did see that winning the war was not out of reach when the Vietnamese would fight to the tactics that the American's wanted them to use, but there was pressure in the states to bring home American troops. He saw the narrow victories we had there, but also the problems that existed between our military and Washington. There were half a million troops placed in Vietnam, American officials wanted more. Bombing raids were scheduled, but American officials wanted more. Something had to give. Winning was slipping through our hands and David Halberstam saw it and believed that.

This book brought about one question for me. Why we were there? The Southern government did not want our help, they did not care what we had

to say, and they did not care about our tactics. With the cold war, raging I feel the whole reason we ever went to Vietnam was to stop the spread of communism, not to influence a democracy in the newly freed Indochina. Until I read this book, I did not realize what all went on during the Vietnam War. With cooperation, the war was a very winnable. I see the value in this book as a source of information and a documentation of the struggles our troops had to deal with while trying to stop communism. It does a wonderful job telling the frank truth the battles our troops faced not only with the Vietcong, but also with the Diem regime.