A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam Study Guide

A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam by Neil Sheehan

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

A Bright Shining Lie was part biography of John Paul Vann, part history lesson of the Vietnam War, and part personal memoir for Neil Sheehan. The book began at the funeral of John Paul Vann, a former Army lieutenant colonel who served in both Korea and Vietnam before his retirement in 1963. At the funeral, the reader was introduced to many of Vann's contemporaries, including some important political figures of the time the reader was sure to recognize.

The next part of the book, Going to War, covers the first year Vann served in Vietnam. Vann was an American advisor assigned to a Southern Vietnamese regiment. He spent this first year organizing and planning many assaults on the Viet Cong, fighting alongside Vietnamese soldiers in each assault. During this time, Vann saw many things that caused him great concern. Vann was concerned that the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, was afraid to go into battle and risk creating casualties. Van also discovered many incidents of torture and murder that were unjustified and bombings of civilian homes that were unwarranted. Vann took his concerns to his superiors and was not heard.

The third part of the book, Antecedents to a Confrontation, took the reader into the past and explained the reasons for the conflict in Vietnam. In this section, Sheehan told the reader who Ho Chi Minh and Diem were and why they both were on the paths they traveled during the Vietnam War. He also told the reader about the war between the French and the Vietnamese and how the Americans got involved in the fight.

The next section, The Battle of Ap Bac, told of one of the first major battles of the conflict that Americans were involved in. Ap Bac was a small hamlet near a Viet Cong base. Vann and his 7th Division were sent there to capture a radio tower the Viet Cong had set up. This battle went wrong from the very first moment and continued to go wrong throughout that day and the next. Vann became so incensed by the actions of his Vietnamese counterpart that he pulled a few reporters aside, including the author of this book, and told them about the many mistakes that had been made.

In Taking on the System, Vann found himself transferred to the Pentagon after his tour of duty in Vietnam. There Vann took it upon himself to brief anyone he could on the things he had seen in Vietnam and his views on how the war could best be won. Vann was prevented from briefing the Joint Chiefs by a general on the council who did not like Vann's views. Vann would retire from the Army later that year.

Antecedents to the Man dealt with Vann's life before he arrived in Vietnam. Vann was a child of the Depression, born to a self-centered woman who often neglected and emotionally abused her children. Vann was saved from this life by a kindly Methodist minister who arranged for him to go to a boarding school. Later Vann joined the Army Air Corps with hoping to become a pilot. During his training, he met his wife. From there, Vann enjoyed a busy and satisfying career in the Army that eventually led to his time in Vietnam.

The next section, A Second Time Around, covered Vann's return to Vietnam as a civilian working with the pacification group AID, or Agency for International Development. Vann did not do well in civilian life and could not let go of his opinions regarding Vietnam. Once back in Vietnam, Vann did all he could to rise in the ranks of AID and put himself in a position to take command of a battalion, the one thing he had always wanted.

Finally, John Vann Stays told how Vann found his desires fulfilled. Months before his death, he was given a position of command over II Corps through his civilian agency. Vann fought his final battles with his notable grace and daring. Despite destruction in his personal life, Vann finally had everything he had wanted in his professional life. However, he slowly realized that the Americans had lost the war in Vietnam.

"The Funeral"

"The Funeral" Summary

A Bright Shining Lie opened with the funeral of John Paul Vann on June 16, 1972. Outside the chapel at Arlington, six gray horses were hitched to a caisson that would carry the coffin to the grave. Vann was a war hero who died in Vietnam several years after retiring from the Army. Vann believed that he knew how to win the war in Vietnam and was determined to do so for the people of South Vietnam. However, his supervisors did not appreciate Vann's zealous approach to attaining their attention, and he was forced to retire. Retirement did not keep Vann from the strategies and the fight he believed in so deeply. For the next seven years, Vann rose in the hierarchy of this company until he found himself in a position to advise generals in both the American and South Vietnamese Armies. Vann was eventually given authority over all U.S. military forces in the provinces on the Central Coast, the equivalence of a major general in the American Army, a role that had never before been given to a civilian. In this capacity, Vann found himself in the circumstances that would eventually lead to his death.

Vann had many enemies and many friends. Both attended his funeral. Major General Edward Lansdale, retired four years and a widower, once had been a legendary covert operative of the CIA. Lansdale had been in Vietnam eight years before Vann, and his work convinced the "Eisenhower administration that South Vietnam could be built into a nation that could stand with America." With Lansdale was Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein, a member of the team Lansdale formed to help preside over the creation of South Vietnam in the late fifties. Conein was best known for setting up a coup to overthrow Ngo Dinh Diem, the leader of South Vietnam who had gotten in the way of the Kennedy administration's attempts to suppress the communist-led rebellions.

Also in attendance was Joseph Alsop, a journalist of high regard in Washington. Alsop was the grandnephew of Theodore Roosevelt and a friend so highly thought of by John Kennedy that Kennedy stopped by Alsop's house the night of his inauguration in 1961. Next to Alsop was Lieutenant General William DePuy. A veteran of World War II, DePuy was the chief of operations in Vietnam under Westmorland. DePuy was ruthless in his warfare design, and Vann considered his strategies needless and contemptuous.

Senator Edward Kennedy attended the funeral as well. Kennedy and Vann were in agreement about the war in Vietnam. Kennedy was a strong advocate for humane conditions in the refugee camps, adequate hospitals, and an end to indiscriminate bombings, as was Vann. Kennedy and Vann corresponded, and Vann passed him information to help wield more influence on Washington.

Daniel Ellsberg, a traitor to many in the chapel, sat in the row behind Vann's family in a place of respect that many did not believe he deserved. Ellsberg was a soldier in Vietnam, a Marine commander who volunteered to fight. During his time in Vietnam,

Ellsberg became disillusioned by the war of attrition, as Westmorland called it, describing the tactics of indiscriminate bombings that often left innocent Vietnamese people dead or homeless. Back home, Ellsberg tried to raise awareness of the atrocities of the war, but he found no success. After the Tet Offensive, a surprise attack by North Vietnam that proved the North was not as weak as Westmorland had predicted, Ellsberg became very disheartened. In the fall of 1969, he began secretly copying the top-secret Pentagon Papers archive on Vietnam and threatened to expose the Pentagon Papers to the world through letters sent to several press organizations around the country. In 1971, they were published by the *New York Times*.

Mary Jane Vann, John Paul Vann's ex-wife, was seated in front of Ellsworth. Mary Jane had asked Ellsworth to sit where he did, with her twenty-one year old son Jesse, who had suffered the most from his father's constant absence. Mary Jane was a wide-eyed innocent when she married John Paul Vann twenty-six years before. She had dreams of a bright future, a Christmas card family. What she got was not what she had imagined. Her husband was a career soldier and an absentee father, leaving her to raise five children. Mary Jane divorced Vann several months before his death, but she still felt as though she were his wife. The divorce was an act of frustration, a plea for attention that did not have the desired effect. As she waited for the funeral to begin, Mary Jane remembered the last time John had come home. It had been Christmas. Ironically, that was the time when she had always wanted him home most.

The service began, and the coffin was brought in on a rolled cart with the eight official pallbearers behind it. Two of the pallbearers were from AID, and another was a South Vietnamese army colonel who was there as a representative of his county. A third pallbearer was General William Westmorland. Now chief of staff of the Army, Westmorland was the top commander of the American forces in Vietnam until he was reassigned after the shameful debacle of the Tet Offensive. Beside him was General Bruce Palmer Jr., his vice chief of staff. Palmer also commanded in Vietnam under Westmorland.

Also serving as a pallbearer was deputy chief of staff for military operations Lieutenant General Richard Stillwell. Stillwell had been chief of operations for General Paul Harkins, Westmorland's predecessor in Saigon. During Vann's short time at the pentagon after being reassigned out of Vietnam, Stillwell tried to rebut Vann's arguments about Vietnam. Behind Westmorland was a civilian, William Colby of the CIA. Colby fought in Vietnam for twelve years, supervising the first counter-guerrilla programs in the south. He also resumed covert warfare against the north that had been allowed to lapse after Lansdale's departure. In 1968, Colby became Vann's superior, a situation that worked well since Vann enjoyed the limelight and Colby did not.

The final pallbearer was Robert Komer, a former CIA officer who helped Colby set up the Phoenix Program to kill, jail or intimidate into surrender the members of the communist-led government the guerrillas had established in the rural areas of the south. Komer planned to give the eulogy. Also present were William Rogers, the secretary of state, and Melvin Laird, the secretary of defense.

Komer stood to give his eulogy. His speech began with an announcement of Vann's great courage and spirit and continued with a politically laced statement on Vann's criticism of the way America was running the war in Vietnam. Komer stated that those in charge should have listened to Vann. Komer continued with an accounting of Vann's fearless nature and his natural ability to lead. Komer acknowledged that although Vann did not die a soldier in the American forces, he was a soldier in his heart and to all those around him. Komer ended by saying that Vann was a unique person and would never be forgotten.

The chaplain concluded the service, and Vann's casket was escorted to the caisson. The band escorted the casket and played "The Colonel Bogie March" from the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* a favorite of Vann's that his wife had requested. The family followed in limousines provided by an armaments and aerospace firm Vann had briefly worked for between his retirement and his return to Vietnam. The rest of those in attendance chose to walk to the gravesite.

The family drove through the cemetery at Arlington, past the monuments to the Spanish-American War and another to the RoughRiders. Vann's final resting-place was in a grove of maple trees that overlooked the Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. When they arrived, the band, as requested by Mary Jane Vann, began to play "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," a song that had become known as a Vietnam protest song. This was Mary Jane's way of announcing to everyone how she felt about the war that took her husband from her.

Peter, the youngest of the five Vann children, received the flag during the ceremony at his father's gravesite. His mother honored his request to receive the flag because he was the one who knew his father the least. John Allen, the oldest of the Vann children, refused to stand when the ceremony concluded, aware that this action would cause the rest of his family to remain sitting. The dignitaries who wanted to express their sympathies needed to stoop in order to do so. Ellsberg remained close to the family, standing to the right of the grave so that the pallbearers would have to pass him as they shook hands with the family. Ellsberg, however, did not stop to enjoy this moment of contempt. He was lost in thought over his friend Vann.

Jesse, the second oldest child, was very angry with his father. Recently, Jesse had received a draft card in the mail that had been changed from the 1-Y status, temporarily unfit for duty, to 4-F, permanently unfit for duty. Jesse took the card from his pocket and tore it in two. He took one half, concealed it in the leaves of a rose and left it on top of his father's casket. The other half, Jesse intended to hand to Richard Nixon when the family met him at the White House later that afternoon for a ceremony in which his father would be award the Presidential Metal of Freedom.

In the limo on the way to the White House, Jesse told Tommy, the second youngest brother, what he intended to do. Tommy in turn told Peter. Finally, John Allen learned of the plan and was upset by it. Protesting the war and disagreeing with the politics of war was one thing, but ruining this day for their father was another. John Allen and his uncles, Eugene and Frank, asked Jesse repeatedly not go through with his plan. John

Allen then enlisted their mother, Mary Jane, to try to dissuade Jesse. Mary Jane's tears almost talked Jesse out of it, but John Allen and Uncle Gene's anger only inflamed Jesse's own anger.

John Allen told Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, a White House staffer whose job was to preside over ceremonies such as this one, what was going on with Jesse. Scowcroft immediately told President Nixon that there would be a delay while he worked this problem out. Then, Scowcroft told Jesse that if he planned to give Nixon his draft card, they would have to cancel the ceremony. Jesse finally relented.

Mary Jane Vann and her five children were escorted into the Oval Office along with John Paul Vann's brother Eugene, his brother Frank, his sister Dorothy Lee, Rogers, Laird and Alsop. Nixon posed for pictures with the family and shook everyone's hands, whispering a special thanks to Jesse for not pulling his prank with the draft card. Then, Nixon made a quiet speech to the family about Vann's heroism, mentioning not once but twice that he would have given Vann the Congressional Medal of Honor, except that Vann was not a soldier at the time of his death.

The family was not terribly impressed with Nixon. It seemed to them from the makeup the president wore and the insincerity of his remarks that this was simply a photo opportunity for him. Mary Jane was doubly offended since she was not allowed to accept the medal on John Paul's behalf because she was not his legal wife at the time of his death. Instead, the award was handed to John Allen. Mary Jane felt pushed aside during the entire ceremony. Under her breath, she told John Paul what a shame it was, just as she had told him she loved him at the cemetery.

"The Funeral" Analysis

This first section of the book describes a humbling and extremely personal moment in a family's life. The funeral took place in one of the most sacred of American landmarks, beginning the story of John Paul Vann with the distinct aura of deep-seated patriotism. The cemetery at Arlington was one of the most recognized symbols of patriotism in America. The author gave the impression that John Paul Vann was an American hero, alluding to one of the many themes of the book. Not only was Vann buried in the most highly regarded resting place, but many political and military elite were also in attendance at his funeral. Again, the author pointed out to the reader just how patriotic and important his subject was.

The book began at the end of Vann's life. His story was complete and was held in the memories of those attending the funeral. In the descriptions of the mourners, the author set up the cast of his drama, adding an element of foreshadowing to this first section. There are a lot of hints as to where this story will go and who will play a major part in each tangent the story may stretch into. In Westmorland's remarks, the reader learned more of the man John Paul Vann must have been. The introduction of Vann's family and the desperation that led his wife, Mary Jane, to divorce him to get his attention, revealed

even more of the obsession that had John Paul Vann in its grips. This first section of the biography makes a lot of promises the reader hopes to see fulfilled.

Book 1, "Going to War"

Book 1, "Going to War" Summary

Vann almost did not go to Vietnam. When he arrived at the airport for his flight, he found that, in his excitement, he had forgotten to make sure his passport was up to date. Vann was pulled from his scheduled flight and placed on a later flight. The flight he was supposed to be on disappeared over the Pacific.

John Paul Vann was a cocky man, one it was impossible to keep down. At least, that was what his commanding officer thought the moment he met him. Colonel Daniel Boone Porter was looking for a new senior advisor to the 7th Infantry Division in the northern Mekong River Delta. Vann was low on his list, but the soldier made a strong impression on Porter. Porter liked that Vann was organized, well educated and a fighter. Porter informed Vann that he should consider himself the new senior advisor. However, since the current advisor was not due to leave for several months, Porter wanted Vann to stick around headquarters and do odd jobs. The first odd job Porter asked Vann to do was to figure out a way for the G-4 logistics officer to send supply requests to a computer system the last commander had set up. Rather than the solution Porter expected, Vann wrote a memo outlining the concept of the system and a practical method to use the system for the Vietnamese G-4 officers and their advisors. Vann completed this task in half the time Porter expected.

Over the next few months, Porter put Vann to work, acquainting him with the country and the North Vietnamese style of combat. Vann drove all around the countryside, went on assault missions in helicopters and explored the rice lands of the Mekong Delta. Finally in May, Vann shook Porter's hand and left in a jeep to his new command. On the drive, Vann realized how easily the Viet Cong could use the landscape to attack a lone officer in a jeep. There were many rice paddies and fruit trees and farms to use as protective cover.

Vann arrived at the headquarters of the 7th Division Advisory Detachment. It was in an old seminary the Army was renting from a local church in need of funds. Since the Army had moved into the seminary, the Viet Cong, short for Vietnamese communists, had taken several shots at the generators and the water purification system. It was generally accepted that a small band of Viet Cong could overrun the seminary if they wanted to. The division stationed there did not have enough men to provide guards at night, and the territorial troops, called Civil Guards, took a casual attitude toward the American advisors. It was also clear, however, that the Viet Cong were not interested in shooting the advisors as they slept, so no one chose to worry about it.

Vann took over command of the 7th Division two days after his arrival, a month sooner than expected, when the man he was to replace, Lt. Col. Frank Clay, participated in an attempt to drive a platoon of fleeing guerrillas back toward Saigon and his helicopter was shot down. Though not seriously injured, he was flown to Saigon for treatment and

took leave thereafter. When Vann took official command at end of the month, there was no ceremony. The Americans were in Vietnam at this time, in 1962, only to advise the South Vietnamese people on how to fight their war with the north. There were no ceremonies and no medals awarded, and the advisors were forbidden to fly the American Flag above their compounds.

Before Vann left Saigon, Porter gave him several goals. The first was to develop offensive operations that would stop the main striking forces of the guerrillas. The current plan involved an operation called "the sweep," which consisted of marching several battalions across the countryside to clear it of guerrillas. However, it was not proving effective, so Porter wanted Vann to incorporate helicopters. Vann's counterpart was a Colonel named Huynh Van Cao. To initiate this plan, Vann was instructed to work with Cao in planning operations under a program called "joint planning." In this unconventional operation, Vann was to persuade Cao to accept American control in planning these operations. The operation in which Clay was injured flushed out more than a hundred Viet Cong and, more importantly, led to the confiscation of many weapons. This success made Cao much more willing to work with the Americans.

Vann began choosing his staff members almost immediately after he gained control. His first choice was Captain Richard Ziegler, who proved invaluable in planning the successful May attack. Vann teamed Ziegler up with Cao's G-3, or operations, officer. Second, Vann chose Major Elmer 'Sandy' Faust as his chief of staff to supervise Ziegler and the younger staff advisors. Faust's counterpart was Lt. Col. Bui Dinh Dam, Cao's chief of staff. Similarly, Cao agreed to team up other members of his staff to those of Vann's staff.

Cao had a small house in the village outside of the seminary. Since he had no need for most of its rooms, he turned the excess into war rooms. Vann suggested they have a weekly staff meeting there when they were not out in the field. This was agreeable to Cao since the man liked to think of himself as a general, and Vann allowed him to run the meetings and feel as though he were in charge. Outside the meetings, however, Vann and Ziegler were running the show.

Vann saw a need for better training. The Vietnamese Army was divided in two parts. The ARVN, Army of the Republic of Vietnam, were trained well enough if there had been no war. The territorial troops were not trained as well as the ARVN soldiers. Vann decided to remedy this lack by laying out a three-week refresher course. To measure progress, he created specific training and operation goals for every battalion and every territorial that would require a critique from the advisors to his Vietnamese counterpart.

The second part of the goals Porter and Vann outlined involved the movement of Viet Cong guerrillas at night. Cao did not want his troops on patrol at night because it was dangerous. Therefore, Vann issued an order requiring all American officers and sergeants to go out on patrol at least one night a week. Vann himself also participated. Since the American advisors could not go out on their own, this forced their Vietnamese counterparts to accompany them. Cao finally agreed. During this time, Vann discovered the South Vietnamese soldiers were afraid of the guerrillas and would make noises to

alert them, and so the patrols rarely ran into guerrillas. Vann's superiors found this information valuable.

Vann was an enthusiastic leader, often goading his soldiers into games of volleyball after long nights on patrol. The war was still a novelty in 1962, still a bit of fun for those soldiers who had been at war before and something to use to prove themselves for those who had not. Vann's attitude only increased the sense of excitement those around him felt. Vann would play practical jokes on visitors from Saigon, taking them on wild rides through the local villages, scaring some and making friends with others. This was simply Vann's way to be a daredevil, to explore the surrounding countryside alone despite the chance of snipers and guerrilla ambushes, and Vann's defiance of danger was greatly admired by his subordinates.

Vann found a friend in Major Herbert Prevost. Prevost was an Air Force officer attached to the 7th Division. He was a soldier who believed in a personal war. Prevost preferred small aircraft to large bombers. Like Vann, Prevost seemed to have been born under a lucky star. He once flew over an unexpected pack of German tanks. His wingman was downed, and his plane was shot so many times that the mechanics junked it when he returned to base. However, the German's surprise was ruined and five of German tanks were burned.

Prevost was a daring man who had seemed to settle down in Vietnam until he fitted his L-19 observation plane with Armalite riffles of M-16s. Prevost would often toss grenades out the windows of his plane as he flew over guerrilla outposts. On a few occasions, he would throw twenty-pound anti-personnel bombs out the windows. Prevost also had a habit of not flying above 1,500 feet.

In the first few months Vann was in My Tho, he concentrated on the main focus of his assignment, which was the destruction of the main striking forces of the Viet Cong. Vann believed that if they could decimate the small number of Viet Cong's Main Force and Regional guerrillas with helicopter and ground assaults, they could turn the tide of the war against the Viet Cong. It was his belief that the peasants were not political and did not have an opinion on which side should win. Vann was wrong. Many of the peasants were fighting with the guerrillas because of their displeasure with the new Republic of Vietnam's leadership. To counteract this problem, Vann turned to his intelligence officer, Jim Drummond. Drummond was extremely talented in finding intelligence that would help Vann find pockets of resistance and guerrilla activity. Vann also employed the help of the American Protestant missionary who lived in My Tho.

The guerrillas often hid in the terrain of their country, making them very difficult to locate. In 1962, the U.S. Army Security Agency came to South Vietnam to track the Viet Cong electronically under the innocent-sounding name of the 3rd Radio Research Unit. They used specially built planes to pick up Viet Cong radio signals in suspected areas of activity. These sources of intelligence helped Vann plan aerial assaults. The largest and most famous assault was the Plain of Reeds. Helicopters were a great success in the early years of fighting in Vietnam because the Viet Cong were not prepared to fight them.

Cao was happy with Vann's success with intelligence and air power. Cao was a competent soldier who thought more highly of himself than most other people did. Cao liked to behave like a general and liked to believe he was responsible for his new success, although Vann's planning was really responsible. Cao came to Diem's notice when he was on the staff of a battalion that took Diem's side during his rise to power. Diem put Cao in charge of a low division and sent him to the United States to complete a series of courses in Kansas before putting him in charge of the 7th. Cao supposedly took his orders from a brigadier general, but he actually took them directly from Diem, whom he called his king.

Vann felt Cao was taking his advice well despite Cao's character flaws. Vann manipulated Cao into doing everything he wanted and allowed Cao to take credit for the successes on the battlefield. Things would soon change, however. In July, Drummond told Vann of a group of Viet Cong who survived the Plain of Reeds attack and who were holed up close to the Cambodian border. Vann organized an assault. Cao agreed that as soon as Vann flushed the guerrillas out, he would provide reserves to wipe them out. Vann took the scared Vietnamese troops in several helicopters to a small hamlet where the guerrillas were thought to be, but all they found were women and children. Vann sent several helicopters full of troops to search some nearby hamlets. The guerrillas watched these searches from their hiding places, unafraid that they would be caught. However, Vann spread his search wide enough that the guerrillas fell into his net. The fight went well for Vann and his soldiers.

The tide began to turn, however. Vann checked on the first reserve group he'd sent out and discovered they had been ordered to stay put, despite the fact that this delay could allow the guerrillas to make a run for the border. Vann tried to goad the captain into moving, but the captain refused to budge. Vann asked Cao to force his men into action, and Cao refused. Vann eventually got Cao to move his first reserve south, but it was three hours after they had landed. They eventually captured a few guerrillas and some weapons. However, the next day Vann discovered that had they gone forward as he had wanted, they would have captured one of the most important training facilities the Viet Cong had in the area.

Diem later gave Cao a parade in recognition of what he had done that day, despite the mistakes Vann believed Cao had made. Vann wrote a candid report regarding the situation to his superiors. Vann was extremely concerned about the ARVN's unwillingness to fight. Despite his reservations, however, Vann continued to work with Cao. During August and September, Vann and Cao had several victories, including one at the end of September that resulted in the biggest kill of the entire war.

Vann became one of the favored advisors of his commander, General Harkin. Harkin often sent correspondents and visiting diplomats to visit with Vann and his 7th Division. Cao also became a newshound, enjoying the publicity their successful campaigns brought. Cao continued to be reserved about sending his soldiers anywhere near a battle that might result in casualties, an attitude that caused a great deal of tension between him and Vann. Cao also backed away from Vann's training plans, no longer requiring his soldiers to go through the refresher courses.

When Maxwell Taylor, the new chairman to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, came to Vietnam and Vann was invited to speak to him, he thought this would be a great opportunity for him to discuss with Taylor the problems he had been having with Cao and the ARVN. Vann intended to tell Taylor that the ARVN's use of an outpost system was outdated and dangerous. Vann also wanted to point out that even though they were doing well in their fight against the Viet Cong, they were not confiscating enough weapons to slow the guerrillas down. He was also concerned that the ARVN were needlessly targeting peasants. Many times, the ARVN would attack small hamlets that they thought were harboring guerrillas, and it would often turn out that the guerrillas had only passed by days or weeks before.

Vann also discovered during this time that some of the Ranger companies under Cao's command were torturing and killing people without good cause. At one point, Vann witnessed a Ranger commander slice the throat of several suspected Viet Cong simply because they were not answering his questions quickly enough. Moments after this atrocity, Vann attempted to carry a wounded Viet Cong to a helicopter and was knocked over by the force of the helicopter blades. The man then picked up Vann and helped him into the helicopter before climbing inside himself. Vann later confronted Cao and suggested he force the men to stop these cruel acts. Cao only told his men not to do these things in front of the Americans. Most of the torture and killings did not stop.

Vann was also aware that Harkins was not doing anything to stop the killing of innocents. On many occasions, ARVN leaders pointed out places on a map where guerrillas were either hiding or manufacturing weapons. Vann knew for a fact that there were innocents in these areas. In most cases, the weapons factories were homes indistinguishable from the other homes in the hamlets. More than likely, the factories would be abandoned by the time an air raid could be organized. Vann repeatedly pointed this out to Harkins along with Porter, but Harkins routinely ordered the air strikes anyway.

Vann went to Taylor and tried to tell him all these concerns. Harkins was also in attendance, and he interrupted Vann repeatedly so that he was unable to express all his concerns. Vann was deeply discouraged by this. He believed that if Taylor had really wanted to hear his concerns, he would have quieted Harkins. It was Vann's belief that he had only been invited to this meeting as a bit of demonstration during a dog and pony show.

Things took a turn for the worse for Vann and Cao in October. During two separate operations, Cao and Vann suffered many casualties. The first was an attack on a Ranger company. The soldiers landed untouched near several flooded rice paddies outside a suspicious hamlet. They were immediately fired upon by a hidden group of guerrillas. Reinforcements were sent in, and two of the three helicopters were shot down, including the one Vann rode in. In all, about forty Rangers were killed. Several days later, a Ranger company ran into a company of guerrillas from a Main Force battalion and lost eighteen men.

Cao was called to Diem's office a few days later. Diem himself told Cao that if he wanted to be promoted to general, he would be careful not to suffer any more loses. Diem believed that the large number of South Vietnamese casualties had caused an abortive coup d'etat in November 1960, and therefore he believed that they should avoid casualties as much as possible. That was the end of Vann's joint planning. Cao began to plan his own operations, showing them to Vann only after they were completed. These missions, it seemed, were based on bad or old intelligence and often entailed hitting innocent peasants instead of actual guerrillas. Diem and Cao had good arguments prepared for anyone who did not agree with their philosophy. There was not much the Americans could do.

Book 1, "Going to War" Analysis

Vann was a gung ho soldier who walked into Porter's office on that first day ready to do all he could to help spread the American belief system as he saw it and win a war. Again, this attitude carries the seed of Vann's patriotism. Vann was a deeply patriotic man who believed that the only way to live a good and happy life was the American way. Vann was also a soldier to the core of his being, well educated in the ways of war and eager to begin. Vann was a good leader and enthusiastic in his command. He worked, and played, just as hard as his men. The author stresses Vann's competence, and his ability to achieve military goals.

Cao was Vann's counterpart, and the two soldiers could not show greater contrast. Cao's ego was bigger than the rank he'd been granted by his "king." He wanted to be a successful commander, but he obviously was not clear on what that meant. While Cao was concerned with limiting casualties among his soldiers while appearing to win battles, Vann was concerned with winning military objectives as efficiently and humanely as possible. Vann guided Cao well in the beginning, when their goals aligned. Both wanted to gain victories, and the match seemed to work well. However, Vann began to question the ARVN soldiers' fear of battle and Cao's reluctance to send men out at night in search of Viet Cong soldiers. This conflict between Cao and Vann was the beginning of greater conflict to come, a conflict that would overshadow the conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese government seemed grateful to have American advisors there at first. However, over time, Cao took less and less of the Americans' advice. The atrocities that Vann and his men witnessed must have made him wonder what kind of people he was trying to help. In all of his patriotism, he did not understand why these people were unwilling to fight, why they would not go out on night patrols and why they indulged in torture and murder so freely. It should be clear to the reader that Vann did not understand these people he had come to help. This again foreshadows the struggle still ahead for Vann. When he became aware of the innocent peasants who were being bombed for no good military reasons, Vann became deeply concerned about the military wisdom of the ARVN. However, Vann never doubted that he could help these people. There was a lot of foreshadowing in this book, Going to War, that should tip the reader off to the coming struggles of Vann and the war in Vietnam.

Book 2, "Antecedents to a Confrontation"

Book 2, "Antecedents to a Confrontation" Summary

Edward Lansdale was sent to Vietnam in June of 1954. The Vietnamese war for independence from the French had just ended with the French agreement to pull out. Lansdale had just completed a mission in the Philippines, in which he secured the presidency for Magsaysay, an American supported politician. Lansdale's superiors thought his work in the Philippines was a miracle and wanted him to work the same magic in Vietnam. The CIA encouraged Bao Dai, the recognized emperor of Vietnam, to offer Diem the prime ministership from his exile on the Riviera. Diem was the best choice from the Americans' point of view, a good Catholic and a man with impeccable anticommunist credentials. The list had been short.

Lansdale also organized Operation Exodus, a mass evacuation of more than 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Most were anticommunist Catholics who would face persecution if they remained in the north. Lansdale also prevented an overthrow of Diem in favor of Bao Dai in 1954. He began a campaign to crush the remaining French-subsidized armies in two religious sects of the south, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, and the armies of an organized crime society, the Binh Xuyen. Lansdale also brought the Vietnamese National Army over to Deim's side.

Shortly after the war, the French wanted to hold an election in Vietnam. Lansdale prevented the election because the Americans were concerned that the French would turn the entire south over the north, which was what Ho Chi Minh, the leader of communist North Vietnam, wanted. Ho Chi Minh believed his country should be whole and that he should be the governing emperor. Ho refused to acknowledge Bao Dai's government, including Diem and the American influence. The Americans could not let this happen because they did not want to encourage the spread of communism.

Lansdale made several mistakes, however. He was a victim of his success in the Philippines. Lansdale underestimated how Americanized Filipinos were before he ever began to meddle in their business. The Philippines had been under American control since 1898. There were more Filipino than American heroes in the defense of the Bataan Peninsula. Filipinos were largely Roman Catholic, making the Philippines the only Christian nation in Asia. Filipinos were also more westernized than the Vietnamese. Therefore, when Lansdale went to Vietnam expecting the same formula to work there, he was dead wrong. Diem told Lansdale what he wanted to hear, but he often went behind Lansdale's back and did things his own way despite Lansdale's advice.

Diem did not believe in representative government, nor did he believe in social justice, though he allowed Lansdale to believe that he did. Diem was a reactionary, and his only desire was to create a new family dynasty. Essentially, there was a national revolution

going on in Vietnam, and by choosing to back the French and Diem, America was on the wrong side of the struggle.

In 1946, Ho signed an agreement with the French allowing them to station garrisons in Haiphong, Hanoi and other major towns of the North. In exchange, the French were to allow Ho and his republic a limited amount of freedom. However, the French went back on the deal, and incidents of shooting began to happen almost immediately. The Americans who had been stationed there during the war were quickly shipped out for their own safety, since the French Army had been largely supplied by the United States and it was often difficult to tell the French from the Americans.

Ho was not pleased to see the Americans go. Over time, he had written many letters to the United States government asking for help in fighting off continued colonization by France. However, the United States ignored his requests. At that time, America did not want to get involved with Vietnam, not only because American popular opinion of colonization was not high, but also at the time World War II was just ending. Many Americans associated all Asian people with the Japanese. Involvement with Vietnam was simply not a popular idea during this time period.

Despite the United States' refusal to respond to Ho's requests, Ho listened to President Wilson's Fourteen Points and took each word to heart. Ho appeared at the Paris Peace Conference with a petition outlining his grievances against the French colonist regime and expressed his desire for autonomy. No one would meet with him. It became clear to Ho that Wilson's speech applied only to the people of Eastern Europe who had been under German and Austro-Hungarian domination.

When Truman became president, Ho turned to him again, begging for help not for independence but for autonomy. Again his requests were ignored. Ho also reached out to Britain, China and Russia. None of these countries answered either. In October of 1946, the French had clearly reneged on their agreement by asserting control over customs inspections and the collection of revenues. Ho realized then that he was completely on his own.

The French were not on their own, however. The American government and Truman granted France a $160 million credit to buy vehicles and related equipment. They also provided France with millions of dollars in aid to revive their post war economy, making the colonial war less of burden. The Americans provided weapons, trucks and ships for France's use. About this time, Ho's communist-led government gave the United States yet another excuse not to step in on Ho's behalf.

Ho was a mandarin, a Vietnamese aristocrat. His father had been a Confucian scholar. French colonization corrupted the mandarin class. To remain in French favor, many mandarins went to work in the French government, which caused them to lose their place in the Vietnamese social casts. These mandarins were outcasts, forced to commit crimes against their fellow Vietnamese on a daily basis. Ho's father was a district magistrate who was dismissed for nationalist activity. Ho's family was outcast, impoverished. Ho made his way to France and settled in Paris during World War I. He

joined the French socialist party simply because it was the only French political party that called for independence in the French colonies.

Ho became involved in politics during his time in Paris, taking part in a great debate in 1920 whether to remain with the socialist parties allied under the Second International or to join the Third International. Ho chose the side of the Third International because of their stand on colonization. Within five years, Ho would be in southern China founding a new organization that would be the forerunner of the Vietnamese Communist Party, the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. Word quickly spread of Ho's work in Canton, and young people came to his home there to learn Ho's beliefs. Some thought these teachings were radical, but others liked what they heard.

In 1941, Ho returned to Vietnam after thirty years of exile. World War II was going on, and the Vichy French colonial administration was alienated from the Allies because of an alliance with Japan. Ho knew that this was the time for a revolt. Ho met with a large group of men who agreed to adopt the strategies he advocated. They toned down his proposals for social revolution to help in achieving assistance from non-communist groups and renamed their organization the Vietnamese Independence Brotherhood League or Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi. It would be commonly known as the Viet Minh.

China had invaded Vietnam every year from the year they won their independence in A.D. 938 until the French arrived in the 1850s. The Vietnamese believed that soldiers were men of greatness, while the Chinese believed that intellect was more important than brawn. The Vietnamese also believed that a weaker army could defeat a stronger one if handled properly. The Vietnamese believed in a sort of hit and run battle philosophy, delaying tactics and ambushes. Their peasants were strong, disciplined people, capable of fighting on the battlefields just as easily as they could work their rice fields everyday. This made Vietnamese soldiers formidable enemies.

When Japan began to lose World War II, the French turned on them. The Japanese then turned on the French in Vietnam, removing the central authority over the countryside during the worst famine in Vietnamese history. The French seized all available rice under Japanese orders to burn the rice in the factories or to send it back to Japan, leaving the Vietnamese people starving. The Viet Minh began destroying granaries and distributed the rice to the starving. In this way, the Viet Minh won the support of the northern peasantry.

The Viet Minh began a full-scale revolt against colonization. The emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai, abdicated his crown to Ho in a ceremony in Hue. The Vietnamese got no help from other communist nations until near the end of the war with France in 1949. By 1950, Ho and his Viet Minh had the French pretty much beat, despite training and equipment shortages.

In 1950 when the war ended, communism had become deeply feared in the United States. America became interested in the war in Vietnam, but only because they did not want communism to spread to the countries bordering Vietnam. Bao Dai returned to

Vietnam to resume his role as emperor in 1949 under American sponsorship. When Diem was put in control of the Vietnamese residue of the French colonial system, Diem got rid of Bao Dai.

For the first four years after the war with France, Ho and his government were bogged down with their own problems. They had a devastated countryside that had to be rebuilt, millions of people to feed and industry to create in order to establish a modern nationhood. Ho's people made mistakes in those first few years. One notable mistake was killing of thousands of Catholic peasants who had not fled the North and were singled out for vengeance. Ho later apologized for this mistake. Ho wanted Vietnam to be one whole country rather than the divided one it had become. The United States arranged for the admission of South Vietnam in the United Nations. Ho did not fight this because he needed Soviet support in rebuilding his own section of the country.

Diem was schooled in a French school for colonial administrators in Hanoi and began his career as a district chief. When Diem was governor of a minor province in Central Vietnam, he helped the French crush the first peasant revolts the Communist Party created. He read the Marxist-Leninist doctrines once and thought they were a manifestation of the antichrist. Diem was promoted to minister of the interior to Bao Dai. When Bao Dai pursued amusements Diem did not agree with, Diem resigned.

Diem did not work for the next twenty-one years. He remained on the outskirts of political life all that time, only dabbling here and there when he pleased, until the Americans extracted him in 1954. Once he took the reigns of the country, Diem made his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, counselor to the president. Nhu was in charge of numerous intelligence and police agencies. Nhu also founded the Republican Youth contingent of civil servants he called the Blue Shirts after Hitler's storm troopers, the Brown Shirts. Nhu was a great admirer of Hitler.

Nhu's wife, Madame Nhu, took on a role equivalent to the First Lady in the United States, since Diem was unmarried. She created the Women's Solidarity Movement and used her members in much the same way Nhu did, to spy and police. Madame Nhu was also responsible for a group of laws she called Family Laws that made divorce nearly impossible and a law that rendered illegitimate children born to second wives and concubines.

Lansdale and Diem's other advisor strongly suggested he started a land reform program. Contrary to this advice, Diem returned land that landlords had abandoned and tenants had taken over to the landlords. Diem also seized land belonging to poor peasants and gave that to landlords, often going around his own laws to make sure these landlords got more than twice the land they would otherwise be entitled to. Diem also started a campaign to ferret out northern cadres who had remained in the south. Diem tortured and killed a large number of cadres and imprisoned still more people in concentration camps. There was no real record of how many people were murdered or imprisoned during this time, but it was thought to be in the thousands.

Diem's rule created a peasantry who not only distrusted their leader but disliked him as well. This made the war much harder to fight because there were suddenly more sympathizers with the communist cause than there had been before. All Ho and his followers wanted was to reunite their country and to have independence from foreign interference. Ho and his followers called the southern government My Diem. This literally meant puppet. They believed that Diem was influenced by American interests.

In 1960, Ho created a national front organization in the south, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. This organization was formed so that the communists could work out in the open, without the world knowing they were communists. It also made it possible for those who supported Ho's attempts to unite his country and to gain independence to join the cause without joining the Communist Party. This signaled a change in the Viet Minh, which the Americans derogatorily called the Viet Cong, to a stronger, more powerful adversary. It also announced to the south that they were back and they were not going away any time soon.

In late 1962, Diem reorganized the ARVN command system. Diem split the third corps region into two sections. This established a new IV Corps to cover the Mekong Delta and gave Cao the twin stars of a brigadier general. Diem also added two provinces to the five the 7th Division already had, a large increase in the territory where the 7th worked. Vann saw what was happening. Since Colonel Porter was going home, Vann asked that Colonel Wilbur Wilson, a tough, no-nonsense commander, be Porter's replacement, since Cao's promotion put him on the same level as Porter, and Porter was now his main advisor. Harkin ignored Vann's recommendation and replaced Porter with the more mild-mannered Colonel John Powers Connor.

Book 2, "Antecedents to a Confrontation" Analysis

Vietnam's history was a long and violent one. The writer moves back and forth through Vietnam's history, utilizing numerous flashbacks and non-linear narration. This structural element in Book 2 evokes the non-linear structure of the work as a whole, beginning with Vann's funeral, jumping back in time to Vann's arrival in Vietnam and jumping back still further to the roots of the Vietnamese conflict. This non-linear sensibility will continue throughout the book.

The writer emphasizes points where American advisors went wrong in the very beginning of the Vietnam conflict and how Vann went to the country with wrong ideas and misinformation that would only compound the mistakes already made. Ho, the leader in the north, appears almost sympathetic in this account of events, a man who simply wanted his homeland to have the same freedoms of any other independent nation. Vietnam had been under attack from China since A.D. 938 only to be colonized by the French in the 1850s. The country had never been totally independent, and independence was all Ho wanted. America, however, wanted something different, not because they were concerned with the welfare of the people of this country but because of political pressure from their allies and from their own people. This created a situation where the writer believes America made a mistake and picked the wrong side of a

struggle for independence. America's position in the Vietnam War is still a controversial issue. Be aware that Ho Chi Minh was not only a nationalist, but also a vehement and ruthless one, willing to sacrifice his country's economy and wellbeing in the struggle to reunite it. Again, in this book the author reveals more of the real conflict brewing regarding the Vietnam War, foreshadowing events to come.

Diem, the leader America hand picked for the communist-free south, liked the control France had over his country now that he was in a position to benefit from it. Diem ruled his part of the country with an iron fist, torturing and murdering his own people because he perceived them to be a part of a revolution that would take his power from him. Diem refused to listen to his American advisors. His ego was so big that he rigged an election so that he won with more than 98% of the vote. His advisors, who condoned the illegal votes, advised him to lower that percentage to create a more realistic result. Diem was king in his own eyes, and he believed that he did not have to listen to anyone. He created an atmosphere in his country that was so unpleasant that peasants who might have been on his side were more willing to aid and perhaps even fight for the communists. It was ironic that the Americans chose Diem to run Vietnam when, as the reader looks back on the history of this war, Diem was probably the bigger of two evils to plague this country.

The writer opens up a lot of debate in this section of the biography. The reader may question his or her own beliefs about the Vietnam War and America's position in this conflict. In this way, the reader's experience mirrors the experience of many in America during the 1960s and 1970s, when large numbers of Americans began to question the country's policies in Vietnam. The events to come may deepen this experience.

Book 3, "The Battle of Ap Bac"

Book 3, "The Battle of Ap Bac" Summary

Ap Bac was a small hamlet on the eastern edge of the Plain of Reeds. The hamlet was called Bac, and *ap* is the Vietnamese word for hamlet that was added to the name in the press stories after the battle. Three days after Christmas in 1962, Vann, the 7th Division and Vann's new counterpart, Lieutenant Bui Dinh Dam, Cao's replacement, were ordered to seize a radio transmitter operating near Ap Bac in the hamlet Tan Thoi. The 3rd Radio Research Unit discovered this radio transmitter using their specially designed planes. Vann's intelligence agents also learned that a reinforced company of 120 Viet Minh was guarding the radio transmitter. It would turn out that this intelligence was faulty. The number of guards was much higher, and the area was being used as some sort of headquarters.

The Viet Minh's 261st Main Force Battalion was prepared for the coming battle. They did not know that the Americans and the ARVN knew about the radio transmitter or the precise target of the battle, but they knew that an influx of weapons and supplies had occurred in the few days prior. Viet Minh leaders, in an unusual decision, chose to stand and fight on this occasion to prove to the peasants that the Party's government had come back to stay and that they could provide protection against the Americans and Diem's armies. This decision would fulfill one of Vann's deepest wishes, to fight face to face with the Viet Minh rather than in the hit and miss way they had fought up to this point.

The Viet Minh commanders and their soldiers had been frightened by the success Vann and Cao had the previous year. The use of helicopters had been unexpected to the Viet Minh, who did not have weaponry with which to fight the aircraft. However, the past few months in which Cao had gone out of his way to avoid fighting the Viet Minh had given the Viet Minh time to train their soldiers to use the local terrain to hide in and to ambush the ARVN soldiers. It also had given the Viet Minh time to seize enough American weapons so that most of the men at Ap Tan Thoi were armed with M-1 riffles or Thompson submachine guns.

The area in which the battle would take place was ideal for the Viet Minh. Not only were the rice paddies flooded all year long, but the 261st Main Force Battalion were from the My Tho vicinity. This was their home turf. The peasants in the area were also sympathetic to the communist cause because the French had persecuted many of the peasants in this area during the Resistance War.

The morning of the battle, the commander of the Viet Minh sent his 1st Company to Ap Bac because it would be the most difficult area to defend. There was a creek just south of the hamlet with a line of trees along it. He stationed his platoon in foxholes on the far bank of the creek where they would be difficult to see from both the land and the air. Along the western side of Ap Bac was a dike where trees grew along the top. The

commander stationed more of his battalion here. The commander sent his remaining soldiers along the dikes that edged the three exposed sides of Ap Tan Thoi in similar fashion.

Vann required thirty helicopters to transport his entire ARVN battalion in one move. However, there was another major operation planned for that day, so he was only able to obtain ten. This meant he would have to move his men one company at a time. The first company lifted off and landed safely at 7 am, but the thick fog became thicker still. The pilots refused to fly anymore until the fog began to lift. There was a two and a half hour delay before the other two companies could join the first.

The first company marched south toward the guerrillas hidden in the creek along Ap Bac. The Viet Minh knew they were coming because they had confiscated American radios and could monitor the same frequencies the ARVN were using. The Viet Minh regulars were going to surprise the company from the front, while the district guerrillas moved to a coconut grove to the right and flanked them. The ARVN commander stopped his men about 150 yards away from the regulars and sent scouts up ahead. The Viet Minh allowed them to come within 30 feet, and then began firing. The guerrillas joined in. The commander and his executive officer were killed, and the rest of the company jumped into the dike and fired blindly, some hitting their men still left on the road.

Over the next two hours, the company captain attempted to dislodge the guerrillas with flanking maneuvers. However, either his artillery observer was constantly wrong, or the field command would not allow him to adjust his fire. Every salvo he called for landed behind the guerrillas rather than on the foxholes where they hid. Major Lam Quang Tho, the Dinh Tuong Province chief who was in charge of the provincial forces, did not tell Vann or Dam about the fighting going on until it was nearly over. Nor did he go see what was going on or listen to the American lieutenant with the company when he advised him to change his faulty artillery. Eight soldiers were killed and the captain was injured in the leg before he called Dam and asked him to land the two additional companies to the west of Ap Bac, right behind the guerrilla regulars in the irrigation dike.

Vann was in an observation plane at the time. He flew over Ap Bac to find a suitable landing area and was not happy with what he saw from the first moment. Vann could see that there were guerrillas in the southern tree lines from the bullets they fired on the first company. Vann also thought there might be guerrillas in the western tree line, so he ordered the helicopters to land in a spot three hundred yards from both the southern and western tree lines and gave them a safe route to take to minimize exposure to gunfire. The pilots did not listen and chose to land two hundred yards from the western tree line.

The Viet Minh commander heard the pilots' choice of landing spots over the radio and told his men to shoot down the H-21s, or flying bananas, and the Hueys. The gunfire began before the helicopters landed. The pilot of the second helicopter, an H-21, jumped from his aircraft and attempted to motivate the ARVN lieutenant into returning fire. The lieutenant refused, saying he couldn't understand the American, and jumped

into a dike with his men. Sergeant First Class Arnold Bowers, the pilot, saw a sergeant with another ARVN squad from another helicopter moving toward the south. Bowers went after him with the intention of flanking the guerrillas on the western tree line from the southern tree line to draw fire away from the helicopters. The ARVN sergeant called for Bowers to stop moving and turn back, but Bowers continued on alone.

The Viet Minh had been practicing how to shoot down aircraft. They had learned that firing ahead of the aircraft would make a hit more likely because the aircraft would essentially run into the bullet. They put this idea into practice that day, and they hit most of the helicopters that were there a significant number of times. However, because of the build of the Hueys and the H-21s, all but one of the aircraft could lift off again. The pilot, co-pilot and two enlisted men joined the ARVN in the paddies. The helicopter pilots adhered to a strict code of not leaving anyone behind, so one of the H-21s circled back to retrieve the downed crew. They chose a bad landing spot, however, between the downed copter and the dike. They were also shot out of commission.

A third helicopter went back to retrieve the downed crews of the two helicopters. The Huey escort helicopters returned as well to provide cover fire over the two tree lines. These Hueys took multiple hits until one was hit directly in the main rotor, flipped and crash-landed near the other downed helicopters. Another took so many hits it crash-landed in a field about a mile from the fighting. In five minutes, the Viet Minh who had been so afraid of the flying machines had taken out four helicopters.

Bowers ran back to the crashed Huey to help the crew escape before the main rotor could explode and ignite the fuel tanks. One pilot escaped on his own, so Bowers ran around to the other side and pulled the other pilot out of the wreckage. Bowers returned to the wreckage to retrieve the crew chief, William Deal. However, when he removed Deal's helmet, he discovered the man was dead. Bowers pulled him out of the wreckage anyway and left him in a dry section of the rice paddy. Then, Bowers ran to the second downed H-21. The pilots and one crewman had already escaped the wreckage. Bowers climbed inside and found the other crewman with a wound to his shoulder. He dressed the wound and advised the young man to stay inside the helicopter so that he would not get the dirty water from the paddies in his wound. Then, Bowers went back out of the helicopter and joined the lieutenant and the other ARVN soldiers in their hiding place in the dike. However, it was not a good hiding place. The dike where the Viet Minh hid was high enough that they could see into the other dike and had managed to shoot many of the soldiers hiding there.

Bowers saw that the artillery forward observer with the ARVN company in the dike was not watching to see where the artillery was landing. Bowers attempted to take the radio and call in the directions himself when the artillery forward observer would not listen to his advice, but the lieutenant would not allow him to do that. The company appeared afraid that if Bowers got on the radio with command, they would force the company to move and do something rather than simply waiting there for rescue. Finally, two AD-6 Skyraider fighter planes swooped in and dropped napalm along the tree lines. They did not hit the guerrillas, and instead set on fire the homes behind the guerrillas. The heat was intense just the same, even where the company lay in hiding. Bowers stood to see

if the Viet Cong would run. Several of the men around him stood too, thinking it was all over. Two of the men fell from rifle fire, and the rest dropped down to hide again. The Viet Cong were not moving. Bowers again tried to take the radio and was refused.

Vann watched all this from an observation plane. He called on the M-113s to come in and help the stranded company, but the Vietnamese commander refused. Vann then called Ziegler, and Ziegler managed to convince Dam to command the M-113s to move in. The amphibian vehicles were designed to cross rivers and canals, but on that morning the sides of the canal were too muddy and slick to allow the heavy vehicle to climb. It would take an hour for all the vehicles to cross, and the first vehicle would need to pull the others out with chains. The Vietnamese commander again refused to move. He suggested the infantry go instead.

Vann was livid. Part of Vann's anger was that he had asked Harkin for portable bridges so the M-113 crews would not have to get out and cut trees for the first vehicle to climb the canal banks. Harkin had refused. Another reason was that Vann saw the M-113s as the best chance he had for stopping these guerrillas and saving his downed reserves. Vann also knew it would be useless to send in the infantry because once the battalion commander knew he wanted to use them in a frontal assault on the guerrillas, they too would refuse to act. The commander of the M-113s was hesitant because he was afraid of upsetting Diem and losing his chance to be promoted. He finally allowed his American advisor to take one of the vehicles to attempt to find a better crossing.

Vann had the pilot of his observation plane swing around and check on the first company, the Civil Guard, who had landed at seven that morning. They were no longer under fire, and most of them were napping in their dikes. The lieutenant on the ground with them had attempted to take the radio from the captain to radio his chief and was not allowed. The lieutenant had also attempted to get the captain to take his company through the coconut grove where the district guerrillas were and turn the table on the Viet Cong. However, the captain had been ordered not to move, to stay in a blocking position, by Major Tho, and he refused to move even when Dam ordered him to move.

The second Civil Guard was still marching up from the southwest, searching hamlets along the way, and the infantry was north of Ap Bac. Neither seemed to be in a hurry to reach the battle. Vann was then told that two of the helicopter crewmen had been injured, but he could not get any more information. In a moment of frustration, Vann ordered another of his advisors with the M-113s to shoot the commander and take command himself. Instead, the man suggested they backtrack, cross at a point where they had successfully crossed that morning and make their way from there. The commander agreed.

Vann assumed because of what he had seen from the air that the Viet Cong were withdrawing from the area. Vann noticed that the first Civil Guard was not being fired upon, and the reserves didn't appear to be taking a lot of fire. With this information, he went back to the airport to organize another helicopter rescue for the reserves. Vann decided he would get back in the L-19 observation plane and buzz the treetops to try to draw fire to assess how many Viet Cong remained. If he drew little fire, then three

Hueys would fly in and fire into the west and south tree lines to suppress the fire of any Viet Cong who had remained behind, while a H-21 would land and retrieve the reserves. A second H-21 would fly in the area in case of an unforeseen emergency.

Bowers knew there were still Viet Cong in the western tree line because the crewman in the one of the downed H-21s made a loud noise, and the Viet Cong fired on him. Bowers went to see what the problem was and found a man still in good condition physically but becoming emotional from being alone. Bowers stayed with him for a little while and then left again to stay with the reserves.

Vann flew over the wrecked helicopters and did not take a single shot. Vann naturally assumed this was because the Viet Cong had withdrawn, but in reality they were simply saving ammunition by not firing at a plane they could not hit. The Hueys came in, firing at both the western tree line and the southern one. They should not have wasted their time on the south because those guerrillas did not have a clear shot at the helicopters, and so they were not an issue. An H-21 flew in and landed behind the downed Huey. However, it took so many shots that it immediately took off again, only to land disabled close to where the M-113s were crossing a canal.

Things were not going well with the Viet Cong, either. Their commander had planned to withdraw and retreat after they downed the four helicopters, but the ARVN infantry marched into Ap Tan Thoi and cut off their escape route. The commander decided they must stay and fight until they could escape under the cover of darkness. The platoon of guerrilla regulars on the far side of the stream on the south end of Bac heard there was another Civil Guard headed their way and asked to retreat. The commander ordered them to move to the irrigation dike on the bottom end. The guerrillas were not careful when they began to move and were spotted by an observation plane. The VNAF sprayed them with bombs, not killing any but dispersing them. Many of the guerrillas ran away and would not return, leaving the southern flank of Bac exposed with the M-113s on their way. The commander in Bac asked for reinforcements from Tan Thoi but was refused because they were under fire and couldn't risk losing any more soldiers.

Vann too was having trouble. Theoretically, he could have taken charge of the artillery fire, but he did not want to do that and give away to his Vietnamese counterparts that he was desperate. However, the artillery spotters on the ground were not reporting directions properly, and the planes already in the air were hitting houses instead of the tree lines where most of the foxholes were hidden. The bombing was not doing any good for anyone.

The M-113s finally arrived in Bac at once. The Viet Cong were not eager to fight the M-113s because they had not established any clear procedure for defeating them. The only way they knew to deal with the M-113s was to shoot the machine gunner, who would be exposed from the waist up, and to concentrate all their firepower on the vehicle at once. The Viet Cong battalion commander had seventy-five men and two .30 caliber machine guns in the foxholes along the ditch that the M-113s were headed toward. When the carriers neared the last canal, about seven hundred yards from the ditch, the commander ordered a half dozen 60 mm mortar shells fired at the carriers.

They landed close enough to frighten the soldiers but not to do any harm to the vehicles.

The commanders in the M-113s, who had finally reached Major Tho and gotten permission to fight in Ap Bac, were under the impression that no Viet Minh were left in Ap Bac. The Civil Guard soldiers were fixing their lunch, and there was no gunfire from the tree lines after the mortar shells, which they mistakenly believed to be friendly fire. One of the American advisors, Captain Robert Mays, asked permission to move forward on foot with a group of the mounted infantry and check on the reserves. Mays believed there were still guerrillas there because he knew Vann would not be mistaken about something like that. Vann told him to stay put and get the vehicles past the final canal. Mays agreed, and forty-five minutes later took one of the M-113s toward the downed helicopters.

Mays took an M-113 to the H-21 with the wounded soldier inside. There were three people standing beside it, two pilots and a warrant officer who were all dazed and didn't seem to know where their surviving crews were. Bowers ran up and told Mays there was a downed man inside the helicopter. Mays jumped down off the M-113, and just then, the Viet Cong battalion leader gave the order to fire. Mays and Bowers moved into the helicopter only to find the wounded crewman dead. They took several shots to the helicopter, and Mays decided they had better move. Mays got the three pilots into the M-113, but Bowers refused to go, instead returning to the reservists in the dike.

Mays jumped back inside the carrier only to find his driver dead. He radioed Vann to give him an update and then lost the radio too when the Viet Cong hit the aerial antenna outside. The M-113s moved left around the helicopters and faced the tree line where the majority of the fire came from. The infantry jumped out of the back of the vehicles and began firing on the Viet Cong. The infantry could not see where the guerrillas were, so they were not firing in the appropriate direction. The American advisor, Captain James Scanlon, realized the whole company would be killed if they did not get behind the vehicles once more. He ordered all the men back into the vehicles.

Scanlon thought the best way to fight was to take the vehicles directly up to the tree line to locate the Viet Cong gunners. Scanlon had to physically force his gunner to return to his gun, and the second M-113 began to back up. They had abandoned a soldier wounded in the paddy. Scanlon jumped out of his vehicle to retrieve the soldier. When he put the soldier into the second vehicle, he discovered that gunner was also too afraid to fire the gun. Scanlon forced him up to the gun and told him to fire at the bottom of the tree line. Scanlon's own gunner had been shot. The carriers then backed up behind the downed helicopters for protection, intending to go where Mays' carriers were, but changed their minds when they saw he was under fire. They then turned toward the canal. Scanlon jumped out of the vehicle and ran over to where Bowers still waited.

Bowers had tried to inspire the reserves to run out to the M-113s and was glad he hadn't convinced them when the vehicles turned tail and ran. Bowers told Scanlon what had happened since he crashed that morning. At the same time, the Vietnamese commander of the M-113s joined Mays. The commander liked to command from the

gun. He was stepping down inside the vehicle as it turned and was hit with the gun. The commander was knocked unconscious. For the next twenty minutes they had no command. Three or four more carriers joined them during that time. Several made individual attacks on the Viet Cong but were each beaten back.

The leaders of the carriers were often the gunners, who liked to command from the guns, where they could see everything. During the twenty minutes the commander was incapacitated, he lost the majority of his leaders as well as his own close friend, the second in command in his own vehicle. One M-113 was equipped with a flame-thrower. It moved up to burn the tree line, but when the flame-thrower was turned on, it failed to keep a flame. The crew had mixed the gasoline and jelly incorrectly.

Vann watched all this from the air. He was cut off from the M-113s since Mays' radio was down. He wanted the M-113s to charge the tree line and run over the Viet Cong, but the M-113 commander had been taught that was a foolish thing to do. The commander simply sent his vehicles on a frontal assault, exposing more gunners to harm. Every time one of the M-113s moved to the front of the pack, the Viet Cong would concentrate their fire on it until the gunner was killed. Every time a gunner was killed, a vehicle would stop. The M-113 commander managed to keep his vehicle heading to the tree line. When he was about to reach the edge of the dike, a Viet Cong squad leader, Dung, stepped out from the protection of the woods and threw a grenade at the vehicle. His men, inspired by him, did the same. The lead M-113 backed up. Mays made one final attempt in his own vehicle but backed away also when two more gunners were killed.

Cao, concerned with how bad the loss of this battle would reflect on him, began scheming to shift the blame elsewhere before the battle was even over. Vann knew the only escape for the Viet Cong would be the east sides of both Tan Thoi and Bac. Porter called Vann and told him Cao had ordered paratroopers dropped, but Cao intended to drop them on the other side. Vann and Porter both tried to explain to Cao that their only option now was to box in the Viet Cong and crush them. Cao refused. Cao was a general, and he outranked both Porter and Vann.

Vann got back in his plane with hopes that he could figure out a way to salvage the day. The second Civil Guard battalion had reached Ap Bac. The lieutenant wanted to flank around to the right behind the guerrillas' foxhole line and help out the wounded M-113 battalion. Major Tho would not allow it. Prevost, who Vann had run into at the airstrip and showed where the guerrillas were dug in, came around and shot out the gun on the right corner of the southern line. It would be the only successful aerial attack of the entire battle.

The paratroopers who were supposed to be dropped at four were not dropped until six, barely an hour and a half before dark would force an end to the battle. The 7th Division battalion in Ap Tan Thoi had only exchanged minor gunfire during the day and were relatively fresh except for an American advisor who bled to death because his Vietnamese counterpart had failed to report that he had been hit. When the paratroopers landed an hour later, the battalion did nothing to help cover them. The

paratroopers were also dropped at the end of their jump rather than at the beginning, so they landed behind the guerrillas rather than behind the 7th battalion. The guerrillas were able to take the paratroopers out before they had even hit the ground. The paratroopers suffered nineteen dead and thirty-three wounded.

Vann wanted the suspected escape route of the guerrillas illuminated by flares. Cao refused. The Viet Cong retreated through Tan Thoi late that night, carrying with them their dead and wounded. The Viet Cong lost only eighteen men and had thirty-nine wounded, compared to the eighty killed and over a hundred wounded on the South Vietnam side, including three Americans. Dung, the squad leader who stood against the M-113, was later killed by an aerial attack. His body was not found after the battle.

Neil Sheehan, the author, was then a reporter covering Vietnam. He drove to the airstrip where the command post for South Vietnam had been set up. First, he attempted to talk to Cao and was ignored. Then, he spoke to Vann, who was still very angry about the whole debacle but who had nothing but praise for his enemy. Vann called them brave.

Book 3, "The Battle of Ap Bac" Analysis

By providing a detailed description of this one battle, Sheehan brought into focus the issues that had been building up to this point. This battle was a turning point for Vann. All the concerns Vann had in previous sections of the book came together in this one battle. Not only Cao and his officers had a fear of battle. The fear ran the length of the ARVN, from Diem right down to the lowest private. Vann's problems were not isolated. This battle amplifies them to encompass the entire Vietnam conflict. From the writer's point of view, the leader of the American advisors was also a man of hesitation, refusing to give to Vann the things he needed not only to win his battles against the Viet Cong, but also to protect his own people from needless wounds and death. It was ironic here that Vann seemed to be the only one concerned with winning this battle when he was only in Vietnam to help win the freedom of the people who refused to fight below him.

Again in this section, the Viet Cong come across as some sort of misunderstood heroes. Even in Vann's eyes, they fought a good fight and were extremely brave. He complimented his enemies, but he had no respect for his colleagues. At several points, the writer seems to admire the Viet Cong, mentioning how they refused to get up and run despite their fears and how the commander continuously pumped his men up with speeches of encouragement. Even the reader has to admire the lack of fear it took for one lone squad leader to stand up and face a vehicle that earlier in the war would have caused him and his counterparts to run for the hills. This may recall the lack of training for the ARVN soldiers.

This section also marks changes that foreshadow upcoming events. The Viet Cong have changed the way they fight. They are no longer scared of the massive American machines, and they are willing to stay and fight when their counterparts would rather retreat or refuse to station their men in the line of fire. In this battle, the Viet Cong have announced that they are here for the long haul, and the ARVN and Americans had

better stand up and take notice. This should have been a warning for the powers that be, and perhaps in a way it was, as the reader will surely see in the following sections.

This section also signals a change in Vann. The reader saw how angry Vann became and how useless he felt. Vann was not a man to sit back and let all this happen without saying anything about it, as we have seen in the previous sections. Vann openly made an attempt to control himself while talking to the reporters at the end of the battle, as the writer himself witnessed and noted. Vann's frustrations escalated. His earlier frustrations foreshadowed his reaction to this battle. Yet again, his frustrations in this section foreshadow worsening events to come.

Vann's development also creates irony and symbolism. Vann's anger toward men he was there to help was ironic. Vann wanted desperately to help these people win their war, but these people were not interested in fighting themselves. It was ironic that Vann cared more than the South Vietnamese people did and that he kept fighting for them despite themselves. At the same time, Vann's anger was symbolic of his patriotism and his identity as a soldier. By refusing to fight, the South Vietnamese undermined Vann's core beliefs in his country and offended his core belief in the value and honor of being a soldier. How could his country send him into a situation where battles were fought incompetently, losing lives and failing objectives? How could soldiers fail to be heroes? How could people fail to fight for their right to live in a democracy?

Book 4, "Taking on the System"

Book 4, "Taking on the System" Summary

Vann was angry that he was being forced to lose this war. He decided that he would do all he could to make sure Harkins did something about the apathy of his Vietnamese counterparts, or he would go above Harkins to Washington. Vann was friendly with the few reporters who were in Vietnam at the time. He had often used them to inflate Cao's ego. Now he intended to use them for his own purposes. The writer, Neal Sheehan, and fellow reporters flew to Ap Bac to take a look at the battlefield. They helped to move the piles of corpses from the dikes into the M-113s, appalled that the surviving soldiers from the M-113s refused to help.

While Sheehan and Turner, another reporter, were in Ap Bac, American Brigadier General Robert York flew in. York, Turner, Sheehan and York's assistant, Lieutenant Willard Golding, went over to the tree line where the Viet Cong had been. While they were there, artillery shells began ringing all around them at about the same time as a fresh 7th Division Battalion came marching in. Cao had ordered a fake attack to make it appear that he was doing something to recoup. Four men in the battalion were killed, and twelve others were wounded due to a mistake the lieutenant made in reading his map warning the artillery of their position. The commander shot him in the head.

As an indirect result of Sheehan and Turner being caught in the shelling, Vann, his advisors and the helicopter pilots spoke freely about their frustration with their Vietnamese counterparts for the first time. Though the reporters tried to keep Vann and his advisors anonymous, the stories were inflammatory and spread quickly in America. It did not take long for Harkins to realize it must have been Vann who spoke to the reporters. President Kennedy wanted an explanation as to what was going on, and Diem and Cao lied about the entire situation. Harkins was under pressure to fire Vann.

Major General Charles Timmes, technically Vann's supervisor, was ordered to fire him. Timmes did not think it was a good idea. Porter promised to quit himself if Vann was fired. Vann swore he never talked to the reporters. He implied that the reporters must have overheard his transmissions from the observation plane during the battle. Vann did not control who was in the command center. That was the responsibility of the ARVN officers. Harkins was pacified and even allowed Porter to recommend Vann for the Distinguished Flying Cross for his bravery in the observation plane during the battle at Ap Bac.

Vann wrote a report of the battle and included sixteen personal accounts from his advisors, including Mays, Scanlon, Bowers and Prevost. He also included a letter from Major Tho and map overlays of the battle in this ninety-one-page report. He sent the report to Porter to endorse before he forwarded it to Harkins. Porter added to the report a memo that included his own opinions of the failings of the ARVN commanders. York also wrote a report that supported Porter and Vann's viewpoint. Harkins, however, had

convinced himself not only that there was nothing wrong with the way the ARVN waged war but that the ARVN had won the battle at Ap Bac.

Harkins' failure to see what was right in front of him was the result of his past experiences. During World War II, Harkins had learned all he knew about fighting a war like this one from General George Patton. Patton was a brilliant strategist who had many victories in World War II. However, his strategies were not easily applied to Vietnam. All Harkins was willing to look at were the casualty counts and the success of his division leaders, like Vann. In that limited point of view, things were going rather well.

Harkins no longer thought of Vann as his favorite advisor. In fact, Harkins considered neither Vann nor Porter higher than the reporters he despised. Harkins ignored both Vann and York's reports and told his superiors that he believed he could crush the Viet Minh to a few remnant bands and have the ARVN soldiers trained and ready in a year, so the American advisors could begin stepping back out of the conflict. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, thought a year was a little too optimistic. McNamara told Harkins to come up with a three-year plan. Harkins handed in a Comprehensive Three-Year Plan for South Vietnam, a plan for victory by the end of 1965, shortly before he was due to begin his Operation Explosion, the beginning of his own plan to end American involvement in Vietnam in less than a year.

The Joint Chiefs voted to send a committee to Vietnam about this time to decide definitely if we were winning or losing the conflict. Among the members of the team was a Marine, Major General Victor 'Brute' Krulak. Krulak had acted heroically in Korea and World War II, and at one point after withdrawing from a raid, he found himself being saved by a young lieutenant piloting a torpedo boat. That lieutenant later became president of the United States, John F. Kennedy. Krulak became friends with both the president and his brother Bobby after the president appointed Krulak to a counter-guerrilla warfare specialist spot on the staff of the Joint Chiefs. Krulak, because of these relationships, was determined to make an honest assessment of the war in Vietnam.

Due to the custom of the times, the general in charge of Krulak's team allowed Harkins to design the itinerary for them. Harkins kept the team to the north and central areas around Saigon, despite the fact that most of the fighting was going on in the southern areas. The team was not scheduled to go to My Tho or anywhere near Vann, where they might interview him or become aware of the amount of fighting in that area. They did, however, spend one day in Can Tho where Cao had his headquarters. Both York and Porter were there that day, though Porter does not recall what was said, and York was never asked the main question: Were they winning? York spoke of the role of the Hueys at Bac but did not offer any other details due to his training not to cause trouble.

The team was presented with Vann's report and Porter's indictment. Vann was brought to Saigon and questioned regarding the battle and his assessment of the war. Despite this information, the team concluded that things were going well in Vietnam, that Harkins was a brilliant leader and Diem a successful leader and that Vann and Porter were simply too critical of their counterparts. The only problem the team saw was a delay in the beginning of Harkins' Operation Explosion because of Diem's lack of

cooperation, a fact Harkins did not express to the team. The news reports on the battle in Ap Bac were dismissed as eager reporters taking out of context the excited utterings of a few American officers. Overall, the team felt the ingredients for eventual success in Vietnam had been assembled and recommended no changes to the current plans.

The North found it unbelievable that the Americans actually believed they were winning this war. However, they learned to turn that fallacy into a benefit for themselves. The Americans, in an attempt to make the peasants feel safer and more in control of their fate, were handing out weapons to the local militia groups. However, most of the peasants were tired of losing their homes to the battles or the reorganization effort of the Americans to make the hamlets smaller and more defensible. They were more willing than ever to aid the Viet Cong. Most of the weapons distributed to the Republic of Vietnam peasants found their way to the Viet Cong.

The press also found itself transformed as a direct result of the battle at Ap Bac. It was the first big story of the war, and the first story to be picked up in the states by most of the major news agencies. It was also the story that introduced the reporters to John Vann. Vann made friends with the reporters, teaching them about the war, the guerrillas and the Army in general. Vann became particularly close to a reporter named David Halberstam who was there covering the war for the *New York Times*. Vann and Halberstam had a lot in common, including feeling like two inferior beings trying to be somebody. Vann also reminded Halberstam of his father, a doctor and a patriot who fought in World War II although he was old enough to avoid the draft.

Vann not only used the press to get his message out, but he also continued to submit reports to Harkins that were deeply honest. He would have Drummond write up maps with colored overlays to show which side controlled which part of the southern areas, along with written descriptions. Harkins' office often called to complain that they assigned areas to Viet Cong control that were actually under Saigon control. Drummond would call Cao to double check, and when he couldn't get a clear answer from him, he would go himself and often be shot at. The Viet Cong at this time also became more aggressive, attacking outposts during the day and shooting at travelers on the local roads near My Tho.

In February, Vann sent a memo to Porter in Can Tho and an informational copy to Harkins regarding the territories under Viet Cong control. His hope was that Harkins would finally be forced to pay attention to his and Drummond's reports. Harkins sent his intelligence officer to investigate the memo and swore to fire Vann if the reports were false. Porter also submitted a report to Harkins, his final report before leaving Vietnam for a position at Fort Hood, Texas. In this report, he was blunt about his opinions of the way the war was going. Porter's final report disappeared, and Vann's reports were altered before going on to Washington.

Vann, in disgust over his supervisor's lack of conscience, took Halberstam aside and told him everything, from the memo, to Porter's report, to Harkins reaction. Again Harkins wanted to fire Vann when the story broke, but he couldn't because only a few

days before, Timmes had pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on Vann. It would not look good for Harkins to fire a soldier he had just decorated.

In April, Vann was rotated out of Vietnam to attend a ten-month course at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at Fort McNair in Washington in mid-August. Until then, he was assigned to the Army's Directorate of Special Warfare at the Pentagon. Vann took with him all the reports he had written to Harkins, reports sent to him from other advisors and his report on Ap Bac with Porter's comments. Vann intended to convince the generals at the Pentagon of the concerns he had regarding Vietnam.

Vann tried to have himself debriefed by the Lessons Learned program that all officers home from Vietnam were debriefed by routinely. However, Saigon asked the Pentagon not to debrief Vann, and so they refused to debrief him. Vann began his own briefs, discussing Vietnam with anyone who would listen, including Lansdale. Lansdale did nothing, however, because he was already on his way out because of a failed mission to remove Castro as leader in Cuba. During this time, Krulak had just returned from another visit to Vietnam and submitted yet another report praising Harkins' work in Vietnam.

In July, Vann was scheduled to present his brief to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Four hours before his presentation was scheduled, Vann sent a copy of his remarks to Krulak's office as they had previously requested. Upon reading it, Krulak had Vann pulled from the agenda.

That summer in Vietnam, on May 8, 1963, the Ngo Dinhs set off what would become known as the Buddhist Crisis. A company of Civil Guards killed several Buddhists who had been protesting in Hue. On June 11, a monk sat down in the middle of Saigon intersection and burned himself a few blocks from Ambassador Nolting's residence. These events created a flurry of reporting from Vietnam. A few days after Vann's scheduled brief for the Joint Chiefs, Halberstam, his old friend, republished Vann's believes regarding the tide of the war in the *New York Times*.

Things became rough for the reporters in Vietnam. The stories they wrote were questioned by everyone from the president on down, and the reporters were accused of making things up to sell more papers. Halberstam was forced to convince his own editors that what he wrote was the truth. Then there were threats made against the reporters. At first they didn't take the threats seriously, but when Diem declared marshal law after an attack on a Buddhist pagoda, the reporters hid in fear of being arrested or worse.

Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. became ambassador to Vietnam in late summer of 1963. Lodge quickly came to his own conclusions regarding the truth of the stories reporters were writing and began to use them to his advantage. Lodge's opinion of Diem was similar to Vann's, and he used the reporters to separate the Americans from Diem and leave him vulnerable to a coup. Lodge enlisted the help of Lou Conein, a CIA agent, to work as liaison to three dissident ARVN generals to help remove the Ngo Dinhs. Lodge and Conein used these generals to help organize a coup to remove Diem from power.

Lodge told Kennedy about his opinions of what was going on in Vietnam. Kennedy sent Krulak and a State Department representative, Joseph Mendenhall, to Vietnam. The two men came back with drastically different reports. Kennedy was given several more conflicting reports from McNamara and Taylor. Finally Kennedy deferred to Lodge. On November 1, 1963, a battalion of Saigon marines stormed the office of the National Police. Three hours later, Diem called Lodge. Lodge offered to allow Diem safely out of the country in exchange for his immediate resignation. Diem refused. Diem and his brother were killed by Diem's replacement, Major General Duong Van Minh.

Halberstam, in the meantime, had been reassigned by request of the president. The Viet Cong took advantage of the chaos created by the coup and increased the number and frequency of their attacks. President Kennedy was assassinated. Harkins was replaced, though he was not blamed for his inefficient leadership. In fact, Harkins was decorated with the Distinguished Service Medal. Minh was overthrown the end of January 1964 by General Nguyen Khanh.

Lyndon Johnson, the new president, put all his faith regarding the war in McNamara and Taylor, though Kennedy had begun to distrust them. Under this new regime, Krulak was promoted to a three-star General and given command over the General Fleet Marine Force Pacific. As commander, he devised a plan, called Operation Plan 34a, that was supposed to cause significant destruction, economic loss and harassment. Instead, this operation only expanded the scope of the war. It also led to the Tonkin Gulf Incident, which led to Johnson committing more American forces to Vietnam.

Vann retired at the end of July 1963. He had been told that he would no longer be promoted in the Army and would be relegated to a desk job in logistics until he retired. Vann wrote letters to his friends, who assumed he had retired so he would be free to speak openly to the press. That is exactly what he began to do. Halberstam wrote an article about him that summer that would win him a Pulitzer, portraying Vann as a man pushed out of the career he loved because of his morals. It wasn't completely true. Vann left the Army because he himself had ruined his chances of being a general when he was nearly court-martialed for statutory rape. Vann had always intended to retire when he returned from Vietnam. However, he regretted every minute of his retirement, bored with a civilian job and feeling rejected, as he had all of his life.

Book 4, "Taking on the System" Analysis

Vann was very angry after the Battle of Ap Bac, with good reason. One of his closest friends died needlessly due to the incompetence of one of the Vietnamese commanders. Two other people also died deaths that might have been prevented if the helicopter pilots had listened to Vann and if the M-113 commander had not been so stubborn about coming to the rescue of the downed copter's crews. It is no surprise that he chose to fight the system. The surprise might be the way he went about it. Vann chose to go to the reporters and use them in order to get his story out because he felt he had no other avenue. Harkins was not going to listen to him. Maybe the American

people would. It was ironic, however, as patriotic and by the book as Vann was, for him to turn against the rules of his chosen profession and chose to go to the press.

Vann moved on to the Pentagon in anticipation of taking classes that would lead to his receiving a promotion to Colonel. While there, he took it upon himself to tell everyone he came into contact with his views on the war. The reader could almost see where that would lead Vann. Sheehan implies all through this section what Vann's going around the chain of command would do to his career. At the same time, Vann's chain of command was tainted by Harkins, who only obfuscated the truth. Sheehan also continues to foreshadow the following sections, when he puts himself in the action of in Vietnam.

Vann's choice to retire surprised those around him and might even be a small surprise for the reader. The author built on of the themes of his book by describing Vann's retirement as heroic and selfless. Then the reader read the final paragraph, in which Neil Sheehan foreshadowed what would come in the next section. Perhaps there was more to this man than the reader suspected.

Book 5, "Antecedents to the Man"

Book 5, "Antecedents to the Man" Summary

John Paul Vann began life as an illegitimate child. His mother, Myrtle Lee Tripp, was the child of a strong-willed woman nicknamed Queenie and a weak-minded farmer named William Tripp. Queenie left her husband after twelve years of marriage and five children. She moved to Norfolk, Virginia with her children and opened a boarding house during World War I. After the war, Queenie quit her boardinghouse and began a job as a ship stewardess on board an overnight passenger steamer that moved between Norfolk and New York.

Myrtle, just short of her eighteenth birthday, ran off to Elizabeth City, North Carolina to marry a merchant marine sailor named Victor LeGay. Their marriage lasted six months, until he left her after she began an affair with a trolley driver named John Paul Spry. Spry was married to another woman at the time, and Myrtle got it into her head that if she became pregnant, Johnny would leave his wife and marry her. Myrtle became pregnant, but Johnny broke off his relationship with her instead of his wife. Myrtle was left with a small child she named John Paul after his biological father and LeGay after her legal husband.

John Paul was raised the first few years of his life by Myrtle's sisters, Mollie and Lillian. Then, Mollie and Lillian moved to New York, and Myrtle got pregnant again by a man named Aaron Frank Vann. Myrtle married Vann and had two more children with him. Frank Vann was a good man who worked when he could find work, but he did not go out of his way to find work. Frank allowed Myrtle to live her life any way she chose, often turning the other way when she practiced prostitution in their own home and giving her money to the detriment of the children. The family moved quite often through the suburbs of Norfolk, Atlantic City and Lamberts Point, just a step ahead of one eviction notice after another.

Frank Vann was the family cook and housekeeper. He did what he could to spice up the fried potatoes and biscuits the family ate at nearly every meal, hiding pieces of cheese inside the biscuits when he could afford some or putting onions in the potatoes and making tomato gravy to dip them in. However cheap this diet, it was horribly insufficient in vitamins. John Paul's brother Gene suffered rickets at a young age because of vitamin deficiency. His legs were so severely bowlegged from the disease that he had to have them broken and reset when he was young. This was done by a charity hospital that sent a nurse to the suburbs to find children such as him.

The children were aware that their home life was not normal. They knew everyone in town was aware of Myrtle's occupation. She would often dress in her fine clothes and sit out in the front yard to advertise her wares while the children ran around town in hand-me-down clothes and worn shoes. Myrtle was even known to take her daughter Dorothy Lee with her to make dates with her johns. Myrtle never nursed the children when they

were sick. They never had a turkey at Thanksgiving or presents at Christmas. Nor did they ever have a Christmas tree.

The shame was double for John. His mother constantly reminded him of his illegitimacy and repeatedly told Frank Vann he need not bother to discipline John because the boy was not his. John Paul also met and got to know his biological father, Johnny Spry, but Spry was too busy with his two children from his first marriage and two from a second marriage to have much time for the boy. John wanted a father, and he wanted that father to be Frank Vann. He so often told people at school that his name was Vann that the school finally compromised with him and registered him under the name John LeGay Vann.

John Paul turned to sports to help him forget about his troubles at home. He joined a basketball club run by a local Salvation Army captain. John Paul also participated in tumbling and running at school and joined the local boy scouts through his grammar school in Lamberts Point. When John Paul was thirteen and about to enter the eighth grade, his family moved again, and he met his first best friend. Gene Crutchfield was the child of a middleclass family. Crutchfield's family was so different from John Paul's that John was embarrassed when Crutchfield brought him home for supper.

Crutchfield knew about John Paul's family. He was with John Paul one day when they came upon a couple making out in a car, and they discovered it was John Paul's mother, Myrtle, inside the car. Crutchfield also noticed how violent John Paul could be. John Paul never initiated fights, but he was quick and always ready to end a fight if the need arose. Crutchfield was so concerned over John Paul that he introduced him to the new minister of his Methodist church in hopes of finding John Paul some help.

The minister was Garland Evans Hopkins. He would go on to become the principal American advocate of Palestinian rights in the late forties and early fifties. Hopkins saw in John Paul a good soul who would be destroyed if not taken from Myrtle's custody. Hopkins counseled John Paul and eventually arranged for a local millionaire to write a check for John Paul to go to a Methodist-run boarding school called Ferrum Training School. Ferrum was originally created to educate the children of the isolated Blue Ridge communities. It was a small coeducational preparatory school and junior college. John Paul entered in the tenth grade of high school.

John Paul excelled at Ferrum. He was happy and easy-going with his classmates, and he did so well in his classes that he was able to skip the eleventh grade and finish three years of school in just two. Myrtle finally allowed Frank to adopt John Paul two weeks short of his eighteenth birthday, after John Paul went to her and said she might as well because he was changing his name when he turned eighteen anyway. World War II began that same year. John Paul was still enrolled in Ferrum, taking courses through the junior college. He wanted to quit school immediately and join the armed forces, but Garland Hopkins apparently talked him out of it. John Paul spent the rest of that year at school and the following summer working a canteen with his Aunt Mollie. However, the following fall, he could no longer watch his country going to war without joining in himself.

John Paul Vann's dream had always been to be a pilot. The president of Ferrum sent him to the Naval Air Service with a recommendation, but it did not go well. John Paul returned to Ferrum to finish enough of his coursework so that the junior college could make the common exception of a wartime emergency and credit him for the full two years. In March, he went to Richmond and signed up with the Army Air Corps. John Paul was first sent to Camp Lee for the beginning of boot camp. He then took several aptitude tests so the Army could decide where he fit best. Eventually, he was sent to Rochester, New York, to the 51st College Training Detachment (Air Crew) for pilot training. During this time, John Paul met Mary Jane Allen.

Mary Jane Allen was the child of a middleclass upbringing. Mary Jane's father was a court reporter, and he had been able to retain his job all through the Depression. The Allens owned a spacious home in the city and were well enough off to rent a vacation home in upstate New York during the summer. Mary Jane only had one sister, and her favorite pastimes were dolls and playing house. Her life was drastically different from John Paul's. However, the two got along well. Mary Jane invited him to her home the Christmas Eve shortly after they met. They flirted the entire evening. Shortly after that, John Paul was sent to another flight school, this one in Nashville. They corresponded faithfully for more than a year. The next time they saw each other, John Paul bought Mary Jane an engagement ring.

Mary Jane's mother was not pleased about this marriage. She wanted to know more about John Paul and his family. She also wanted her daughter to go to college. Mary Jane, however, had her mind set. Mary Jane married John Paul the following October. John Paul liked being in the Army. His uniform brought with it a respect he had never experienced before. Though he had been thrown out of pilot school for executing maneuvers that were not approved by his superiors, he had become a navigator. John Paul decided the Army was what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. Shortly after his marriage, John Paul was sent to Guam. Mary Jane was pregnant with their first child at the time. She supported his decision to seek a commission in the Regular Army despite the possibility of constant separations like this one and the fact that he never really asked her opinion.

In 1946, John Paul decided to return to college to get a bachelor's degree. Then in 1947, he abruptly changed his mind when the Air Corps split off from the Army and became the Air Force. John Paul elected to stay with the Army. That June, John Paul loaded his family in their new car and headed out to Georgia and the Infantry School at Fort Benning where John could take the three-month course in fundamentals of leading a platoon and company in battle. He also elected to take parachute and glider training so he could command airborne troops.

Two years later, Mary Jane was on a ship to join John Paul in Japan with their two children, Patricia and John Allen. John Paul had been shipped to Japan to be the purchasing and contracting officer at the headquarters of the 25th Infantry Division in Osaka. The house John Paul took them to in Osaka was a mansion on a hill, much more than Mary Jane had ever expected. In Japan, the Americans were like demigods to the people. The Americans were provided with only the best. The house was

beautiful, inside and out, with wonderful gardens and a lovely patio for entertaining guests. Mary Jane was finally able to fulfill the duties she had desired as the wife of an Army officer.

The house, however, was not completely perfect. It was infested with centipedes and cockroaches. There were also rats living in the walls. When the Army pest exterminators could not rid the house of the rats, Mary Jane tried to learn to live with them. Then, a maid burned the house down while melting floor wax in the kitchen. The Army declared the house unsalvageable and moved the Vanns into another home, one that was even larger but less luxurious. All this ceased to matter, however, when John Paul Vann was called to war on June 25, 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea.

On arrival in Korea, Vann, by then a first lieutenant, was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division as an assistant supply and evacuation officer, essentially in charge of transportation. Vann was not happy with this assignment. He felt the best way for him to stand out as a soldier and to gain promotion would be to fight on a battlefield. Vann would not come near a battlefield as a supply officer. However, he was extremely good at his job. The Americans were unprepared for war when the North Koreans invaded South Korea. America was originally inclined to not become involved, should the invasion happen. However, when it did occur, Truman immediately sent troops to protect the American interests in South Korea and to protect America as a super power from the Soviet regime growing under Stalin. Several years after World War II, the soldiers were ill prepared. Training had lapsed, and supplies were stored and in poor working condition. In short, the Army leaders had neglected their primary obligation of maintaining an Army ready to fight.

Vann's division commander, Major General William Kean, was better prepared for this war. Kean had demanded his soldiers continue a minimum of training. At the end of July, the 25th was given the worst section of the front lines to hold, an attempt to keep the North Koreans out of Pusan, a port town on the southwest corner. The Americans fought hard, but they quickly ran out of supplies and lost momentum. Vann and the other supply officers worked hard to keep them supplied, but they couldn't get the supplies onto the battlefields where they were needed in a safe and quick manner. Vann came up with a scheme to solve this problem. Vann found five pilots of small L-5 observation planes to fly him and three boxes of supplies over the battlefields, so he could drop them down to the troops on the ground.

Many pilots thought the plan was insane, but they agreed. Vann would pack three boxes with a hundred pounds of supplies, wrap them in blankets to protect them from the fall and put two in the back of the plane and one in his lap. They would then fly into the battle locations and drop to less than thirty feet above the fighting. Vann would drop one box as close to the locations of the platoons as possible. Then they would go around two more times to drop the other two boxes. During these runs, they would encounter North Korean soldiers who would fire on them. Vann had a bag of grenades with him and would drop them out the window when they were over the North Koreans. Vann did this a total of 69 times over four days. The planes were never hit by more than a few

bullets, so Vann was never given a medal for his heroism. However, he was promoted to captain.

Later, in Vietnam, Vann would tell the author, Neil Sheehan, about a Ranger company he commanded that took the brunt of the opening Chinese campaign in the Korean War. Vann would say how he had barely survived the battle with only fifteen of his men. Sheehan later found out that Vann borrowed this story from another man, Lieutenant Ralph Puckett, Jr. Puckett was given the task of forming the first Ranger Company, since the Rangers had been disbanded after World War II. It was their mission to infiltrate and reconnoiter a salient the North Koreans had pushed through into the northeastern side of the Pusan Perimeter. In the beginning of the Korean War, the Americans did not believe that the Chinese would act in the North's interest, or that many Chinese soldiers would be sent to help fight the war. This belief would prove to be extremely incorrect. In late November, Puckett and his company of Rangers ran into a group of Chinese soldiers who had snuck into Korea by the cover of darkness unnoticed by the Americans. Puckett, along with fifty of his original seventy-four men and one officer, dug in on Hill 205 and waited for the battle to begin. Although they did not know it at the time, Puckett and his men faced an entire Chinese battalion of about 600 men. They held them off half the night through four waves of attack. Finally, however, they were overcome. Puckett and eighteen of his men were the only survivors.

As soon as Vann heard what had happened, he asked to speak to Kean. Vann wanted to rebuild the Rangers and lead them himself. Kean agreed. Vann built up the Ranger Company to one hundred and seven Rangers plus five officers, including himself. Vann's Rangers were sent on several intelligence gathering missions, but he never faced anything more than a minor skirmish with his Rangers, nothing on the scale of Puckett's experience. Vann was, however, responsible for Puckett receiving the Distinguished Service Cross. He interviewed the survivors and wrote the citation that led to Puckett receiving the award. Sheehan, the writer, believed Vann stole the story of Puckett's heroism not to make himself seem more heroic, but to make a point to further his own beliefs regarding the Vietnam War.

Vann would leave the Korean War just four months after he received the Ranger Company. His third child, Jesse, was born shortly after Vann left Japan. In February of 1951, when Jesse was six months old, the baby became gravely ill. He was diagnosed with a form of meningitis, and the pediatrician told Mary Jane it was very unlikely the child would survive. Another officer's wife who was working with the Red Cross arranged to have Vann brought home. After Vann returned home, Jesse began to recover. The doctor, however, thought it would be best if Vann were reassigned to the United States so the baby could receive better care there. Vann did not want to be reassigned. He wanted to return to Korea. His desires were overruled, however. Mary Jane was relived by this change in orders, even though her husband was not. Mary Jane had volunteered at the airstrip to help assist incoming patients onto buses for transportation to the hospital. She saw the horror of war and was glad to have her husband home safe and sound.

The Vanns were sent to Fort Benning so that John Paul could attend the next Advanced Course at the Infantry School. Vann, who had been having open affairs with the Japanese maids in his home while stationed in Japan, continued this behavior at Fort Benning. After his training, Vann was transferred to Rutgers University, where he would be an ROTC instructor. While in New Jersey, he rented his family a small house outside of the town where the university was and enrolled in business courses to finish his bachelor's degree in business administration. During this time, he put Mary Jane on a strict budget and spent as little time at home as he could. Mary Jane became aware of several affairs her husband engaged in while she stayed home taking care of her sickly baby. It was a difficult time for her, but she never considered divorce.

Vann's childhood had a great deal to do with his behavior toward his wife. Vann was punishing his mother in a way by punishing Mary Jane and the women he had affairs with. Also, Vann may have been victimized by the very man who saved him. In later years, Garland Hopkins, the Methodist minister who arranged for Vann to attend Ferrum, would be exposed as a pedophile. Vann may have been one of his first victims.

In June 1954, Vann was reassigned to Germany after his graduation from Rutgers, just a few months after the birth of his fourth child, Tommy. Vann arranged for Mary Jane and the children to stay with her parents in New York because there was no available housing in Germany. Months went by, and Mary Jane eventually got an apartment for herself through her sister and brother-in-law. However, she was not content to be separated from her husband. When she learned housing was available, she called Vann and told him she and the children would be on the next flight available. Vann met their plane and actually seemed happy to see them.

Vann's initial assignment with the 16th Infantry Regiment was as acting executive officer of a battalion. Then, for a week he was the battalion commander. Vann greatly impressed his regiment commander, Colonel Bruce Palmer, Jr., with his performance as commander. When Vann transferred to Headquarters U.S. Army Europe in Heidelberg the following June, 1955, Palmer went out of his way to alert promotion boards of Vann's outstanding potential. At the headquarters in Heidelberg, his commanders were soon just as impressed as Palmer.

Vann's personal life was not affecting his career yet. Vann still carried on with other women, both before his wife joined him and after. However, he made a point of hiding his women from his superiors, fearing how it might affect his career and future promotions. Vann continued to make the appearance of being a loving father and husband, often taking his wife and children on long bike rides through the German countryside and going on extending vacations to places such as West Berlin and the Bavarian Alps. In the fall of 1955, Mary Jane gave birth to their fifth and final child, Peter.

On one afternoon while the Vanns were in Germany, a young woman, no more than fifteen or sixteen, visited Mary Jane and told her that she and Vann had been having an affair. The young girl told Mary Jane that Vann had promised to marry her and told her he loved her. Vann denied only that he told the girl he loved her. Vann did not deny

having the affair. Mary Jane was devastated once more at the evidence of his affairs, expressing her anger in torrential fits, as she had in New Jersey when faced with Vann's hurtful acts. However, once again Mary Jane refused to even consider divorce.

Vann, now a major, was extremely energetic in his work with the G-4 Division at Heidelberg. Vann found problems in the supply system within the G-4 Divisions and solved them simply and logically. When his solutions uncovered more problems, he solved them as well. Vann's superiors were very pleased with his performance and, like Palmer, added glowing recommendations to his permanent record for future promotion boards.

In the summer of 1957, Vann was transferred to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas to attend the Command and General Staff College. Vann graduated the following summer in the top two percent of his class. Following graduation, Vann took his family to Syracuse so that he could get his MBA. After graduation from Syracuse, his plan was to go to the Pentagon to fill a logistics position. However, before his graduation, a criminal investigation was begun into allegations that Vann had committed statutory rape with a young woman who had been Mary Jane's babysitter while they were in Kansas.

During the initial stages of the investigation, Peter, then three, became jaundiced. The military hospital diagnosed him with hepatitis and started him on cortisone treatments. However, the child only seemed to grow worse. Mary Jane begged Vann to allow her to take the child to a civilian hospital. At first he would not allow it, but then he relented. They again diagnosed the boy with hepatitis and continued the cortisone treatment. Mary Jane became convinced her son was dying, a fact that was only underscored when a hospital employee called a funeral director to talk to them. Vann took the child to another hospital as a result of that experience and was told to take the child to Children's Hospital in Boston.

Vann drove all night to take Peter to the hospital in Boston. When he returned the next day, he lied to Mary Jane and told her he had to force the hospital to admit Peter. In reality, the hospital had a policy that it never turned a child away. The doctors in Boston diagnosed Peter with an obstruction in the duct leading from the pancreas after exploratory surgery. The block was removed, and Peter was sent home to recover.

Vann, because of his actions, now had an ally in Mary Jane. Mary Jane agreed to lie to the investigators regarding the statutory rape charge, although Vann admitted that he had an affair with the fifteen year old girl. Vann came up with a story and a time line and made Mary Jane memorize it. Then, Vann decided to take a lie detector test to refute the lie detector test the victim had taken. He discovered that if he stayed awake for forty-eight hours prior to the test he could fool it. Vann took the test and passed. The charges were eventually dropped.

Mary Jane, now sick herself with tuberculosis, arranged through a friend in Army personnel for Vann's next assignment to be in a warm climate. Vann was assigned to the Army's antiaircraft missile center at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. Vann was the chief of the program and budget section in the comptroller's office, but the job bored him. At

work he was always enthusiastic, although he was angry and complained constantly at home. Vann learned nothing from his experience with the near court martial and continued his lifestyle, except perhaps for a closer look at the ages of his girlfriends.

Vann was promoted to lieutenant colonel in May of 1961 and looked forward to early promotion to colonel in the near future. However, Vann knew that if there was anything of the criminal investigation in his record, his chances of being promoted to general were slim. Vann arranged with Porter to meet a man who was once been an assistant in the chief of staff's office and who still had good connections there. Vann asked this man, Francis Bradley, if he could arrange for Vann to be alone in a room at the Pentagon with his service records. Bradley knew what Vann wanted to do and politely refused to give an answer either way.

Vann promised Bradley he was going to retire. Following his year in Vietnam, Vann did retire and took a job at the company where Bradley worked, Martin Marietta. However, civilian life was not what Vann had thought it would be. He quickly became bored and disillusioned with his life. Vann's marriage was falling apart, so he spent less and less time at home with Mary Jane and the children. Vann was offered command of a battalion in 1963 by Bob York, a friend of Vann's, should he return to the Army and Vietnam. However, the Army did not want Vann back. In the summer of 1964, Vann approached the Agency for International Development in Washington to volunteer for their civilian pacification program in Vietnam. The AID was happy to have Vann and offered him a position as regional director of pacification for the Mekong Delta. However, Maxwell Taylor, the new ambassador in Saigon, vetoed the appointment, saying Vann was too controversial. Vann fought this decision, writing letters to everyone he could think of for letters of recommendation. Finally Colonel Sam Wilson intervened on Vann's behalf and talked Wilson into allowing Vann to come to Vietnam in a lesser capacity. Vann was allowed to go as a province pacification officer.

While in Washington undergoing processing and orientation lectures at AID headquarters, Vann stayed with his old friend Garland Hopkins. Hopkins, in the months before this time, was discovered to be a pedophile. Hopkins lost his job, his standing in the community and his wife and children. He was waiting to be prosecuted as a pedophile. While Vann was staying at his home, Hopkins swallowed rat poison and left directions with Vann on how to deal with his death. It was the least Vann could do, Hopkins said in the letter he left. Vann returned to Vietnam a few days later.

Book 5, "Antecedents to the Man" Analysis

John Paul Vann's childhood, as told in this section of flashbacks, was not an ideal one. Abandoned by his mother on many occasions and then neglected through his childhood, he was continuously reminded of his illegitimate birth and rejected by his biological father. During a time of turmoil in his country, it seemed Vann had impossible obstacles to overcome. He did overcome them, however, in great part with help from a kind Methodist minister who would later become a great humanitarian. It can only be described as ironic that this savior later was discovered to be the metaphoric devil in

angel's clothing. Vann was once again victimized by someone who he should have been able to trust, a person in a position to do great good. This man left Vann perhaps as damaged by his behavior as Vann was by his mother's actions.

Delving more deeply into Vann's character, this section of the biography went a long way to explain a lot of Vann's motivations to the reader. In the first few books, the reader saw Vann as a brilliant soldier, a humanitarian in his own way and a hero. In this book, however, the reader saw Vann as a damaged human being who had a gift. Vann was not kind to his wife, though at the beginning of their romance the reader perceived no hint of the future these lovers have in store. When Vann and Mary Jane met, they appeared to be deeply in love, eager to begin a new life together. There was no hint of their troubled marriage until the author suddenly dropped the information that Vann liked to make love to the Japanese maids. Though this information was shocking, it revealed Vann's character in more depth. Perhaps, though, the reader should have guessed all was not right in Vann's world. A childhood like Vann's could almost explain away his behavior, in which he symbolically abused his mother through the abuse of the many women in his life. At least, this was the author's implication.

There is no doubt, despite Vann's fractured personal life, that Vann was a good soldier. This touches on one of the many themes of this book, heroism. Vann was a hero, but he was far from perfect. His heroism was defined by his abilities as a soldier. Unhappy in his job in the G-4 section of the Army, Vann still managed to excel in his job, bringing about attention that would eventually lead to his many promotions. It seems, despite his unconventional birth and childhood, Vann was born to be a soldier.

Book 6, "A Second Time Around"

Book 6, "A Second Time Around" Summary

Vann returned to Vietnam and reacquainted himself with old friends, including Cao. Cao had been promoted after yet another coup put Air Vice-Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky and the Young Turk factions in charge. Vann was assigned to an insecure new province called Hau Nghia, nearly escaping death for what must have been the hundredth time when the Viet Cong bombed the embassy seconds after Vann left. Vann returned to the scene to help evacuate the wounded. Twenty people died, and one hundred twenty-six Vietnamese were wounded. Fifty-one Americans were also wounded inside the building.

Vann went to the capitol of Hau Nghia, Bau Trai, the next day. Vann was not pleased with what he found. The office was a small warehouse that was terribly unorganized. The only place to eat was an outdoor restaurant where the flies were so bad he could barely eat without eating a fly. The roads into the province were cut off by the Viet Cong, and the only way to travel was by convoy. There also was no province chief. Vann immediately set to reorganizing the whole setup, his mind quickly going to the idea of taking the province back from the Viet Cong, even though his job consisted only of building schools for the locals and refugee relief.

A new province chief arrived a few days after Vann. Nguyen Tri Hanh was an honest man who liked Vann from the first. Hanh was with Vann in wanting to take his province back from the Viet Cong. However, the ARVN had gone downhill since Vann's last trip to Vietnam. The troops were now drinking and doing drugs. They were out of control, and they were deserting at high rates. Not only that, but there was corruption high up in the command. When Hanh first came to the province, his rolls told that unit rosters listed more men than he actually had in the troops assigned to his province.

Corruption was so prevalent in the area that it undermined the AID. The AID official Vann replaced allowed the Vietnamese contractor to steal concrete and building materials in exchange for women. The Viet Cong was the biggest customer of the corruption. They often bought ID cards and security clearance for spies seeking jobs with U.S. agencies. The corruption also aided the social revolution going on in the countryside that was bringing even more of the local peasants over to the Viet Cong side.

Vann traveled the roads around Bau Trai, getting to know the peasantry and hearing stories about the social revolution over and over again. He made friends with the schoolteacher in a small hamlet less than two miles from Bau Trai, who happened to be the Viet Cong medical worker for the area. Vann fixed her schoolhouse and arranged for many of the children with birth defects to get medical attention. Vann also befriended most of the children. Vann was told most of these children would not get much of an education under the old regime of the south. Vann realized that the war wasn't just about stopping communism anymore. Vann devised a plan in which South Vietnam

could stand as a nation with the United States in the global struggle for the underdeveloped lands.

In Vann's view, the Americans could not win this war for the Vietnamese. However, it was clear to him that if America backed out now, South Vietnam would be lost. ARVN troops were losing men every day to desertion, and the leadership was inches from panic. Vann thought it would be best if the Americans came in and secured key points around the country that could not fall to the communists. They would then serve as protectors, a garrison and emergency reserve.

First, Vann decided, he would have to change things at Bau Trai. Vann intentionally caught the contractor stealing American supplies while building a maternity clinic. He then refused to sign the paperwork that would allow the man to be paid. The contractor went to Hanh and tried to bribe him. Instead, Hanh promised to cancel all the man's contracts in the province if Vann could prove him guilty. The contractor then tried to get Vann fired, and Vann showed his correspondence to the contractor that proved the man had stolen the supplies. This eventually led to the discovery of a corrupt AID official.

Not long after, Vann was hit by an ambush of Viet Cong on the road to Bau Trai. Vann was uninjured, though he received hundreds of cuts from flying glass when the guerrillas shot out his windshield. Vann was convinced he had been set up because this was the first time he had been fired upon while driving alone and because it would not have been hard for someone to find out where he would be and when. Vann suspected it was the corrupt contractor.

In August, Vann finished the first draft of his plan for Vietnam, entitled "Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam." It consisted of the Americans taking over the social revolution and converting the population of three provinces in the south to the American way of thinking rather than the communist philosophy. Vann wanted to take these three provinces and put a province chief in them who had no ties to the corrupt Saigon politicians. This province chief would control all funds and material aid, would be allowed to hire and fire his own people and would control all military divisions in the area. Vann called this plan an experiment, with the hope that his superiors would be more likely to allow it to be implemented. Vann also called for a halt to free-strike zones, a practice that involved airplanes and helicopters destroying areas just for the practice and for the number of kills on some general's monthly reports.

Vann continued to have a good relationship with the reporters in the area. Many of the new reporters liked to go see Vann because something exciting almost always happened while they were interviewing him. In one instance, an ABC reporter was interviewing him on camera, and group of Viet Cong began harassing the policemen at a road check a few feet away. Pretty quickly, the frightened Saigon soldiers began firing back. The ABC reporter was thrilled at his good fortune at having been able to film the firefight. Though his superiors did not like it, this good relationship with the reporters paid off when a copy of his paper was sent to a former United Press International reporter. He in turn handed it over to William Bundy, the new assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and his assistant.

Vann really wanted to get Lodge's when he returned for a second turn at ambassador later that month. Lodge invited Vann to his office shortly after his return, and Vann gave him a copy of the paper. Lodge promised to have a longer meeting with Vann after he read it, and then sent the paper to the political section for comment. Vann ran into a couple of the political officers, who told him his ideas were out of line. Vann was not worried by their reaction because he expected it from bureaucrats. General Rosson, Westmorland's chief of staff, flew to Bau Trai for a briefing from Vann. Rosson approved of the ideas Vann had outlined. Vann also had another small victory in September. Unobserved artillery and mortar fire were banned in Hau Nghia.

Shortly before Lodge returned, Hanh was pressured by Ky and his people to embezzle money from the Americans to pay for his right to remain in Bau Trai. Vann promised to do something about it and wrote a memo to Wilson regarding the matter. However, Vann went home for two weeks and on his return was transferred out of Bau Trai by the new USOM director, Charles Mann. Vann was to be promoted to a USOM representative and advisor on civilian affairs to Lieutenant General Jonathan Seaman. Almost as soon as Vann left, Hanh gave in to the pressure and embezzled the money his superiors requested. The ban on unobserved artillery and mortar fire was lifted, and Vann never got the meeting with Lodge he had so looked forward to.

In January of 1966, Doug Ramsey, Vann's assistant during his time in Bau Trai, was captured by Viet Cong. He was on his way back to headquarters one night after picking up a load of rice. Ramsey was taken to a small hamlet the Saigon forces had just destroyed. The people there had lost everything, and it was only two days until the holiday of Tet. Many of the villagers wanted to kill him because they assumed he was with the ARVN. The Viet Cong would not let them.

The moment Vann heard the news he drove to Bau Trai to help in the search for Ramsey. There was a cease-fire for the holiday, so Vann and his friends felt safe driving around asking about Ramsey. Vann went to the schoolteacher he had befriended while in Bau Trai to question her, but before he could get out of the car she yelled that he was about to be killed. Vann gunned his car down the road, and he and his passenger spotted the ambush in a bend in the road. Vann's passenger, Frank Scotton, threw a grenade at the Viet Cong. Vann was warned after that not to go back to that hamlet because the Viet Cong had vowed to kill him. Vann was forced to give up the search for Ramsey and left to hope he would be released when the war was over. Ramsey would be a prisoner of war for the next seven years.

Westmorland, like Harkins before him, was not interested in any of the plans in Vann's paper, though he did eventually read it. Westmorland believed the war would be best fought if the Americans destroyed the Viet Cong and then returned the country to the Vietnamese, the complete opposite of Vann's plan. There were two large assaults at the end of 1965 that were designed to serve this purpose. The first was the Battle of the Ia Drang. This battle was fought in large part by the 1st Battalion, 7th Calvary led by Lieutenant Colonel Harold Moore Jr. Despite heavy casualties on the American side, this battle was declared a victory for Moore. The second was Operation Masher. Once

again, there were heavy casualties on the American side, but again it was declared a victory.

In the aftermath of Operation Masher, many civilians in the tiny hamlets where the battle took place were wounded. The American hospital often refused to help the seriously wounded civilians, sending them instead to the Qui Nhon hospital. Neil Sheehan asked a general about this lack of concern and the decision not to leave troops behind for pacification. He got an answer that led him to believe the only thing the American generals wanted was victory. They had no concern for the citizens or for pacification.

Book 6, "A Second Time Around" Analysis

Vann went back to Vietnam with the mentality and symbolic role of a man still a part of the Army. Vann was going to win this war single-handedly if the generals in charge would only give him a little room to maneuver. He came up with a plan that many thought was solid, if arrogant for his current role. It was clear to the reader that the writer agreed with Vann as well. The reader then wondered if perhaps things might become better for John Vann, if perhaps now people might begin to listen to him.

The disappearance of Vann's assistant was a sudden reminder that there was indeed a war going on. Vann was also wracked with guilt. As the writer points out, this was the only guilt Vann would carry during this conflict. Vann was a man of great arrogance and of shattered morality. The possible death of a near stranger finally revealed to the reader the true depth to Vann's character. Ramsey's disappearance was also a symbol that all was not right in Vann's world, that bad things could happen and that Vann was not as lucky as he always believed himself to be.

The war in Vietnam continued to grow more violent as time passed. The writer was present at some decisive battles and included them in the book. This work was not just a biography of a man and a history of a war, but it was also the writer's personal memoir. This added depth to the story and lends authenticity and sense of urgency to the text. It foreshadowed the coming battle that would be John Vann's last.

Book 7, "John Vann Stays"

Book 7, "John Vann Stays" Summary

A year after Vann arrived in Vietnam for the second time, he was offered a job at the Pentagon with the Office of Systems Analysis under McNamara. Vann used this offer to be promoted to director of the whole civilian pacification effort for the III Corps region. During this time, Vann also became good friends with Daniel Ellsberg, who was in Vietnam as part of Lansdale's team. The two men fed a need in each other and came to depend on one another.

Ellsberg and Vann also shared an interest in extra-marital affairs. Ellsberg was divorced at the time. Vann continued his liaisons in Vietnam, at one time carrying on an affair with two women. One was a twenty-one-year-old schoolteacher named Lee. She was quite beautiful and spoke perfect English. This affair became very serious after Vann was promoted again to AID's manager of a program to train specialized teams of Vietnamese pacification workers. The second was a seventeen-year-old girl named Annie who would eventually give birth to Vann's child.

In the fall of 1966, Vann's mother, Myrtle, died from injuries she sustained in a beating while drunk on a beach in Norfolk. Vann flew home to pay for her funeral, as he had paid for most everything Myrtle had had the past many years. The funeral was a family reunion of sorts. Vann's brothers, one a carpenter and the other in the military, Vann's sister, who had married a petty officer and had five kids, and Frank Vann, Vann's stepfather and Myrtle's ex-husband, were all there. Myrtle had left Frank Vann several years before to marry a petty officer. Three of Myrtle's sisters also came, including Mollie, who had rescued John Paul from his crib as a baby when Myrtle abandoned him.

Back in Vietnam, Vann was still making waves in his job. As head of the AID's program to train pacification workers, Vann got into a disagreement with the CIA station chief and the ranking CIA officer involved with the program. Vann and his Vietnamese counterpart, Tran Ngoc Chau, wanted to alter the training program to include bigger teams, which would mean altering the training camp at Vung Tau to create Political Action Teams under the CIA. They eventually reached a compromise. In another incident that embarrassed the CIA station chief, Vann reported that the commandant and chief of instruction at Vung Tau was propagandizing all the trainees through a political instruction course spreading anticommunist and anti-Saigon messages. When this proved to be true, it reflected badly on the CIA and left Vann a marked man.

Vann went in search of another job in case these incidents left him jobless. This was when he was offered the job at the Pentagon with the Office of Systems Analysis under McNamara. Vann used this job offer in a campaign to not only be promoted within the AID but to also have his job status changed from temporary to permanent. Under the new civilian unifying organization, Office of Civil Operations, Vann was made the director of the entire pacification program in III Corps region.

Vann hoped his new promotion would enable him to make large-scale change. However, things had only grown worse for the Vietnamese citizens. Bombings were still destroying hamlets on a daily basis, leaving many people homeless and without any means of support. While the Americans were living in luxury, bringing in generators to power their air conditioners and movie theaters, and the Saigon government was raking in money with grafting schemes, the peasantry was forced to work for the Americans to support themselves. Those who couldn't find legitimate jobs became prostitutes or beggars. Then, the drug trade began.

Vann also had a new ally in his fight, though he was not to know it for a while yet. Brute Krulak, who had been instrumental in Vann losing his opportunity to speak in front of the Joint Chiefs, had become convinced that Westmorland's strategy in fighting the war was not the appropriate one. The ARVN had become even more hesitant to go into battle against the Viet Cong, and Westmorland did nothing to encourage them to do so. Krulak wrote a paper describing his own views on the war. The paper argued that attrition would fail because it was the enemy's game and that the Viet Cong had far too many men at their disposal for the Americans to continue fighting them the way they were. Finally, he argued that the Viet Cong should not be allowed to continue using the vegetation to hide. Unlike Vann, Krulak had support from his superiors, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp and Marine Corps General Wallace Greene, Jr. Westmorland was the obstacle. Krulak requested a meeting with President Johnson and was eventually granted one. However, it seemed clear to Krulak that Johnson did not understand his strategy.

Krulak wanted to have the Marines prove the merits of his plan, but he did not have control over the Marines in Vietnam. Krulak enlisted the help of a friend, Major General Lewis Walt. Walt integrated marine rifle squads into militia platoons. The Marine commander became the platoon leader, and the Vietnamese platoon leader became his deputy. These Combined Action Platoons were put together into a Combined Action Company under a Marine officer and Vietnamese deputy. Eventually, Marines were integrated into every militia platoon in five provinces. Westmoreland was instantly against this. He thought the Marines were better used in the foothills and mountains on search-and-destroy missions and the pacification programs should be left to the civilians and the ARVN.

Krulak received resistance from McNamara, Westmoreland and Paul Nitze, the secretary of the Navy. Krulak also was not achieving the progress he had expected by late summer. However, Walt had started to see the good they were doing and found his control expanded in the countryside with the Combined Action militia units and the organization of hamlet and village intelligence networks. It would never be possible, however, for Walt to have enough men to fight both a war of attrition and a pacification campaign.

Walt would find out quickly that he could not do both. In September 1966, Westmoreland decided he wanted to turn a little airstrip in Khe Sanh, fifteen miles below the Demilitarized Zone, into a larger aluminum-matted field capable of landing C-130 transport planes in case he ever had the chance to expand the war into Laos.

Westmoreland wanted Walt to transfer a battalion of Marines there. Krulak became angry and went to see Westmoreland, arguing that one battalion would not be enough and a strong helicopter presence would also be needed and that such a large commitment would draw troops from his pacification program. Westmoreland would not back down.

Walt felt pressure on both sides, from Krulak begging him not to move his men and Westmoreland threatening to replace him if he did not. Walt finally gave in and moved the 3rd Marine Division from Da Nang north to the Hai Van Pass. Westmoreland shifted the Marines around and added more Army divisions into their ranks, until Walt's company was all but gone. That was the end of his pacification program.

In April 1967, Krulak's predictions regarding the Viet Cong presence in the area around the airstrip came true. The NVA's 325 Division marched on the hills surrounding the area, Hill 861, Hill 881 south and Hill 881 North. The battle was close, hand to hand combat, as Krulak had predicted in his paper that argued to keep the air artillery at a minimum. When it was over, 155 Marines were dead and 425 had been wounded, the worst Marine losses for a single battle of the war so far. The Demilitarized Zone would be the most violent area in the entire war. 52% of all deaths in Vietnam after 1967 would be members of the I Corps and 25% of them would happen in or near the DMZ.

Vann, in the meantime, was working with Robert Komer to create a pacification organization called Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support or CORDS. Komer was deputy to McGeorge Bundy on the National Security Council before President Johnson gave him the job of deputy commander for pacification and an honorary title of ambassador. Vann taught Komer everything he needed to know about Vietnam and aided him in creating his civil-military organization, which amounted to a special pacification service within the US forces in Vietnam.

In this organization, each corps region would have a corps deputy who would answer to no one but the American commanding general. It would be a fully unified province team, just like Vann had proposed in his "Harnessing the Revolution" paper. Vann became the corps deputy for the II Field Force under Major General Fred Weyand.

In January 1967, Vann received word that Ramsey had gotten a letter to his parents smuggled out of the prison camp where he was being held. The letter told of two bouts the man had suffered with malaria, one the mild, typical type, the other a more aggressive strain that affects the brain. Ramsey survived both and thought that might mean he could survive anything. He attempted to be upbeat in the letter, talking about memories of home, but he also told his parents they should be realistic and be prepared for the worse. The conditions of the camp where Ramsey was being held were deplorable, with flooding in the rooms where the prisoners slept and long hikes to new camps. Ramsey was afraid to sleep because he had had nightmares and cried out, and the guards said they would shoot him if he did it again.

By mid-1967, with Ellsberg back in the states and Komer's more relaxed view on the American presence in Vietnam, Vann was losing some of the enthusiasm he had at the

beginning of the year. Lodge went home for a second time, and new ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, took his place. Bunker was a quiet man who intimidated Vann. Vann decided he would get no help in his cause from this new ambassador.

Vann also faced a crisis in his personal life. Annie became pregnant a second time in April and refused to have an abortion as she had the first time. Annie's father confronted Vann and told him if he would rent a house for Annie and the baby and take care of them, he would not go to Bunker and tell him of Vann's behavior. Vann agreed. A ceremony took place on Annie's nineteenth birthday to lend the relationship a touch of legitimacy, though it was not legal since Vann was still married to Mary Jane. Vann continued to carry on a public affair with Lee.

The aerial artillery war in South Vietnam was no longer working. When the Americans bombed roads to make it harder for the Viet Cong to move around, the Viet Cong would devise other ways to get around. They would use pontoon bridges and move them during the day to where they could not be seen. Not only that, but a lot of the roads were hidden in dense terrain, and there were numerous ways to get from A to B. When one road was bombed, the Viet Cong would simply move to another. The Americans were considering closing the ports. McNamara wrote a memo to President Johnson that said, in essence, that the only way to make the air war a success was to target the people of North Vietnam. However, he said, the best way to go about it would hurt the Americans in world opinion and could bring about a war with China.

Faced with the failure of the aerial artillery war and statistical information from his own brain trust, Robert McNamara began to believe that the war in Vietnam was not winnable. McNamara wrote a memo to the president that advised they negotiate an unfavorable peace. McNamara began to feel guilt for having given bad advice to the two previous presidents in regards to Vietnam. In June 1967, he commissioned the Pentagon Papers, a top-secret investigation into America's involvement in Indochina. The first question he wanted answered was, "Was Ho Chi Minh an Asian Tito?"

McNamara had also become concerned over the death and destruction in the hamlets. A young reporter, Jonathan Schell, worked for *The New Yorker* and had written an article about the destruction of hamlets in the Quang Ngai Province. A friend arranged for Schell to have a meeting with McNamara. McNamara asked Schell if he had anything in writing that went deeper into the destruction he had seen in the districts of Quang Ngai. Schell had a small book-length manuscript already written. He gave a copy to McNamara and a copy to *The New Yorker*. McNamara sent his copy to Bunker.

With General Westmoreland's approval, Bunker ordered an investigation into the destruction described in Schell's paper. The final report stated that there were good military and political reasons for the destruction and that the people injured during these attacks were sympathetic to the Viet Cong and would not accept American rules. Within four months of this report, a massacre took place in the small village of Son My on the South China Sea. Five hundred and four people were killed that day, and one lieutenant was court marshaled as a result.

McNamara continued to try to convince the president to negotiate peace in Vietnam, but most of the president's other advisors disagreed. The president did not put much stock in McNamara's words. The president appointed McNamara as the new president of the World Bank, assuming that McNamara was having an emotional breakdown from the pressure of the war. President Johnson hoped this change of position would keep McNamara from becoming an asset to Johnson's opponents during the next presidential election.

In November 1967, Westmoreland and his staff held a large press briefing that had been ordered by the president. American support of the war had begun to wane, with 30% of voters anxious to get out of Vietnam. The president and his think tank, The Wise Men, thought it would be best to start a public relations campaign to help change this trend. Westmoreland fed the reporters a lot of statistics and body counts, announcing that the war would be entering its fourth and final phase soon.

Vann, during this time, became even more disillusioned. He went home for eight weeks in November. Vann vacationed for a few days in France with Lee before moving on to have Thanksgiving in Colorado with Mary Jane and the children. Vann then returned to Washington to brief Walt Rostow, Ambassador William Leonhart, Rostow's assistant and George Christian, the president's press secretary. Rostow remarked that a man like Vann shouldn't be working for the U.S. government before telling him he had another appointment.

Vann and Annie's daughter was born the day after Christmas while he was in Denver once more with Mary Jane and the children. The child was born early because of a fall Annie took. Annie named the child Thuy Van. Vann's name did not appear on the birth certificate. Vann returned to Vietnam in early January 1968. Weyand was concerned about Westmoreland's 1968 campaign plan that was due to begin very soon. Weyand did not see the Viet Cong as a greatly diminished army, as Westmoreland did, and Weyand also believed the Viet Cong leadership had enhanced their firepower in all their battalions, rather than just a few as Westmoreland believed. Weyand went to Westmoreland's deputy, Creighton Abrams, and asked for a postponement. Westmoreland agreed.

A deserter from the Viet Cong appeared outside the gates of the Khe Sanh airstrip a few days before the Tet holiday. He informed the Americans of an upcoming attack on the base. Westmoreland had not only expected this attack but had been hoping for it, since he placed Marines there as bait in 1966. Westmoreland hoped for a second Dien Bien Phu, the final battle of the French/Viet Cong war, only in reverse. The deserter also told of an attack planned in the hills surrounding the airstrip, and his information seemed to be reinforced by an attack that took place the following day. Westmoreland ordered the beginning of his planned campaign, a phase called Niagara that included a bombing campaign and the use of fighter planes.

Weyand and Vann were too concerned about their own region to worry about Khe Sanh. The Viet Cong had increased their attacks in the last few weeks. Vann wrote York that it appeared the Viet Cong were trying to make a show of force before the cease-fire for

the Tet holiday. Weyand was so concerned about an attack at his headquarters and on a nearby POW camp for communist deserters, that he had all the vegetation around both buildings removed and put his armored cavalry squadrons on full alert.

On Tet Eve, George Jacobson gave a party on the front lawn of his house, and Bunker was one of the guests. The cease-fire had begun that evening except in the two northernmost provinces because Westmoreland worried about Khe Sanh. During the early hours of the first day of Tet, there were minor attacks at installations in Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Ban Me Thuot, Kontum and Pleiku. Despite that, no one was really concerned because the Viet Cong had never launched a large offensive during the Tet holidays. Even Vann went back to Saigon and spent the night with Lee.

Bunker was awoken in Saigon at three in the morning on the 31st of January and told the embassy was under attack by the Viet Cong. Fifteen Viet Cong battalions had moved into Saigon and the surrounding suburbs. It had never been their intention to attack at Khe Sanh and restage Dien Bien Phu, simply because they knew they did not have the raw military power to win. The Viet Cong, however, organized a massive number of attacks in South Vietnam in more than half of the forty-four province capitols. District centers and ARVN bases in the countryside were being struck, and air bases were being shelled or hit by ground attacks to keep air support or helicopter reinforcements from taking flight. In Saigon, the Viet Cong were attempting to seize Independence Palace, the Navy headquarters, the Joint General Staff compound and the radio station. The goal was to collapse the Saigon regime.

Weyand's compound came under attack. Weyand fought the Viet Cong back with M-113s and infantry companies. Vann rushed to his CORDS office and spent most of the night and the following morning rallying his teams. He finally went to rescue Annie and the baby in Gia Dinh, the town where he'd housed her, and found her house ringed with shooting and empty. Annie's parents had managed to rescue her first and take her to their home in Saigon.

The entire battle was not a success for the Viet Cong, due in part to the fact that Weyand refused to send the majority of his troops to Khe Sanh. The Viet Cong sent in regional troops first to take targets and hold them until the regular battalions could arrive. Had the Viet Cong regulars arrived and found only ARVN troops, they would have overwhelmed them quite easily. Instead, they found a large number of American troops still in the area and were fought back despite their surprise attack.

Fighting continued in Saigon for two more weeks and in the small town of Hue for twenty-five days. The Tet Offensive, as it came to be called, signaled the loss of the war to many of those in positions of power. The American people no longer supported the war. Many colleges were having protests, and many young men were dodging the draft. Johnson nearly lost the nomination from his party to run for reelection. Westmoreland would not accept defeat, however. At a press conference shortly after the beginning of the offensive, he said he believed the battle was simply a ruse to distract him from the battle planned at Khe Sanh. Westmoreland continued to send troops north.

Vann, too, refused to see defeat. While men like Westmoreland and Komer were losing face, John Vann was suddenly the guy who knew it all. Vann saw that the Viet Cong were diminishing, and the communist government was relying more on the regional companies and the NVA to do most of their fighting. With this opinion, he devised a new paper that called for reducing the American forces in Vietnam by 200,000 by 1971 and leaving the ARVN to fight their own battles. Vann also believed the Tet Offensive must surely have taught the Saigon government a lesson and would diminish government corruption in order to make this transition easier. Ellsberg, however, did not agree with him.

Lyndon Johnson allowed Westmoreland to stay in Vietnam until summer, replacing him with his deputy, Creighton Abrams. Johnson then wanted to negotiate a mutual withdrawal with the NVA, but the Vietnamese communists were not interested. Instead, in October of 1968, they agreed to a de-escalation along the DMZ and around Saigon and other major cities in exchange for an end to bombings in the north and admission to the talks of a delegation from the North Liberation Front.

Vann, in the meantime, got himself in trouble with his superiors once again. Vann talked to Peter Arnett, a reporter, about the withdrawal of troops in Vietnam. Although Vann told Arnett he could use his name in the article he was writing, Vann assumed the man would protect his identity as reporters had always done in the past. However, Arnett not only did not protect Vann's identity, he wrote a caustic and mocking article that included many direct and unflattering quotes from Vann. Komer was told to fire Vann. However, afraid of bad publicity, Komer convinced his superiors it would be best to keep Vann around.

Johnson lost his party's nomination to run for a second term. Nixon won the election after Bobby Kennedy was killed, but only by a narrow margin. Nixon liked Vann's plan to withdraw American troops while still fighting the war with Saigon troops. Vann hoped this optimism would lead to a job in the president's administration, but the invitation never came. Komer moved on to be ambassador in Turkey and was replaced by William Colby. Vann only continued to find success, making friends in important places. One friend was Joseph Alsop whom he called the president's journalist. Alsop spent time with Vann in Vietnam and wrote many columns about him. Vann was also visited by Sir Robert Thompson, who was hired by Nixon as a consultant on Vietnam and used Vann to show him around South Vietnam. Thompson then arranged a meeting between Vann and President Nixon. Nixon seemed to like what Vann had to say.

Vann nearly got himself fired again in January 1970. Chau was Vann's counterpart and friend from when he was head of the AID's program to train pacification workers. He was about to be arrested for working with his own brother, who happened to be a Vietnamese communist intelligence officer. Vann devised a plan to helicopter Chau to Cambodia, where he could escape to France or the United States. Chau talked Vann out of his plan, hiding out instead for a number of days before going back to Saigon and allowing himself to be arrested. Bunker told Vann he would have to leave the country if he ever did anything like that again.

Vann moved to Can Tho and brought Annie there with the baby. He was still seeing both Annie and Lee, and he even went through an engagement ceremony with Lee to appease her and her family. Vann had moved beyond some of his friends in his new success, including York, who had retired from the Army in 1968. Vann and Ellsberg were still close friends, though Ellsberg's view on the war had changed drastically. Ellsberg had read the Pentagon Papers McNamara had commissioned and felt they would change Vann's mind about the war if he would only read them. Ellsberg had started sneaking the Pentagon Papers out of the Rand offices and photocopying them.

The ARVN did not improve as Vann had hoped, nor did the Saigon government provide the province and district chiefs Vann had hoped the Tet Offensive would scare them into providing. Vann had always raged against corruption in the Saigon government. However, Vann had changed, and now he was encouraging the promotion of one of the most corrupt province chiefs to regimental commander. Vann had become obsessed by the war, and he began to twist the truth of the war around to fit himself, as he had so many other truths in the past.

Nixon decided to expand the war into Cambodia in April 1970. Vann saw this as a great way to prolong the war. Had he known that Ramsey was currently being held in Vietnam, he might have changed his mind. In the fall of 1970, Weyand, who had finished his tour of duty, returned to Vietnam to be Abrams' deputy. This gave Vann an ally in a scheme he had devised to make himself a civilian general in charge of U.S. military forces. Vann had befriended an ARVN general, Ngo Dzu, who became his ally in asking for Vann to be his second in command. Vann was promoted to the title of Commanding General U.S. Army Forces Military Region 2. Vann finally got what he had always wanted. He was the boss.

Changes were taking place in Vann's personal life as well. Mary Jane had divorced him in October, and Vann was making plans to marry Annie. He had told Lee about Annie and the child, explaining to her that she would always be his mistress. Vann and Ellsberg had a falling out over the release of the Pentagon Papers in June. However, Vann agreed to testify at the trial in Ellsberg's defense.

Vann expected a battle to take place in February 1972. He thought the NVA objective was Kontum, a garrison and trading center, the capitol of a province of the same name in the Highlands. Kontum was west of a ridgeline called Rocket Ridge for all the rockets it had been bombarded with by the NVA. Hoang Minh Thao, a general for the NVA, stationed 35,000 men in the area beyond Tan Canh and Rocket Ridge where Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam met. When the battle didn't happen in February, Vann thought it was because of a bombardment of B-52 strikes he had ordered along the approach routes in the area.

On March 30, 1972, the Easter 1972 Offensive began. NVA troops led by tanks surged out of the DMZ against Camp Carroll and several other positions the Marines in I Corps had turned over to ARVN troops. Vann's fire bases along Rocket Ridge were also under assault. Several divisions of NVA appeared out of Cambodia and overran a district headquarters in Loc Ninh. They moved down to a province town of An Loc sixty miles

from Saigon, also led by tanks. Fire Base Delta, manned by a battalion of ARVN paratroops, was knocked out by the NVA.

Vann flew over the battle on Rocket Ridge in a helicopter, taking charge of the artillery and stopping every NVA attempt to reinforce the troops who had fought their way inside Fire Base Delta. The NVA inside Delta were wiped out, but the American and ARVN troops inside had run out of supplies. Vann loaded up his little Ranger helicopter with supplies and tossed the supplies to the men in Delta like he'd done during the Korean War.

Another battleground in the Central Coast was under control, or at least Vann thought it was. The colonel in charge, Tran Hieu Duc, was a man Vann knew well. When a fire support base, Landing Zone Pony, came under attack, however, Duc would not fight. The entire district came under attack by two or three NVA battalions. They struck the district headquarters of Tam Quan. Bridges were blown up, and outposts were attacked. The South Vietnamese began deserting their posts. Eventually Vann was forced to authorize an evacuation, though he could not supervise because he was having trouble of his own on Rocket Ridge. The NVA had partially succeeded in cracking the fire-base line and conquered a position called Fire Base Charlie. During the evacuation, the NVA attacked with several mortar rounds before the vehicles were fully loaded. Several of the senior officers had to be airlifted to safety.

Over the next couple of days, Fire Base Delta and An Luc were on the verge. The NVA was also threatening Hue, the former imperial capital, as well as Tan Cahn and Rocket Ridge. On April 23, 1972, the Tan Canh compound was hit. During the assault, the NVA took out all the ARVN tanks parked inside the Tan Canh compound. The NVA were coming with tanks of their own, a fact Vann had ignored because he liked to verify his intelligence and had never seen an NVA battalion with tanks. Vann had been wrong.

On April 24, 1972, Vann wrote a will in his helicopter on the way to Tan Cahn. Vann had not made any provisions for Annie and her child and had not even put in an official request to marry her yet. If he were to die, she would get nothing from his meager estate. Vann left everything to her and her child in this new will and put it in his pocket with the hope it would be found if the helicopter went down.

Vann's helicopter picked up three advisors from Tan Cahn where the compound had been overrun by tanks. As they took off, two ARVN soldiers grabbed onto the radio antennae and several grabbed onto the skids. Vann ordered the pilot to set down at Dak To II instead of Ben Het, where he had originally planned to go, so the ARVN soldiers would not fall off during the flight. Then he turned around and went back for the two senior advisors. However, Vann and his pilot had to turn back because they were hit by NVA AK-47 and were losing fuel. They returned to Pleiku without incident.

Vann then jumped into a second Ranger and went back to Dak To to pick up a stranded major and his interpreter, as that base was being overrun. On takeoff, the helicopter had so many ARVN soldiers hanging from the pilot's side that it tipped and crashed. Vann pulled a man from the wreckage and jumped on board a Huey. Back at Kontum, Vann

hopped yet another helicopter and headed back to Tan Canh, after first leaving his will with a friend from his time in My Tho.

Had the NVA immediately moved on to Kontum after taking Tan Cahn, they more than likely would have taken it and had control over most of the Highlands. However, the NVA waited twenty days before they attacked. Dzu schemed behind Vann's back to retreat from Kontum before the NVA attacked. Vann stopped him and was so filled with anger that his fight was restored. The last major unit in II Corps was committed to this fight, and Vann's reputation and career were at stake. However, they had several advantages over the NVA.

Kontum was situated in a small river valley. In order for the NVA to attack, they would have to come down into the valley where they could be spotted by aircraft. Also, by waiting so long to attack, they had lost the surprise of their tanks. The NVA were vulnerable to B-52s, so Vann made them his personal weapon. The NVA managed to survive the B-52s and broke into the east side of Kontum from the south and north ends of town. The plan for these companies was to meet up and turn west. However, a battalion of South Vietnamese was waiting and actually stood their ground this time. The NVA were forced to withdraw.

Vann flew to Saigon on June 9 to meet with Abrams and Weyand. He celebrated with Lee in the afternoon and with his fellow soldiers later in the evening. At one point, he gave a note to a friend to take to Annie to let her know he had finally filed the paperwork to marry her just a few weeks before. Vann was in a good mood on the helicopter ride home. A few miles from Kontum, near the Montagnard hamlet of Ro Uay, Vann's helicopter crashed. His body was found in a field face down. He died on impact. The cause of the accident was determined to be pilot error.

Book 7, "John Vann Stays" Analysis

A whole lifetime of planning and fighting came to fruition for John Vann at the end of his life. Finally, the people who mattered started to listen to him. He gained fame and respect, and he was free to live the life he wanted to live. Vietnam was a symbol of the family, the respect and the life that Vann had been searching for his entire life. Vann had come home when he returned to Vietnam.

The death of Vann's mother was a telling event in his life. Vann still wanted the world to believe in the lies he told everyone, including himself. The mistresses he clung to in Vietnam, the one mistress to whom he would never commit but whom he couldn't let go, and the one who bore his child and who he had promised to marry, were symbolic of the different views of his mother Vann held until his death. Vann craved love and security, which he got from Annie and perhaps Mary Jane, too. Vann also craved fun and a challenging relationship, which was what he got from Lee. However, Vann also had a deep need to hurt women. This was probably the reason he continually lied to these girls, why he allowed Mary Jane to find out about his child with Annie and why he eventually told Lee the complete truth about Mary Jane and eventually Annie as well.

Vann was a brilliant soldier. However, he allowed the war in Vietnam to take over his life. He lost sight of what his original beliefs about the war and the ways to win it. It was ironic that, despite fighting to win the war, at the end Vann simply wanted the war to continue so he could hold on to his freedom and keep doing the one thing he was really good at. Vann had failed at being a civilian. Vann wanted to be a soldier in any capacity he could achieve. The book reveals the author's own personal point of view about John Paul Vann's heroism and capabilities as a soldier. It raises a question: if a soldier's duty is to fight and win wars, what happens to the successful soldier? By being successful (winning and therefore ending the war), the soldier deprives himself of his place in society.

The war in Vietnam was controversial in its day and continues to be so today. This book plays a role in this controversy, casting doubt on statements of the American government about the war and revealing problems and incompetencies in the military. While the book gives us pause to think, ultimately the reader must come to his or her own conclusions about Vietnam.

Characters

John Paul Vann

John Paul Vann was born John Paul LeGay in Norfolk, Virginia during the Great Depression. He was a redneck in every sense of the phrase, a hard worker, quick-tempered and fearless. Vann was a career Army man who fought in Korea and then in Vietnam. He served in Vietnam from March 1962 until April 1963. At the end of his tour of duty he was reassigned to the Pentagon to work in logistics while he waited to take classes that would elevate him from lieutenant colonel to full colonel. While at the Pentagon, Vann offered briefings to anyone who would listen regarding his views on the war in Vietnam. Vann's views were considered unacceptable by some people in power. Vann chose to retire after twenty years of service in the Army.

Vann worked in a civilian job for a while, but it lacked the excitement and frantic pace he required for a fulfilling life. Vann wanted to return to the Army and lead a battalion, but in the intervening time he had done many open and candid interviews in the general press regarding Vietnam. The Army considered him too controversial to reinstate his commission. Vann offered his services to the Agency for International Development, a civilian organization charged with aiding in the war in Vietnam. The agency was initially excited to have Vann aboard, but some of the people in power there too hesitated about Vann, just as the military had. Eventually, however, friends of Vann's convinced the agency he would only do good as a representative of their organization. Vann died in a helicopter crash while still serving the AID.

Myrtle Lee Vann

Myrtle Lee Vann was John Paul's mother. Myrtle was the daughter of a headstrong southern woman nicknamed Queenie and a weak-minded farmer, William Tripp. Myrtle was raised by her mother in Norfolk, Virginia, where her mother ran a boardinghouse during World War I. After the war, Myrtle ran away to Elisabeth City, North Carolina to marry a French merchant sailor named Victor LeGay. Only six months into this marriage, however, Myrtle began an affair with a man named John Paul Spry. Spry was also already married and had two children of his own. Myrtle, it seemed, thought that becoming pregnant herself would convince Johnny, as they called him, to leave his wife and marry her. Her plan did not work as she had hoped. Johnny broke up with Myrtle long before the child was born. Myrtle named her son John Paul after Johnny anyway, giving him her husband's last name as well.

Myrtle eventually married and had three more children with a man named Aaron Frank Vann. Frank Vann was the only father John Paul had ever known, and he wanted to have Frank's last name so badly that he would often tell people his name was Vann. Myrtle, however, would not allow Frank to legally adopt John until two weeks before John's eighteenth birthday. Myrtle was a self-absorbed woman who often allowed her

children to suffer the cold of winter and a severe lack of food. One of her sons became severely deformed because of rickets caused by vitamin deficiency, while Myrtle sported authentic fur coats and large diamond rings. Myrtle often worked as a prostitute during John Paul's childhood, not to pay for her children to have nice clothes and good food but so she could have nice clothes and expensive jewelry. Myrtle believed herself to be a good mom. She was simply too selfish to see what her actions did to the people who loved her most.

Aaron Frank Vann

Though aware of who his biological father was, John Paul Vann would always consider Frank Vann his father. Though not a good provider, Frank Vann was a loving father who did all he could to make sure the repetitive fried potatoes and biscuits he made for his children were flavorful. Frank Vann was not a lazy man, though his favorite pastime was to sit in the living room and read. He would work and work hard whenever he could find a job. Frank simply did not enjoy looking for work, and so he did not look for work as often as he could have. When Frank did work, instead of using his money to improve the lives of his family, he would often give the money to Myrtle and allow her to spend it on herself. As a result, the family moved quite often, running ahead of eviction notices from their landlords to homes where other families were currently being evicted. Frank even missed John Paul's wedding due to lack of money, although Myrtle was somehow able to attend.

Mary Jane Vann

Mary Jane Allen Vann was John Paul's wife. Mary Jane had a vastly different childhood than John. Mary Jane was born to a middleclass family, her father a court reporter who managed to keep his job even during the worst of the Depression. While John Paul's family was constantly moving to keep ahead of eviction notices, Mary Jane's family bought and moved into a spacious home in the city of Rochester, New York and rented a cottage every summer in upstate New York. Mary Jane was a bright child whose interests included everything feminine, from sewing to playing at keeping a house.

Mary Jane met John Paul when she was just sixteen. They courted for a year long-distance while John Paul attended pilot training in the Army Air Corps. On his first leave since their first date on Christmas Eve 1943, John flew to New York and bought Mary Jane an engagement ring. Despite her mother's objections, they were married the following October. Mary Jane walked into this marriage with the image of her parent's conventional marriage strongly in focus, unaware of how difficult it could be to be married to a career military man. Mary Jane accepted John's choice to make the military his career, his long absences and her role as an Army officer's wife. It became, however, more and more difficult for her to handle the distance. She sought a divorce just months before John's death in 1972.

Garland Hopkins

Garland Hopkins was a Methodist minister at a church in Norfolk, Virginia where Vann grew up. A friend of Vann's who was a parishioner at the church introduced Vann to the minister. Hopkins became Vann's counselor, helping him through the torment of growing up with a mother like Myrtle. Hopkins also arranged for Vann to attend a Methodist-run finishing school through a rich parishioner who paid for a scholarship and bought Vann new clothing every year. It would later be discovered that Garland Hopkins was a pedophile who more than likely abused Vann when he was a child.

Colonel Daniel Boone Porter

Colonel Porter was the man Vann reported to the first day he arrived in Vietnam. Porter was the American advisor in charge of a large corps that included the 7th Division, to which he assigned Vann. Porter was one of Vann's biggest supporters when he tried to convince Harkins that the Vietnamese were unwilling to fight their own war and that the Americans needed to take a bigger role in the war to stop the needless killing of innocent civilians. Porter also voluntarily offered to resign if Vann was fired when details of the Battle of Ap Bac leaked to the press.

General Paul D. Harkins

General Harkins was the head of the MACV from 1962-1964. Harkins had been a principal staff aide to George Patton during World War II. Vann reported to Harkins during his time in Vietnam. Vann also went to Harkins with his concerns regarding the behavior of the Vietnamese command and the careless bombing of innocent civilians during his first year in Vietnam. Harkins deluded himself into believing that the battle of Ap Bac was a success for the Republic of Vietnam.

Vann was one of Harkins' favorite advisors because he was aggressive, successful in his kills and brutally honest in his reports. Harkins invited Vann to entertain visiting dignitaries during his time with the 7th Division, again because of his success. However, when Vann attempted to speak to a visitor from the Joint Chiefs of Staff bluntly regarding his Vietnamese counterparts, Harkins shut him off.

Colonel Huynh Van Cao

Colonel Cao was Vann's Vietnamese counterpart when he first arrived in My Tho. Cao was an ego-driven man who was more than willing to allow Vann to help plan missions as long as the enemy body count was high and the casualty count low. Vann expertly played Cao's ego until the 7th Division had the highest kill rate at that point in Vietnam. However, when two operations went badly within the stretch of only a few days, Cao cut Vann out of the mission planning and began using intelligence to attack areas where he knew his men would not encounter Viet Minh resistance.

Shortly after this change in planning techniques, Cao was promoted to general and became Vann's superior by rank. Cao was still in charge of the 7th Division, and when the battle of Ap Bac took place, Cao knew he would be held responsible for the high casualty count. Cao arranged for paratroopers to be dropped into the area much too late in the day to mount an effective assault and in the wrong area to stop the Viet Minh's escape. The paratroopers were somehow dropped in the wrong area, however, and suffered a large number of casualties. The following day, still attempting to save himself, Cao mounted a decoy attack on the area where the Viet Minh had been during the battle. He wounded many of his own men as well as putting into danger several reporters, including the author of this book, and an American General. This lead to Vann's decision to speak to the American press regarding the mistakes made during the battle.

Major General Edward Lansdale

After a successful campaign in the Philippines, in which Lansdale help put into power President Magsaysay, the CIA sent Lansdale to Vietnam to work the same magic there. Lansdale picked Diem to be the president of South Vietnam because he believed Diem was the best candidate available. Lansdale advised Diem just the way he had Magsaysay, encouraging him to be modest and to look out for the needs of his people. Diem did not listen. Lansdale also helped train the ARVN and organized the evacuation of thousands of non-communist refugees from North Vietnam. Lansdale orchestrated a propaganda campaign against North Vietnam, spreading rumors designed to increase support for the new Republic of Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was born in Vietnam but educated in France and England. He discovered communism while in England and began to apply the ideals he had learned there to the love he felt for his country. Ho Chi Minh founded the Vietnamese Communist Party following World War I and spent much time in Russia and China learning from their communist societies. In the early forties, he returned to Vietnam to help run the Viet Minh independence movement. In 1945, Ho Chi Minh became president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam. He attempted to work with France to prevent them from reoccupying his country, but France went back on the agreement. There were many times when Ho Chi Minh asked the American government to help in his attempts to oust France from his country, but America refused. Ho Chi Minh also approached several other countries for help, but they all ignored the request.

Ho Chi Minh and his Democratic Republic of Vietnam waged war against the French from 1946-1954. The French eventually pulled out of Vietnam. After this point, the Americans became involved in the country's problems. An American CIA agent arranged the creation of the Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh wanted his country to be one whole country and refused to acknowledge this new government in

the south. Ho Chi Minh eventually went to war against the south and America as the south's primary advisor.

Jean Baptiste Ngo Dinh Diem

Diem was the president of the Republic of Vietnam. Diem was in exile during the French war in Vietnam and only returned after the war ended. Lansdale chose him to become president because the Americans believed he was the best choice of a leader who would take the Americans' advice. However, from the very beginning Diem refused to listen to his American advisors. Diem was a cruel leader. In the early years of his reign, he rounded up thousands of people believed to be northern trusted cadres. Most of these people were tortured and murdered or placed in concentration camps.

Daniel Ellsberg

Ellsberg was a Marine company commander in Vietnam and returned a few years later with a team Lansdale organized in 1965 to reform the Saigon Regime and devise an effective pacification program. Two years later, Ellsberg returned to his job with the Rand Corporation, discouraged by the repetitive violence of the war of attrition Westmorland was waging. The Tet Offensive of 1968 only made his disillusions worse. Ellsberg lost faith in the system he had been a part of. He had served in the Pentagon in 1964 under McNamara and decided he had to do something about the war. Ellsberg began to covertly photocopy and remove top secret papers regarding the Vietnam War from the Pentagon in 1969. In 1971, Neil Sheehan, author of this book, published a series of articles from these so-called Pentagon Papers.

Neil Sheehan

Neil Sheehan was the author of this book and also a character within it. Sheehan served in the Army from 1959-1962 and then became a correspondent for the United Press International. Sheehan reported from Vietnam from 1962-1964, where he met John Vann. Sheehan was one of the reporters who visited the battlefield in Ap Bac and was shot at when Cao ordered his decoy firefight. Sheehan then moved on to the *New York Times* in 1964 and spent another year in Vietnam. In 1971, Sheehan obtained the Pentagon Papers from Ellsberg and published them in a series of articles in the *New York Times*.

Objects/Places

Korea

Korea is a small country between Japan, China and Russia. The United States held the south after World War II, and Russia held the north until the north invaded the south in 1950. The war in Korea was John Vann's first experience with war, since he was in pilot training when World War II ended.

Vietnam

Vietnam is a country that lies along the borders of Laos and Cambodia south of China. After World War II, the American government became concerned with the communist-led guerrillas in North Vietnam and communism's possible spread to South Vietnam. The American government sent military advisors to Vietnam to stop this spread, and although war was never officially declared, America lost more soldiers in the course of the Vietnam conflict than almost all wars America fought previously.

Norfolk, Virginia

John Paul Vann was born and spent most of his childhood in Norfolk.

My Tho

The Seminary, the headquarters of the 7th Division, was located in My Tho, the capital city of the Tien Giang Province in the Mekong Delta.

Hamlets

Hamlets were small villages or groupings of homes in the countryside of Vietnam.

Pacification Programs

Pacification was the use of military force or other measures to eradicate rebellion and restore an area to peace and government control. Vann's main goals were to help the peasants rebuild, to avoid the needless destruction of innocent people's homes and to prevent pointless killings.

Ferrum

Ferrum was the Methodist-run boarding school where John Paul spent the final years of high school, thanks to the generosity of a wealthy oyster dealer.

Viet Minh

Viet Minh was an acronym for the league for the independence of Vietnam. Viet Minh was the Army that Ho Chi Minh raised in the early fifties to fight against the French and the Japanese who occupied the country during that time.

Viet Cong

Viet Cong was a shortened version of Vietnamese communist, a slur the American reporters of the US Information Service came up with to address the Viet Minh.

Pentagon Papers

The Pentagon Papers were a 7,000-page collection of papers detailing America's involvement in Vietnam from 1945-1971 that were stolen and released to the press by Daniel Ellsberg.

ARVN

ARVN was an acronym for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. ARVN was the Army that Vann went to Vietnam to advise.

OSS

The OSS, or Office of Strategic Services, was the precursor to the CIA or Central Intelligence Agency.

MACV

MACV was the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

VNAF

VNAF stands for the Vietnamese Air Force. The American planes in the early years of the war were painted in the markings of VNAF because the Americans were only there to advise and observe.

M-15

The M-15 or Armalite riffles were machine gun riffles used by American soldiers during the Vietnam War.

L-19

The L-19 was a Cessna observation plane flown during the war in Vietnam.

Themes

Heroism

John Paul Vann was a brilliant soldier, one who managed to devise unorthodox ways of getting supplies to his fellow soldiers, who put himself in the line of fire to save fellow soldiers and who put his career on the line to attempt to right a wrong. Many soldiers during this time period did all of these things and more. Many men died in Vietnam during the years in which John Vann was in country. Many men were decorated, just as John Vann was. In this time of constant conflict, it was difficult for one man to stand out above the rest.

John Vann was not the only man to have a book written about his service in the Vietnam War. What made John Paul Vann stand out above all the others was that he saw a wrong from the moment it first appeared before him, and he did not ignore it. John Vann would have loved nothing more than to be an Army officer for his entire life, to rise to the rank of general. Vann put his entire career in jeopardy when he began fighting his immediate superiors regarding the wrongs he saw perpetrated in Vietnam. Vann knew the South Vietnamese people would never win a war against communist North Vietnam if their army was not willing to fight whenever they came into contact with the enemy on the battlefield. However, that was exactly what was happening. No matter how hard he tried, Vann could not convince the ARVN forces to risk casualties and fight their enemy. Vann repeatedly told his boss this and was nearly fired every time.

Does this make John Paul Vann a hero? In the eyes of the author it does. Neil Sheehan clearly thought well enough of Vann to write an entire book about him. Vann was the first to stand up, Sheehan said in his book. Vann was the first to turn to the reporters and tell the American people what was really happening in Vietnam. To some, this does make Vann a hero. To others, it makes Vann a traitor. Heroism has a broad definition and is open to individual interpretation. That may be what made it a major theme of this book.

Morality

A Bright Shining Lie deals with several situations where a person in the book must decide whether his intended actions are morally right or wrong. Vann had to chose several times, not only as a soldier, but also as a husband and father. Vann had a terrible childhood in which he was badly abused by a man he trusted as well as by the woman who gave birth to him. As a result, Vann felt he constantly had to prove himself a man. John Vann treated woman badly in his adulthood, maybe in some way getting back at his own mother for her abusive neglect. Vann also had to make the choice between continuing his career in the military or leaving to pursue other avenues. Vann needed the world to know what was going wrong in Vietnam. After his superiors chose to ignore his repeated complaints about the direction of the war, he felt that the only way to change things was to go public. This choice hurt his career, nearly got him fired and

found him facing a desk job at the Pentagon that would have driven him mad. Speaking out hurt Vann's career, but Vann could not accept the status quo in Vietnam. Vann knew the situation could not continue if America intended to win the war. Vann's choice to speak publicly appeared wrong in the eyes of his superiors and some patriotic Americans, but he felt it was his only option.

This book also deals with the decision Daniel Ellsberg made to release the Pentagon Papers. Ellsberg faced prison time for what he did. To Ellsberg, however, the risk was well worth the personal danger. Ellsberg wanted the world to know that the American government had lied to its people and that America's involvement in the war was much deeper than anyone could possibly comprehend. His actions led not only to a changing tide in the political view of the war, but also to an unprecedented court battle involving the supreme court and the *New York Times.* This was the beginning of one of the biggest scandals in political history, the Watergate scandal. Ellsberg's choice was clearly the right one in his point of view but clearly the wrong one in the view of the American president and many American citizens.

Family Values

Another theme in this book was family values. Vann grew up in a home without many values, in contrast to the home his wife grew up in, which had many strong values. Vann found himself unable to be a good husband and father. His past demons compelled him to be unfaithful to his wife, and his distance from his children and his lack of experience with the loving parts of parenthood caused him to find it very difficult to deal with his children. Often in the book, Vann refers to his children as Mary Jane's children. Vann's own values when it came to his biological family were warped and almost non-existent, as were those of his biological parents. Vann was damaged goods, and it was not surprising that he was unable to remain committed to his family.

However, in the military, Vann found it quite easy to be committed to the men who served under him and to be a good servant to his superior officers. Vann maintained his relationships with his men even after he served with them. He worked to get a medal for one man whose story he later stole and remained good friends with the Vietnamese general with whom he had worked and with whom he had the highest number of complaints during his first year in Vietnam. Perhaps his Army training created this paradox in Vann's behavior. Perhaps the Army was the only true family where Vann felt secure and where he was completely understood.

Style

Point of View

A Bright Shining Lie was written in the third person, switching to first person in those moments when the writer himself became a character in the book. The writer was involved in a few of the situations he describes in the book, some involving Vann and some not involving Van. During these events, the book became a first person account of the events the writer himself experienced during his time as a reporter in Vietnam. This point of view made readers feel like a deeper part of the story, more involved in the biography than they might have been if Sheehan had not put himself in his narrative.

Setting

The majority of the book was set in Vietnam, though it traveled through the events in John Paul Vann's life, taking the reader from Norfolk, Virginia to Japan to Korea and various points around the world. The biography began in the prestigious lands of Arlington Cemetery in Washington DC. However, the beginning was the end of the subject's life. John Paul Vann's life began in Norfolk, Virginia, in the poorer suburbs of the large city. The reader then moved to Korea and Germany, Kansas and New York, finally arriving in Vietnam where many of the citizens were poor. From there, the reader moved back to the Depression Era, to the beginning of Vann's mother's life, and to Vann's poor existence. Then the reader moved to the prosperity of Mary Jane's life and to the simple luxury of life for a military officer in Japan. Finally, the book moved back to Vietnam. It seems as if, no matter how many changes took place in John Paul Vann's life, he always ended up back where he began, a child of the Depression. However, at the end of his life, his body was interred in Arlington Cemetery, one of the most hallowed grounds on American soil.

Language and Meaning

The language of this biography was well educated with undertones of anger. At times, the reader felt as though he or she were listening to a lecture on the history of the American Army and the political climate of the 1960s. The book contained a lot of information about the Army and the history that led to the war in Vietnam. At other times, the book had the feel of a novel, a story of sadness and deprivation. The author clearly had affection and respect for his subject, a man he knew well during their shared time in Vietnam. The anger the author felt toward his subject's deprivation in life came out loud and clear on several occasions, including one section in which the writer called John Paul Vann's mother "white trash." "In the Norfolk of the 1930s the Southern term 'white trash' was not applied to a family on the basis of poverty alone. The term connoted a way of living more than it did income. Myrtle made the Vanns white trash." (Antecedents to the Man, pg. 408)

The author also used Army slang, such as the numerous acronyms the Army used to shorten the lengthy names of their various organizations. Also included in this biography were many examples of Vietnamese culture and language, such as the conventions of Vietnamese names and an explanation of why siblings rarely shared a common sire name, the lengthy names of Vietnamese military organizations and the various names of their hamlets and villages.

Structure

A Bright Shining Lie was told in one chapter and seven books that tended to be between eighty and a hundred pages long. Each book was divided into untitled sections, giving the reader occasional breaks, but each of these divisions was thirty to forty pages. Each section of the book contained a lot of information, and whole sections included history lessons about the structure of the Army and the political and military dynamics of the war in Vietnam. The biography was as much a history tome as it was the story of one man's life. The book also included sections for acknowledgments, a list of persons interviewed before the book was written, documents noted in the text of the book, source notes, a bibliography and an index.

The main focus of the book was John Paul Vann's actions in Vietnam. The book moved from his funeral to his experiences in Vietnam as an Army officer. Following his yearlong service, which was expressed in four of the seven books, Vann was reassigned to the Pentagon and later decided to retire. The next section of the biography went back to Vann's childhood, showing the reader the difficult years of Vann's beginnings through the Korean War, which was Vann's first experience with war. The last two books of the biography deal with the final years of Vann's life, which he spent trying to win the war in Vietnam as a civilian. The biography's pace was quite slow. The history lessons are worth the work, however.

The non-linear approach to telling John Paul Vann's life story, including not only biographical details but the historical context of Vietnam, built connections between John Paul Vann and the most important element of his life, the Vietnam War. By jumping from the historical truths of the war to the personal truths of Vann's childhood, the author built up a complete picture of the man and his motivations.

Quotes

"To Vann, other peoples were lesser peoples: it was the natural order of things that they accept American leadership. He was convinced that having gained the preeminence it had been destined to achieve, the United States would never relinquish the position. He did not see America as using its power for self-satisfaction. He saw the United States as a stern yet benevolent authority that enforced peace and brought prosperity to the peoples of the non-communist nations, sharing the bounty of its enterprise and technology of those who had been denied a fruitful life by poverty and social injustice and bad government." The Funeral, pg. 8

"He assumed that he and his fellow Americans had a right to take life and to spend it, as long as they did so with discretion, whenever killing and dying were necessary in their struggle. His assumptions were buttressed by his pride in being one of the best officers in the U.S. Army, the finest army that had ever existed, but he was also conscious that he and the Army represented a greater entity still, an entity in which he took even more pride. He was a guardian of the American empire." Going to War, pg. 43

"Cao and the other Saigon officers, Vann concluded, wanted to kill these people and destroy their homes and slaughter their livestock, not on a systematic basis, but often to intimidate them." Going to War, pg. 109

"Diem and his family believed that casualties suffered on offensive operations against the Ciet Cong had been a major cause of the abortive coup d'etat in November 1960. The Ngo Dinhs were convinced that the ARVN paratroop officers who had led the attempt had plotted with oppositionist politicians because they had been disgruntled over these losses."

Going to War, pg. 122

"When Harkins asked Diem if it was true that he had ordered his officers not to take casualties, Diem lied. It certainly was not true, Diem said." Going to War, pg. 125

"South Vietnam, it can truly be said, was the creation of Edward Lansdale. He hoodwinked the pro-Bao Dai officers in the Vietnamese National Army who were about to overthrow Diem in the fall of 1954 and engineered their removal. He masterminded the campaign that began in the spring of 1955 to crush the French-subsidized armies of the two religious sects, the Can Dai and the Hoa Hao, and the troops of the Binh Xuyen organized crime society." Antecedents to a Confrontation, pg. 138-139

"He looked out across the darkness toward Bac, as the token artillery fire sounded in the muffled way that artillery always seems to sound on battlefields at night and an occasional star shell from the batteries illuminated the sky despite Cao's ban on flares.

"'They were brave men,' he said. 'They gave a good account of themselves today.'" The Battle of Ap Bac, pg. 265

"He had meant more than Halberstam could have realized when he said at the airport farewell with his small, tight smile: 'You never hurt me more than I wanted to be hurt.' He also said more about himself than he meant to say when he told the Army historian: 'We had also, to all the visitors who came over there, been one of the bright shining lies.'" Taking on the System, pg. 385

"John Paul Vann was an original white Southerner. His lineage reached back centuries to the beginnings of the South, and his birth was in keeping with his ancestry: the majority of his forebears had been social illegitimates." Antecedents to the Man, pg. 389-390

"Even though the man might be the provider, raising the family was ultimately the woman's responsibility. In a time of trouble, a woman should sacrifice for her children, holding them firmly to her and nurturing them into adulthood. If a woman fulfilled her duty to her family, she would also be fulfilling her duty to God and her country, for without the family, the church and the nation could not exist, Mary Jane's grandmother said." Antecedents to the Man, pg. 429

"When he looked at these farm youngsters he did not simply see Vietnamese children. He saw potential Vietnamese counterparts of Lansdale's Filipinos - native leaders so infused with American values and so grateful for American help that they would naturally make the cause of the United States their own. 'Had we begun eleven years ago,' he said in a lecture in Denver while on home leave that fall, 'we'd now be having the leaders emerging that we want. I think we can still do it through children like this.'" A Second Time Around, pg. 525

"Moore would not leave on Tuesday afternoon without three of his sergeants. They were from C Company, and he thought they were still out in the elephant grass where they had disappeared the day before....'I won't leave without them,' he cried." A Second Time Around, pg. 577-578

"Vann made Myrtle in death the mother she had refused to be to him in life. He had the stone carver chisel into the gray marble: 'Myrtle Lee Vann...Beloved Mother of John, Dorothy, Frank & Gene.'" John Vann Stays, pg. 607

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Jesse's desire to hand President Nixon half of his draft card. Do you think his behavior was appropriate for the situation, considering who his father had been? Was it anger at the war that caused Jesse to do this, or was it his grief over the loss of his father? Should he have been allowed to give the card to the president?

Discuss Diem's order not to allow his armies to incur casualties. Was Diem's order practical? Would a higher number of casualties have led to Diem's removal from office quicker? Should Cao have gone against his orders during the Ap Bac battle, when it was clear something needed to be done?

Discuss Cao's actions at the end of the Battle of Ap Bac. Why did he send in the paratroopers at all if he didn't intend to put them where they could stop the Viet Cong's escape? What was the point in the mock battle Cao put on the following day?

Discuss Harkins' view of the Battle of Ap Bac. Why did Harkins convince himself that the Saigon side had won, even though it was a clear victory for the other side?

Discuss Vann's decision to retire from the military. Was his decision based on his inability to advance to general or did it have more to do with his anger over being turned down to speak in front of the Joint Chiefs?

Discuss Vann's decision to return to Vietnam. Did this decision have anything to do with his desire to see America win the war? Or did it have more to do with his personal boredom?

Discuss the pacification programs in Vietnam. What is pacification? How would John Vann's plan have changed things if it had been put into effect? Why weren't the American generals interested in pursuing the pacification programs?