COLIN POWELL'S VIETNAM AND THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN STATESMAN

MANY VIETNAM VETERANS HAD THEIR LIVES AND CAREERS SHAPED BY MILITARY, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC ACTIONS DURING THE WAR, BUT COLIN POWELL IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HELPED SHAPE MILITARY, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC ACTIONS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL AFTER THE WAR.

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A MAN BETRAYED BY HIS OWN COUNTRY

OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2021

COLIN POWELL'S DEATH

Colin L. Powell, who in four decades of public life served as the nation's top soldier, diplomat and national security adviser, and whose speech at the United Nations in 2003 helped pave the way for the United States to go to war in Iraq, died on Monday. October 18, 2021, He was 84.

The cause was complications of Covid-19, his family said in a statement, adding that he had been vaccinated and was being treated at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, in Bethesda, Md., when he died there.

A spokeswoman said his immune system had been compromised by multiple myeloma, for which he had been undergoing treatment. He had been due to receive a booster shot for his vaccine last week, she said, but had to postpone it when he fell ill. He had also been treated for early stages of Parkinson's disease, she said.

Born: April 5, 1937, New York City

Residence: McLean, Va.

Education: City College of New York, bachelor's degree in geology; U.S. Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.; MBA, George Washington University; National War College, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.

COLIN POWELL'S SERVICE TO AMERICA

He served in the office of Defense Secretary Harold Brown during Jimmy Carter's administration and in the office of Ronald Reagan's defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger. Reagan made Powell his national security adviser in 1987. Two years later George H.W. Bush appointed him chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a position he continued to hold in Bill Clinton's presidency until October 1993. He culminated his government career as George W. Bush's secretary of state from January 2001 to January 2005.

Powell, a City College of New York ROTC graduate commissioned a second lieutenant in June 1958, served in Vietnam as a captain advising South Vietnamese units from December 1962 through November 1963 and as a major in the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal) from June 1968 through July 1969.

After returning to the United States, he earned an MBA from George Washington University in 1971 and was selected for the White House Fellows program, which enabled him to spend a year working in President Richard Nixon's Office of Management and Budget.

His rise up the ranks included positions as a battalion commander in Korea, a brigade commander in the 101st Airborne Division and commanding general of V Corps in Germany*. In April 1989, Powell was promoted to four-star general and that October became Joint Chiefs chairman, not only the first African-American in that position but also the youngest officer (age 52) and first ROTC graduate.*

He oversaw the December 1989 intervention in Panama to oust dictator Manuel Noriega, who refused to relinquish power after democratic elections and had been charged with drug trafficking. But Powell's real rise to fame occurred during the 1991 Gulf War's Operation Desert Storm, launched after Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces invaded neighboring Kuwait.

Powell's tenure as secretary of state was marked by some of the most tumultuous events in recent American history: the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

THE VIETNAM COLIN POWELL KNEW

Powell talked about his experiences in Vietnam, lingering controversies of the war, the lessons he drew from it and why he never ran for president in an interview with *Vietnam Editor Chuck Springston.*

In your memoir, My American Journey, you recall a conversation with South Vietnamese Captain Vo Cong Hieu at a base in the A Shau Valley during your first assignment in the field. He said something that would come to sum up the war in your words.

I got out of the helicopter, looked around and saw that the base was against the side of a mountain, and the other side of the mountain was Laos. There we were, in a huge triple-canopy forest. And logic says, why is this base here? What strategic purpose is it serving? That strategic purpose, as explained to me by Captain Hieu, was "It's here to protect the airfield." Well, what's the airfield here for? "To resupply the base."

It struck me, a 26-year-old infantry captain, as "We're here because we're here." Now that was a bit unfair. The airfield allowed you to have other operations going on and it established a presence in the valley.

The young captain Colin Powell leans against his hooch in the A Shau Valley in 1963 wearing his "showoff" uniform. On patrol, the name tag and silver bars were gone, and the grenade was carried more carefully.

Even so, "We're here because we're here" was a metaphor for the war?

It finally came to a halt when General Westmoreland asked for yet another large tranche of soldiers, and Lyndon Johnson said, "That's it. No more." *We had 540,000 there then [1968].*

It had become a much broader war, not just sandal-clad Viet Cong guys running around. The North Vietnamese Army had come in. *No matter what we did, we could not stop them from coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail*. *We could not stop them from re-equipping or resupplying their forces.*

We kept hoping we could draw them out into a fixed battle, where they could be defeated. But they had a better strategy than we did. They picked their place and time. They came out during the Tet Offensive [at the end of January 1968] and caused a lot of damage. They lost huge numbers, but they understood it wasn't a military operation. It was a political operation. They were not aiming to kill Americans. *They were aiming to kill the American spirit. **And they succeeded**.*

Major Powell looks at circling helicopters after the November 1968 crash landing of a copter that carried him, Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, commander of the Americal Division, and others. Powell pulled a barely conscious Gettys from the wreckage. All of the men survived.

You and the other advisers in the early years were sent to Vietnam by Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy. Did Eisenhower and Kennedy make a mistake in starting the movement of U.S. troops to Vietnam?

No. It started out as a reflection of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and China and our desire to help this small country defend itself against insurgency and a foreign invasion [from North Vietnam*]. When I went over there in 1962, I felt I was doing something noble, and that's what President Kennedy thought when he was sending us over.*

The original mission was to advise the South Vietnamese on how to defend themselves. Time passes, and you have the Gulf of Tonkin incident [in August 1964, when North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked a U.S. destroyer]. *Lyndon Johnson is the one who made the fateful decision to add more.* Then you have the Marines and the Army starting to come in 1965. But I can't put that onto Eisenhower or Kennedy.

Eisenhower wouldn't help the French [who controlled Vietnam in the 1950s and wanted the U.S. military to join a fight against Vietnamese seeking independence] when he was asked. He was very careful about getting into foreign entanglements. There has been speculation that if Kennedy had lived, he would not have continued. I don't know what he would have done.

As I ended my year as an adviser in '63, *I realized we had been stomping around in the forest and chasing people who were not catchable.*

We were starting to do things we thought would help us, such as destroying crops. We were walking through planted areas with chemical sprayers, spraying manioc. Then we started burning hooches. I thought, the hooches can be rebuilt in a day, and this will be replanted. So where is this all going?

By the time I left in 1969, after my second tour, *it was clear that we had gotten into a war we didn't fully understand.* It was not a war of communism vs. capitalism or totalitarianism vs. democracy. It was a war of nationalism. The North Vietnamese were determined to reunite Vietnam into one country.

Powell receives the Soldier's Medal for heroism

Do you think we could have beat the North Vietnamese and won the war?

They were prepared to put every life at risk. They were truly willing to lose whatever it took to win. I remember seeing a statistic that said their birth rate is higher than any kill rate we can impose upon them. *This will go on forever*. And they were going to be sustained by outside powers.

During World War II, the objective was to take terrain and hold it until the enemy surrendered. In Vietnam, it was search and destroy, kill large numbers of the enemy in an area, then pull back. Could U.S. forces have applied the take-and-hold approach to get a clear victory?

My own view was—notwithstanding what many of my fellow veterans have said—that we could not have done that. We were never prepared to put in what would have been required. We also were supporting a regime that had lost some of its legitimacy. We had coup after coup. It wasn't a government that had the support of the people any longer. People were suffering economically, suffering from the NVA and the VC.

And what would we have done? Occupy the whole country with a million American soldiers and keep them there? Remember, we were not invading Vietnam. We were fighting a Vietnamese war in South Vietnam. There was a border, the 17th parallel. So they [the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong] had a sanctuary. They kept pouring in support, pouring in troops, taking massive casualties, but kept coming. *And we were not seriously bombing them in a way that hurts*

I love air power. I used air power in every conflict I have been seriously involved in. But I'm also an infantry officer. If you can't hold and control the ground, you haven't won. Planes fly back to their bases. Ships are at sea. *If you want to really win a war, you've got to have a guy with a rifle.*

In World War II we bombed Germany into total destruction, but it wasn't until the Russian army entered Berlin and we met the Russians at the Elbe that the war was brought to a conclusion.
In Japan, we sent an army to take control after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki'

After we left in 1973, could the South Vietnamese have prevailed against the North's invasion if the United States had continued to fund them?

That's the view of a lot of Vietnam veterans—that it was the Congress who lost this war. I can't buy into that. By that point, it didn't make any difference whether we could have [won] because the American people had made a decision. We are a people's army. And the losses were hundreds a week. *I do not*

think that the American people had the will to fight the kind of war that the North Vietnamese were going to fight.

You have to remember what was going on in the country at the time. I arrived home [from the first tour] the day Kennedy was killed, and then five years later his brother was killed.

Martin Luther King was killed April 4, 1968. *The country was really coming apart.*

We had racial problems. The vice president resigned in disgrace and then the president got caught in Watergate and he resigned in disgrace. There was still a Soviet Union. There was still a People's Republic of China—maybe Nixon had been there, but it wasn't yet the China it is today. We had a recession. The counterculture was sweeping across the country. *We had to do something. And one of the things we had to do was get out of the war.*

So what do we as a country say to the families of those who died there? What did they die for? Did they die in vain?

They served their country. And when the country called on them, or conscripted them, they didn't shrink from it. You should be proud of the fact that your loved one answered the call.

We regret all of the losses, all of the 58,000. I lost three of my CCNY classmates, including one of my dearest friends, Tony Mavroudis. But that's war. It was the first one we ever lost like that. It was a biggie. But we came out of it. *America is a country of enormous resilience.*

What are the lessons of the Vietnam War?

The major lesson I used as chairman, national security adviser and secretary of state was to advise leaders: Make sure you understand what you're getting into. *Don't fight a war with somebody who has a greater investment in it and a greater cause than ours.* That's manifested itself in other things I have said over the years, such as "You break it, you own it."

The second lesson is once you decide something is worth it and you're prepared to invest military force, in addition to political and diplomatic efforts, *make sure you don't just send a few advisers and think that will work*. This has become known as the Powell Doctrine, but it really is classical military doctrine. If you look at the basic principles of war, the two captured in my thinking are objectives and mass.

First, what is the objective? What are we trying to do? Have we analyzed the enemy, the terrain, the weather and all the other aspects of the situation? An objective should have a political basis to it. *Why are we doing this politically? Not just can we do it militarily.*

And once you've got the objective, the other part is mass. What I call decisive force. People are forever calling it Powell's "overwhelming" force doctrine. I used that word once, and I realized it was a bad word. Never used it again. "Decisive" means make sure you put enough in so that you will prevail, will have a decisive outcome.

Desert Storm is a perfect example. Panama is an even better example. When Manuel Noriega killed one of our people [a Marine stationed in Panama] and assaulted some others, we had a plan ready. We've got 13,000 stationed there already, and let's send another 13,000 in. We have a [Panamanian] president in waiting, hiding under a bed. He's been elected, so once we take the country over, we've got a guy to swear in that same day. We got rid of the Panamanian army, but we brought it right back, reconstituted it, *which is what we did not do in Iraq many years later, to my distress.*

We didn't take charge of Iraq. We disbanded the army, which was a huge strategic error, compared to what we did in Panama, where we rebuilt it as fast as we took it apart, which was what we were supposed to do in Iraq. But that was not the decision made by the Pentagon. We did not secure the country. And it goes south for four years until President Bush orders a surge, but the surge should have

come at the beginning, not in the end. *And so we're still in this conflict. Iraq's not yet a success in my judgment*.

Powell meets Richard Nixon in the fall of 1972 after being selected as a White House Fellow

Should a corrupt dictatorial leadership, like South Vietnam's, deter us from joining forces with a country even though we have a common enemy?

It should deter us, but deter doesn't mean stop. It means there is a yellow blinking light, and we ought to be very, very careful about getting deeply involved in these places. But sometimes the politics and the strategic situation require you to do so.

After the Vietnam War, how did you and the other young career officers' size up the condition of the U.S. Army and determine any changes that needed to be made?

The advisers who went in were very professional. The Army and Marine Corps troops that started deploying in '65 were very professional. They had good leadership. But over the next several years, we started to lose a lot of people and were rotating a lot of people with one-year tours and six-month command tours.

The quality of the force deteriorated. We started to have drug problems. There were some fragging problems, not as many as people suggested, but I used to be careful in my own hooch, move my bed around because there was the potential to be fragged by your own troops. *(Fragging meant being killed by one of your own soldiers …..yes it did happen)*

The young soldiers coming in reflected the society they were coming from. *Support for the war was dropping.* Racial tension was rising. Conscription was seen as a problem.

When I was in Korea as a battalion commander, we were at the beginning of the all-volunteer force. It hadn't been funded adequately, so the youngsters we were getting tended to be not high school graduates. Judges had said to some: Go to the Army or go to jail. *A high percentage did not speak English.* The challenge was immense, but it was the most rewarding year I've ever had—getting these kids in shape.

I told them, "If you do drugs, I'm going to throw you out." Every morning I got up with them, and we ran 4 miles and got them tired. And we kept them tired all day long, so when night fell they were too tired to get into too much trouble.

We constantly had competitions. Best clerk, best mess hall, best anything, to make sure that every youngster who had never been successful in high school had a chance to win. Some of my officers had wives who came in to teach these kids, get them GEDs, send them home better than we got them.

A couple of years later I was a brigade commander in the 101st, in ’76 to ’77. By then you could see the quality improve because we were taking 95-98 percent high school graduates.

The real end to this period and the beginning of a new era was Ronald Reagan. He and my boss, Cap Weinberger, put tons of money into the military and restored pride. *And from then on it’s been a fabulous force.*

What was your favorite music from the 1960s and ’70s?

In the ’60s I was pretty much in the forest, but Marty Robbins’ “El Paso” was one of my favorites. I knew Elvis Presley. I liked his music. I really remember the songs of the early ’70s because I was in Korea freezing my butt off in this metal hut that I lived in. AFN [American Forces Network] would come on in the morning and play “Rock the boat, don’t rock the boat baby,” by the Hues Corporation. Also Fifth Dimension songs, and there was “Hotel California” [by the Eagles].

That era was noted for some unusual clothing styles. What did you wear when you were off duty?

I could not keep up with the troops. They were wearing bell-bottoms. And the black troops had some sharp clothes that you wouldn’t believe. Go look at some of those old Super Fly movies, and you’ll see what they wore. There’s a picture of me shaking hands with President Nixon, and you’ll see my hair is a lot longer. I had something of a fro, but not a full fro, and I was wearing a hideous double-knit suit.

Which political or military leaders do you admire most?

Lincoln was a remarkable political and military leader. And Washington, who lost over and over but learned as he lost and became a brilliant strategist. Eisenhower was not noted as a great tactician in his early years, but he was a great staff officer and a great strategist. *He went from colonel to four stars in three years and got command of Europe.*

One person I should mention is George Marshall. Roosevelt had to decide who was going to go to Europe to lead the invasion. Marshall badly wanted it, and Roosevelt gave it to Eisenhower, who had been a junior officer under Marshall. Roosevelt said, “George, I could not sleep well at night if you were not here.” And Marshall said, “Yes, sir.” And that was the end of it. “Yes, sir.” He was that kind of selfless leader that I have always admired.

In almost every major war in American history, someone who served in it became president. How come one of the longest wars, Vietnam, never produced a president

We didn’t win. None of the generals emerged from Vietnam with political reputation

Do you ever regret not having run for president?

No. I found other ways to serve our nation and my fellow citizens.

TWO MAJOR “EVENTS “ THAT CAME BACK TO HAUNT COLIN POWELL THE REST OF HIS LIFE

THE MY LAI MASSACRE

Several months before Powell was assigned to the Americal Division in Vietnam, members of same infantry brigade perpetrated perhaps the most horrific crime against Vietnamese civilians during the entire war. What became known as the My Lai massacre entailed the murder of more than 500 unarmed civilians—including women, children and infants—in the captured village of My Lai. When rumors began to spread of a possible atrocity committed by U.S. soldiers*, the army called for an internal investigation and Powell was one of the officers tasked with looking into the charges*.

"This was still early in the Army's cover up of what happened, but Powell wrote a pretty simple, glossy overview saying that there was no evidence of any kind of massacre," says Matthews*. "He literally said that relations between the American forces and the South Vietnamese people were 'excellent,' which was hardly the truth."*

Matthews says that Powell later admitted that his career ambitions and a desire to preserve his reputation as a loyal officer likely influenced his thinking during the war, but he also blamed the atrocities committed by *all sides* to the awful realities of war.

A MAN BETRAYED BY HIS OWN COUNTRY

POWELL TELLS THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD THAT IRAQ DOES HAVE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

THE STORY BEGINS– CIA REPORT CONFIRMS IRAQ'S POSSESION Of WMD'S

Powell used his reputation for credibility to help convince the world Saddam Hussein was an imminent threat, ***but the US intel was false. They had used him to tell a lie***.

As secretary of state, Colin L. Powell was a reluctant warrior in President George W. Bush's push to invade Iraq after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He warned the president that the invasion could

destabilize the Middle East, upset oil markets and divert political will and resources from the unfinished fight against Al Qaeda.

In a two-hour meeting with Mr. Bush on Aug. 5, 2002, Mr. Powell laid down what became known as the Pottery Barn rules: *"You break it, you're going to own it."*

Mr. Powell did not recommend whether the country should go to war or not — that, he believed, was the president's prerogative — *but he outlined options*. After a failed diplomatic effort to avert a conflict, Mr. Bush turned to Mr. Powell to bolster the administration's case for use of force if the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, did not comply with international demands.

In a 76-minute speech at the United Nations on Feb. 5, 2003, Mr. Powell pressed the American case for a possible war to disarm Iraq, presenting photographs, electronic intercepts of conversations between Iraqi military officers and information from *defectors aimed at proving that Saddam Hussein posed an imminent danger to the world.*

Powell's speech is seen as having helped bring US public opinion behind the war. He was, after all, a trusted, popular figure – so much so that, before he spoke, US vice-president Dick Cheney reportedly told him: "*You've got high poll ratings, you can afford to lose a few points."*

Offering the Bush administration's most explicit effort to connect the activities of Iraq and Al Qaeda, Mr. Powell suggested that Iraq's lethal weapons could be given at any time to terrorists who could use them against the United States or Europe.

He provided new details about Iraq's effort to develop mobile laboratories to make germ weapons. He asserted that Iraq had sought to hide missiles in its western desert.

Significantly, he cited intelligence reports that Saddam Hussein had authorized his military to use poison gas if the United States invaded**.**

Powell speaks to The United Nations
Feb 5, 2003

Before the speech, Mr. Powell had spent several days at the C.I.A. grilling analysts on the intelligence, paring back many of the claims in an early White House draft of the speech that he felt were unsupported. Now he felt confident, he told aides before the address in New York.

"Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-Sept. 11 world," Mr. Powell declared.

The speech failed to persuade many skeptics in the international community, *but Mr. Powell's personal appeal swung many Americans to support the war, however reluctantly.*

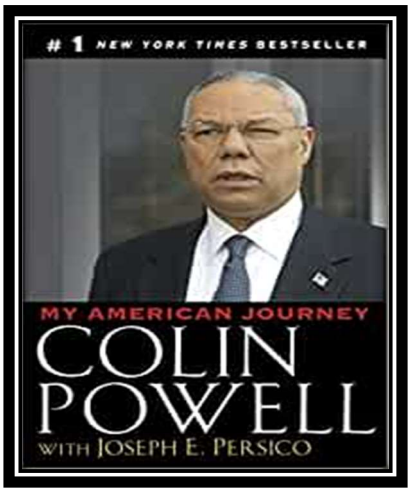
AFTER AMERICAN TROOPS INVADED IN MARCH OF 2003, HOWEVER, IT BECAME CLEAR THERE WERE NO WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRUCTION. THE INTELLIGENCE HAD BEEN WRONG AND POWELL HAD JUST PASSED IT ON TO THE WORLD.

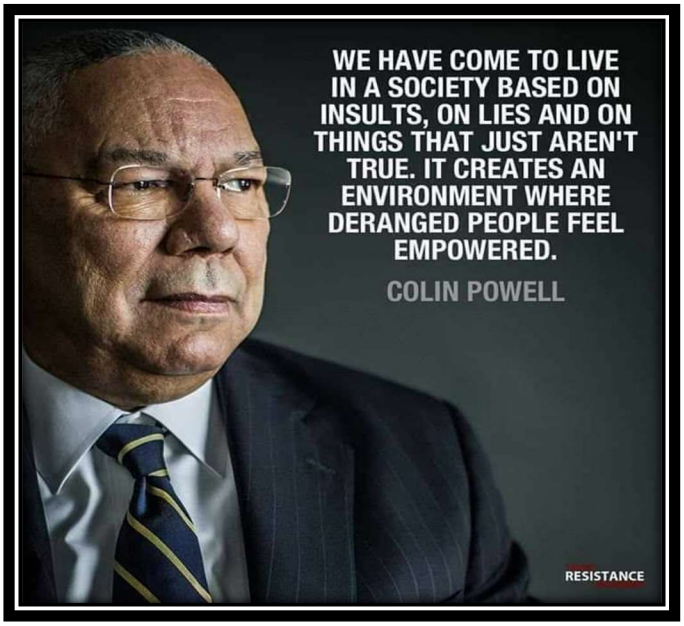
SOME STILL SAY THAT THIS IS THE REASON HE NEVER RAN FOR THE PRESIDENCY

HE WAS DELIBERATELY USED BY HIS OWN COUNTRY TO MISLEAD THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Two years later, Mr. Powell told Barbara Walters of ABC News that his speech to the United Nations was "painful" for him personally and would forever be a "blot" on his record. "I'm the one who presented it on behalf of the United States to the world," Mr. Powell said, acknowledging that his presentation "*will always be a part of my record.*

In 1995, he published a best-selling autobiography, *My American Journey*, which chronicles his life and its influences, the ins and outs of military bureaucracy, and what he learned in his life about personal rules and character.





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