

Rethinking American Press Coverage of the Vietnam War, 1965-68

Many scholars and other observers of U.S. press coverage of the Vietnam War have criticized the media for showing either too much or too little. Some have charged the press with sensationalizing the war's difficulties, while others have pointed out their reproduction of the official, optimistic viewpoint, particularly before the Tet offensive of early 1968. This article takes the middle ground, accepting and modifying elements of both positions in this highly partisan debate. Using stories from both print and television, it argues that journalists presented disturbing portraits of the American GI and the war before Tet, alongside more optimistic dispatches. Despite common assertions about the shattering effect of the Tet offensive, press coverage of those attacks repeated, albeit in more dramatic and consistent fashion, earlier gestures about the war's dark sides.

If most American presidents believe the press distorts the truth about their administrations, Lyndon Johnson may have given that frustration its most colorful expression. The notoriously ribald president once said of the media, "I feel like a hound bitch in heat in the country. If you run, they chew your tail off, if you stand still, they slip it to you." On the matter of the Vietnam War in particular, he believed the news organizations opposed his actions and delivered biased, negative coverage, showing "bad things" from the war zone designed to make readers and viewers "hate us."¹ After the war a wide variety of commentators—from scholars to politicians to former military and diplomatic officials—echoed and elaborated upon Johnson's view, accusing the media of sensationalizing the war with bloody, misleading, or "oppositional" dis-

patches.² The political scientist Guenter Lewy, for example, wrote in 1978 that television had offered "one-dimensional" portraits of "devastation and suffering": "War has always been beastly, but the Vietnam war was the first war exposed to television cameras and seen in practically every home, often in living color."³

An equally diverse set of observers has provided a vital corrective to such critics of the Vietnam-era press corps. Far from showing too much, these writers have argued, the media showed and said too little of the dark sides of war. In his oral history of Vietnam veterans published in 1981, Mark Baker contended that journalists covering the Vietnam War on television sanitized the horrors of modern combat. He introduced *Nam* with these words:

We didn't see it all on television. The Technicolor blotch of napalm flickering on the screen while Walter [Cronkite] recited the day's body count like a grim blessing over our suppers had little to do with gagging on the stench of a burning man. We sanitize war with romantic adventure and paranoid propaganda to make it tasteful enough for us to live with it.⁴

Other writers have agreed that the press offered fairly bloodless and uncritical reporting, especially in the years between the commitment of American ground troops in March 1965 and the Tet offensive of January-February 1968.⁵ These scholars have



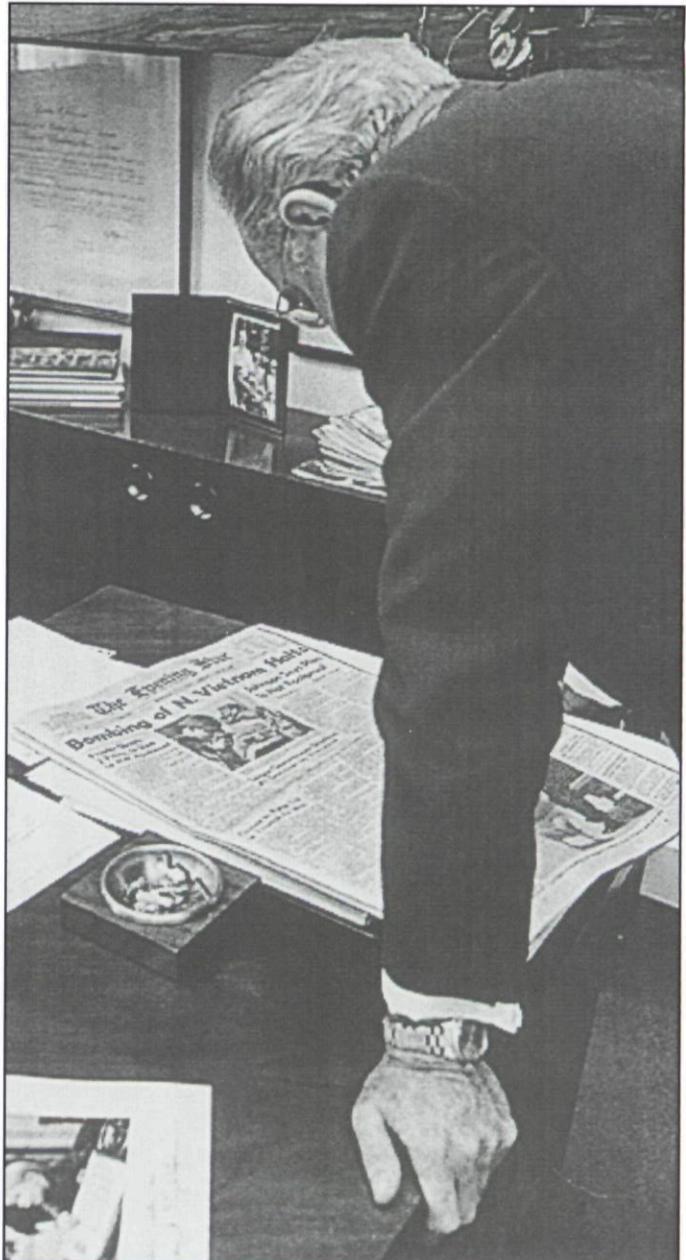
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stressed that before Tet, most television and magazine reports reproduced the viewpoint of the Johnson administration, while editors withheld particularly gruesome realities of combat. As Daniel Hallin put it, before 1968 "most news coverage was highly supportive of American intervention in Vietnam." In terms of violence, William Hammond suggested, "What the public saw . . . was hardly the carnage that critics of the press have tended to allege."⁶

Despite the usefulness of such interpretations, the common implication that Tet was a turning point in news coverage—as well as the emphasis on journalists' commitment to the war effort before it—may obscure the fact that troubling images of American GIs did circulate in the media early in the Vietnam War. News from Vietnam between 1965 and 1968 presented the war as anything but a "romantic adventure." Although the mainstream press was not explicitly "antiwar" before Tet, it did lay bare the confusion, misery, difficulty, and tragedy of the conflict. At the same time, though, the media did not merely sensationalize the war through constant blood and gore. Early coverage of the Vietnam War on television and in popular periodicals was enormously complex, at times foreshadowing the grim and critical reporting of the post-Tet years.

In the early 1960s a handful of journalists, including David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Malcolm Browne, and Peter Arnett, were covering what still seemed a distant and murky conflict. Under President John Kennedy, the United States increased the number of advisers it sent to assist the South Vietnamese regime in its struggle against the communist forces of the National Liberation Front (NLF), or Vietcong, and their allies in communist North Vietnam.⁷ The early print reporters strongly supported the presence of American advisers in Vietnam but increasingly questioned the likelihood of defeating the communists. Stories in the *New York Times*—and Halberstam's 1965 book *The Making of a Quagmire*—depicted a determined enemy, unmotivated and poorly trained South Vietnamese soldiers, and American officials who grasped neither the political nature of the war nor the unsuitability of massive military power to such a conflict. Just as the correspondents in Vietnam recognized the disastrous geopolitical consequences of an American withdrawal, they also foresaw trouble if the United States upped its commitment. With great prescience Halberstam in his book contemplated the costs of sending American soldiers to Vietnam: "Whatever military gains were brought by U.S. troops might soon be countered by the political loss. . . . It would be a war without fronts, fought against an elusive enemy, and extremely difficult for the American people to understand."⁸ Despite such warnings, in the years after Kennedy's assassination in 1963 the Johnson administration escalated the war, culminating in the commitment of ground troops to protect the American airbase at Danang in March 1965.

With large numbers of American boys now in harm's way, Vietnam had turned from a back-page news story into what *The New Yorker's* Michael Arlen later called "a central fact in American life."⁹ By 1965, there were print journalists in Vietnam representing four magazines (*Life*, *Look*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*), two wire services (the Associated Press and United Press International), and several newspapers (notably the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*). Halberstam, Sheehan, Browne, Arnett, Bernard Fall, Stanley Karnow, and others distinguished themselves covering the war in print. Prominent photographers in Vietnam included David Douglas Duncan, Carl Mydans, Larry Burrows, Eddie Adams, Horst Faas, Dickey Chapelle, and military cameraman Ronald Haeberle. Large, color photographs in *Life* and other periodicals, sitting on



Lyndon Johnson reads about the bombing of North Vietnam in the Washington Star in November 1968. The president and the press had a stormy relationship over the war while he was in office from 1963 to 1969. (National Archives and Records Administration photograph)

coffee tables in waiting rooms throughout the United States during the Vietnam era, comprised a large part of the war's visual legacy.

Yet Vietnam is better remembered as the first televised war. "Most of us knew about it, felt about it, from television," wrote Arlen.¹⁰ Each of the three main networks had correspondents in Vietnam by 1965. CBS and NBC lengthened their nightly news programs from fifteen to thirty minutes in 1963, and ABC did so in 1967, allowing more time for coverage of the war in Vietnam. Televised dispatches arrived in American living rooms from correspondents who would go on to prominent careers in journalism: Ed Bradley, Garrick Utley, Ted Koppel, Morley Safer, Dan Rather, and Mike Wallace. The network studio anchors—Walter Cronkite, Chet

Huntley, David Brinkley, Peter Jennings and others—shepherded the field reports from Vietnam to the American public. After the Tet offensive of 1968 some anchors became increasingly critical of the war (Cronkite famously pronounced Vietnam a “stalemate” on February 27, 1968), but through 1967 these men tended to present the news with little interpretation.¹¹

Indeed, as Susan Moeller has pointed out in her book on combat photography, these publications and television networks were institutions of the “establishment media.”¹² They considered themselves allies of the White House even when their correspondents in the field sent back pessimistic reports about the war. In the early period after American ground troops arrived in country—from March 1965 through 1967—even those journalists who questioned American methods in Vietnam rarely challenged the American presence there (as some reporters had during the Kennedy years). The media, like the public, generally supported Cold War anticomunism and approved of the American intervention in Vietnam. Lest television viewers had forgotten the threat, hanging on the wall behind Cronkite’s desk on the CBS nightly newscast was a map of Vietnam with “RED CHINA” looming to the north.¹³

Nevertheless, during the Vietnam War there was considerable—and unprecedented—room for dissent among the press corps. While censorship of press coverage had prevailed during World War II and in the Korean War by 1951, no official control of the media occurred at any point during the Vietnam War. With all of the technological advances of the 1960s, particularly television and satellites, military officials simply could not imagine censoring the news. Gen. William Westmoreland, for example, believed the logistics of censorship were “forbidding to contemplate.”¹⁴

Some methods of control, however, did restrict reporters in Vietnam. Members of the media often faced official requests to withhold news of troop movements and graphic depictions of the dead and wounded. Reporters whom the military leadership in Vietnam did not favor might be denied transportation to the countryside, official accreditation, interviews with commanders, or lodging at military bases. And the brass could, as always, hold back or distort the information it released to the press. For years the military’s public information officers in Saigon held the much-derided “Five-O’clock Follies,” a daily briefing that provided the official version of the war. Indeed, many stories from news agencies during the Vietnam War relied on information provided by military and administration representatives. And television networks had their own policies governing the release of footage that might disturb families of the dead and wounded.¹⁵

In short, there were numerous informal ways the military and government could manage the news, but early in the war the press, usually fell into line of its own volition. Eventually journalists in Vietnam took advantage of the lack of official censorship and delivered more critical war reporting. After the Tet offensive of early 1968 the tenor of press coverage in Vietnam became more skepti-

cal, and the impact of that change on administration policy and public opinion became the subject of an extensive, highly partisan debate for decades afterwards.¹⁶

Yet if journalists generally supported American involvement in Indochina early in the war, that did not inhibit them from propagating troubling depictions of the GI. Between 1965 and 1968 the media, particularly popular magazines and television networks, trotted out manifold versions of the foot soldier, some of which coexisted awkwardly with editorial support for the war. The upshot was a bewildering set of portraits of soldiers and of the war effort generally which was a “constant flow of words and images” bringing “obfuscation,” not “clarification,” according to *The New Yorker’s* noted correspondent Robert Shaplen.¹⁷

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Though the Vietnam War is better remembered for a breakdown in military discipline after 1970, in the early period of the war reporters lauded the efficiency, teamwork, and might of the American armed forces.¹⁹ This image of professionalism was a natural one given the high proportion of professional or volunteer soldiers (compared to draftees) in the country.²⁰ Invoking a theme that had dominated coverage of World War II, the press once again placed individual soldiers within the framework of a well-oiled machine.

In April 1965, just a few weeks after American ground forces arrived in Vietnam, *Time* ran a cover story titled “Who’s Fighting in Viet Nam: A Gallery of American Combatants.” The piece emphasized professionalism, skill, and teamwork. “The American serviceman in Viet Nam,” it said, “is probably the most proficient the nation has ever produced.” To operate in the cockpit of a Thunderchief fighter-bomber, for example, “requires the highest degree of human ingenuity and precision.” When Robbie Risner, the pilot featured on the cover of the magazine, was hit by ground fire and bailed out of his Thunderchief, “his professionalism saved him.”²¹

Compared to the situation before the March landing, one demolitions expert told *Time*, the American coordination and equipment in Vietnam were awe-inspiring: “But look at us now. We’ve got every weapon we ask for. We’ve got a scientifically laid-out camp with clear fields of fire and plenty of wire. When we ask for air support, we get it. We’ve even got a dispensary and an icebox. This

time we've got what we need to do the job.”²² The press told American readers that technology, know-how, and teamwork were going to level the playing field against a shadowy enemy. And how would the Americans’ lumbering military compete against guerrillas? “To this,” reported *Newsweek* in July, “U.S. military men reply that today’s American soldier and marine is as well prepared as any fighting man in the world for waging guerrilla warfare.”²³

Americans fighting in Vietnam also were brave, though reporters did not gloss over the terror and agony of combat. In November 1965, Bill Harvey of NBC interviewed several injured GIs from their beds. In halting tones and in obvious pain, the fallen men spoke frankly of their fears. Harvey asked Pfc. James Shaddon how he had felt during a recent ambush: “I was trying to stay cool-headed but I was a little scared anyway, [breathing heavily] tryin’ to watch for snipers up in the tree but they were pretty hard to see there. A lot smarter than you think, they are, they’re real camouflaged and they know a lot of good tactics.”

Another GI described the same ambush with terror in his voice and expression.²⁴ ABC aired a similar report that evening on the, improbably named Toby Braveboy, hailing from the even more improbable Coward, South Carolina. He spoke from the operating table while medics tended his wounds: “They shot me about three or four times, sir. Killed my partners. [Grimaces in pain] I crawled through the bushes, see if I could help them. And I went back to see if I could find the medics. . . . I went back then and all three of them was dead [*sic*]. One of them was cut, cut in two.”²⁵ These dispatches made heroes of men flat on their backs, with no attempts to shield viewers from their pain, fear, or lingering emotional trauma. Such accounts of GIs in Vietnam were not antiwar, but they showed individual suffering without any obvious sentimentality.

Alongside consistent praise of the GIs, however, a few whispers of doubt circulated in 1965 about the ability of the American military to handle guerrilla warfare. Some media reports—and they were rare at this point—hinted that American troops were having trouble with the guerrillas. *Newsweek* reported as early as July 1965 that officials in Washington were “embarrassed” by the performance of Marines guarding the Danang air base. Responding to questions about a damaging Vietcong raid on the position, a testy Pentagon official responded, “I wish we’d quit blaming the South Vietnamese for these incidents.”²⁶

Life sent a similar message in more measured tones when it reported ten days later that “U.S. combat units are finding that they still have a lot to learn about guerrilla warfare.” The article went on to charge that American troops were making the same “mistakes” advisers had rebuked the South Vietnamese for in previous years; namely, they were relying too heavily on logically complicated and time-consuming air strikes.²⁷ *Newsweek* worried in August 1965 that if the Americans kept up their deadly air war against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese, they would soon find themselves in the position of the French colonizers of an earlier era: “alien intruders feared and hated by the general population.”²⁸ ABC correspondent Malcolm Browne, when asked in November whether American GIs were prepared to fight and win in Vietnam, replied, “Frankly, I don’t think they are. I think these boys are magnificently trained to fight World War II and fight Korea, but I think this is a different kind of conflict. In this kind of war, politics and economics and a lot of other factors are important.”²⁹ Such depictions did not question the professionalism or courage of GIs but their ability to get the job done in the particular locale of Vietnam.

One of the war’s most enduring and controversial images of GIs arrived in American living rooms in August 1965, just weeks



Walter Cronkite (with the microphone) and a CBS camera crew use a jeep for a dolly during an interview with the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion of the 1st Marines during the battle for Hue in 1968. Cronkite’s visit led him to proclaim the war in Vietnam a “stalemate” on February 27, 1968. (National Archives and Records Administration photograph)

after Johnson boosted his administration's military commitment to South Vietnam. In an early execution of the "search and destroy" strategy, Marines entered the hamlet of Cam Ne on August 3. CBS correspondent Safer reported that Vietcong troops were "long gone" from the alleged enemy stronghold by the time the GIs arrived. Nevertheless, the soldiers had orders to destroy the village, and the CBS camera crew recorded infamous footage of Americans using Zippo lighters to set thatched huts on fire. "There is little doubt that American fire power can win a military victory here," Safer commented. "But to a Vietnamese peasant whose home means a lifetime of backbreaking labor, it will take more than presidential promises to convince him that we are on his side."³⁰ His report exposed, quite early, two chronic difficulties of the war in Vietnam: differentiating villagers from soldiers and winning over the South Vietnamese population in the face of substantial civilian casualties.

Not surprisingly, the president and the military leaders were furious about the story on Cam Ne. In an oft-quoted telephone call, Johnson asked CBS president Frank Stanton, "Are you trying to fuck me?"³¹ Angry enough that Safer was a Canadian, administration officials also wondered if he might be a communist, and officials in the White House and the Department of Defense tried unsuccessfully to pressure CBS into withdrawing him from his assignment. The Pentagon also began recording nightly television coverage of Vietnam to keep an eye on the networks. Scholars rightly have pointed out that Safer's dispatch was unusual in 1965—otherwise why the irate reaction?—but the furor it caused surely inflated its impact. As Tom Engelhardt put it, Safer's images "were perhaps the most disturbing of the war for those who saw them that August night," precisely because they broke the mold of prior television coverage.³²

Yet if such images were still uncommon on the small screen, popular magazines offered coverage that made Cam Ne seem less surprising. Some reports in the print media in the second half of 1965 similarly suggested that American forces could damage the people they were trying to help. *Newsweek* spoke in August of the "unhappy consequences" of American operations: "During a sweep south of the Da Nang base, U.S. Marines poured artillery shells into the village of Chau Son, which was suspected of harboring Viet Cong. And, indeed, the Marines did succeed in killing 25 guerrillas. But they also inadvertently killed a woman and four children."³³

In the same period *Life* reported on the difficult decision of Marines at Ky Hoa: "whether to kill presumably innocent peasants in order to reach an enemy who have taken on protective coloration among them." The Marine commander eventually bombed two villages, killing between fifty and 100 South Vietnamese peasants.³⁴ A *Look* article on naval pilots described sympathetically the outlook of the fliers on civilian casualties: "And often tighter than fear are the knots in your chest, because you know there may be women and kids down there."³⁵

A related matter, which would emerge more fully later in the

war, was deliberate atrocities committed against civilians or Vietcong prisoners. In November 1965, *Look* captured well, and early, the cycle of vengeance afflicting troops in Vietnam:

So there is mutual terrorism, as there is in every war. Both sides have been guilty of abuse, torture and mutilation of prisoners. A kind of nameless rage builds up in most men at the dirt and heat and terrifying suspense of this struggle in which there is no front line, no real way of knowing who is with you and who is against you. Rage ebbs into hunger for revenge, then more rage piles upon it, and men begin devising ingenious, hideous ways of giving their enemies the jitters.³⁶

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Everyone in South Vietnam knew that the Vietcong were guilty of atrocities, but the communists were good at covering their tracks. America's allies in the South Vietnamese military, on the contrary, often made their crimes "distressingly available" to the press, in the words of historian William O'Neill.³⁷ "Meanwhile," reported *Newsweek* in September 1965, "scores of photographs showing South Vietnamese troops brutally mistreating Viet Cong prisoners have appeared in the Western press." An accompanying picture showed a South Vietnamese soldier stomping on a bound communist soldier. The article reported that American GIs often felt "obliged to stand by" as the South Vietnamese abused captives by throwing them out of airplanes, for example.³⁸ For now, American soldiers appeared to be accomplices, but not perpetrators, of war crimes.

Even more prevalent in 1965, however, were reports on the positive impact of the GIs on Vietnamese villagers. Just after the Cam Ne incident, Safer issued another dispatch from Vietnam on "how civilians should be treated." He spoke of how GIs warned villagers of an impending American raid and evacuated them from their hamlet. As the CBS camera rolled, a steady rain fell on the displaced Vietnamese. The voice of a compassionate American soldier rang out, "Tell the woman and children to come in here, and get in out of the rain! This is better shelter." Safer concluded,

The Marines played the whole operation very cool indeed. Few guns in evidence, in fact, few Marines. The impression given was one of teamwork, of American Marines helping Vietnamese Marines, and together there, to help the villagers themselves . . . This isn't a surefire way of winning the hearts and minds of the people—there isn't one. But, it is an effective beginning.³⁹

As scholar Chester Pach has noted, after the furor over Cam Ne, Safer's dispatches tended to blame warfare, not the GIs, for the death of civilians (Safer spoke in late August of "the inevitable civilian suffering" in war). In this case he went even further, indicating that American soldiers were protecting South Vietnamese villagers from the Vietcong and from American firepower. Such was "censorship" in the Vietnam context; consciously or otherwise, he issued more encouraging reports after LBJ's intimidating outburst.⁴⁰ Other correspondents did so as well; in the same period NBC's Utley issued a dispatch with footage of American GIs aid-

ing women who had been tortured by the Vietcong.⁴¹

These two messages—that American GIs might hurt civilians but also might help them—appeared neatly side-by-side in an NBC report by Dean Brelis that aired on August 30. He began his dispatch with grim words accompanying footage of bedraggled Vietnamese refugees. These people had been displaced partly because of “Vietcong terrorism” but also because “Americans have turned their villages and farms into a battleground.” Yet that did not mean, as he said and images showed, that the civilians were worse off for their contact with the Americans. On the contrary, “[M]ore than Marine guns, Marine heart has helped [the refugees]. . . . In the same volunteer spirit, the Marines donate medical supplies to the village dispensary.” Meanwhile, Navy doctors entered the area to provide medical services to the villagers, “not as part of orders, but because they want to help the living.”⁴²

Some of the doubts circulating in the media earlier in 1965 subsided when the American presence—185,000 strong by the end of the year—seemed to stabilize South Vietnam. In October, *Time* wrote with no shortage of drama of the “remarkable turnaround” in the country, a place that now “throbs with a pride and power, above all an *esprit*, scarcely credible against the summer’s somber vista.”⁴³ Of course, not all was rosy. *Time* reported in January 1966 that 1,241 Americans had died in Vietnam in 1965 and 5,687 were wounded.⁴⁴ But as Cronkite announced, quoting Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on the evening of November 29, “We have stopped losing the war.”⁴⁵ It was a fitting expression of progress in a perplexing conflict.

Popular magazines continued in 1966 to illustrate the professionalism, efficiency, and compassion of American GIs. *Newsweek* pointed out in August 1966 that fewer than 25 percent of soldiers in Vietnam were draftees, though it presciently predicted an increase in that figure.⁴⁶ As in the previous year, journalists in 1966 often countered the idea that American GIs posed a threat to the civilians of South Vietnam, highlighting instead the positive impact of the Americans on ordinary Vietnamese. *Time* took the occasion of naming Westmoreland “Man of the Year” for 1965 to write a long, sanguine piece in January on the war. “[A]s it has done everywhere else,” the article went, “the G.I.’s heart inevitably goes out to the war’s forlorn victims.” An accompanying photograph showed American soldiers serving food to orphans on Christmas.⁴⁷

In April, *Life* ran a cover story on Captain Pete Dawkins, an American adviser to a South Vietnamese battalion. The article included photographs of Dawkins playing cards, laughing, and strumming a guitar with his Vietnamese counterparts, as well as shots of “Saigon schoolgirls” surrounding him upon receipt of his first Gallantry Cross. The former All-American football star and Heisman Trophy winner from Army seemed the epitome of man-

liness in an article peppered with sports references in captions: “Captain Pete Dawkins Keeps on Winning” and “Pete Dawkins Takes the Field.” Under another photograph he was quoted: “This is the big stadium. This is the varsity. I want to be on it.”⁴⁸ Another Heisman winner, Navy’s All-American quarterback Roger Staubach, arrived in Vietnam in 1966 before beginning his storied career in the National Football League. A broadcast from CBS’ Ike Pappas in October used fairly obvious sports metaphors to describe his role in Vietnam: “Roger Staubach is still calling signals for the Navy, but they’re of a different sort. It is Ensign Roger Staubach now, and he’s quarterbacking a team of local workers at a Navy supply depot in Danang.” Accompanying footage showed a dashing Staubach working with the South Vietnamese, throwing a football around, and heading off on a boat patrol of a river near Danang.⁴⁹

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African-American soldiers
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and able, which was
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for them. Often pictured
in the past by the white-
owned media as either inept
soldiers or as embittered,
'uppity' veterans returning
from war to a land
of discrimination, black GIs
in the fully integrated military
of the 1960s appeared just as
brave, committed, and skilled
as their white comrades.”*

portion of black combat deaths, and it was true that blacks suffered approximately 20 percent of the combat deaths through 1967, compared to their 11-percent portion of the American population. However, thanks to the efforts of civil rights activists, the Department of Defense took steps in 1967 to reduce the number of black combat casualties. Over the course of the entire war the proportion of such fatalities leveled out at 12.5 percent, just slightly higher than the percentage of blacks in the American population.⁵² Yet much coverage of the African-American GI between 1965 and 1967 emphasized his value as a soldier and the egalitarianism he found in the United States military. “The Negro soldier’s come into his own,” Westmoreland told *Look* in October.⁵³

Not all coverage of the GI in 1966, however, touted his professionalism, compassion, and competence. Nor did popular news agencies ignore death and injury in wartime. Alongside the growth

of domestic antiwar sentiment, the complexities of war and the soldier's reaction to it crept steadily into news coverage of Vietnam.⁵⁴

The American military occasionally made mistakes, and the press reported these in a frank manner. In January a televised dispatch from CBS correspondent Rather showed panicky GIs running for cover under fire, while the company commander frantically tried to call off what he assumed to be his own artillery.⁵⁵ The barrage, in fact, came from the enemy, but the quick assumption that it was American indicated the frequency of error. Indeed, later estimates suggested that as many as 20 percent of all American casualties came from friendly fire.⁵⁶

In November, a CBS camera crew caught just such a moment of error on film. As poorly aimed air strikes rained down on the GIs, one screamed into his radio: "Get the damn thing away from me! That's landing right in us!" Though correspondent Bruce Morton noted that most air support was devastatingly effective, the image of the shouting GI may have overwhelmed that fact.⁵⁷ A similar phenomenon marked an article in *Time* that fall. The text reported that American pilots had accidentally napalmed their own GIs, though the division commander of the unit "held no grudges" and said he would call in the air strikes again if necessary. The two sides were fighting in close quarters and that was simply the reality of combat in Vietnam, he felt. More striking, however, was the adjoining photograph of two badly burned American servicemen, their faces and arms completely bandaged, leaning against each other for support.⁵⁸

Even more vivid was an article in *Look* in March describing how an American mortar round fell short and devastated a Marine platoon:

The marines had just been pulled back for a rest. Their lieutenant, due to be married, woke to find his legs sheared off at the hips. He died of shock. Beauchemin struggled to plug the hole in the sergeant's chest. The sergeant vomited all over him, stiffened and died in his arms. Eleven marines were casualties in the accident. Beauchemin, helping sort the bodies, cried.⁵⁹

As this passage suggests, depictions of wounded American GIs appeared quite graphically early in the Vietnam War. Likewise, such passages valorized the suffering of the individual GI beyond whatever higher purpose the war did or did not serve.

Unlike in years past, however, some publications now put images of the wounded onto their covers. Starting with an issue in July 1965, *Life* put injured GIs in this prominent position several times.⁶⁰ In February and October of 1966, *Life* covers showed soldiers in particularly helpless states, with bandaged faces and ragged, torn clothing. Inside the February 11 issue, several photographs from the same series showed a medic, who was

"so completely bandaged that he could barely peer out of one eye," feeding C-rations to another soldier with a head wound. The pictures expressed American compassion as few other images could, and the wounded GIs surely invited deep sympathy. Another victim of the war, a Marine south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), appeared unconscious, his head swathed in bandages, on *Life's* cover of October 28.⁶¹ An article on the military situation in *Newsweek* in April included a large picture of Lt. Richard Lindsey, hit by shrapnel and crying in pain.⁶² Though they were by no means daily fare on television, nightly news stories in 1966 occasionally showed interviews with wounded American soldiers, footage of grimacing GIs, and on-screen medical procedures.⁶³

Such images were not necessarily "antiwar;" journalists surely understood that wounds and death were a part of any conflict. But these images conveyed a picture of war that reminded viewers of its costs. In this way reporters valorized the suffering of the individual GI, and made him seem pitiable, but without questioning his manliness or toughness. As Moeller has written, combat photographers in Vietnam "took portraits of the troops to champion the fortitude of the individual soldiers in their sad triumph over the hardship of warfare."⁶⁴

Deliberate or inadvertent abuse of civilians, Vietcong prisoners, and enemy suspects continued to command significant attention. Sometimes such treatment seemed justified. Rather reported from Vietnam in January 1966:

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In this village along the Saigon riverbanks, residents admit a Vietcong battalion, with Chinese advisers, spent the night, moving out just a few hours before U.S. troops came in. Our troops continue burning every hut they find, and all crops, convinced that practically every man, woman, and child in this section belongs to the Vietcong.⁶⁵

Laura Bergquist of *Look* suggested just how tragic this thinking could be for the people of South Vietnam:

A visit to the jungle that is the Da Nang Surgical Hospital brings on nausea. There, two to a bed, lie hideously wounded Vietnamese civilians, children and adults. Eighty percent are war victims (mostly mortar and mine wounds, ours and Vietcong Charlie's). I couldn't look at one child, perhaps seven, who was one huge, blistered napalm wound.⁶⁶

In the spring, newspapers around the country ran a photograph by Sean Flynn of a Vietcong sniper strung up in a tree by his heels.⁶⁷ *Time* lamented the widespread attention the photograph garnered, particularly since most publications ran it without his accompanying dispatch about how the prisoner had killed a baby and was cut down unharmed after only fifteen minutes. "Such pictures," groaned the magazine, "are hardly ever balanced out by coverage of the Viet Cong's far more common tactics of terror and brutality." Evidence of American or South Vietnamese harshness "so often" received undue coverage with "indignant captions." Try-

ing to right the wrong, perhaps, *Time* had recently reported on the killing and mutilation of two American pilots by the Vietcong.⁶⁸ Dispatches on the brutality of the enemy often appeared in this context, as if to help justify images of American cruelty.

Possibly feeding *Time's* aggravation, Kenneth Gale of NBC reported from Vietnam in November about the interrogation of several Vietcong prisoners. With American GIs looking on approvingly, a South Vietnamese soldier beat one prisoner savagely. In Gale's words: "The first prisoner of the day . . . led to the other captives, but not without force. It took about an hour of this kind of treatment, karate chops and kicks administered by a Vietnamese interrogator on loan to the Marines." More footage showed young boys captured by the Americans, who were "interrogated, to use the term that would go on the official report."⁶⁹ These prisoners were also struck on camera. Statistically speaking, such reports were far from common in 1966. Yet they hinted at what was to come when news of the My Lai massacre and similar incidents appeared in the American press just three years later.

During the course of 1966 more than 5,000 Americans died in Vietnam as the total force reached 385,000 troops.⁷⁰ The war continued to offer perplexing imagery. "Daily," said an article in *Look* in December, "you are assaulted by the good, the bad and the wildly absurd of this peculiar war."⁷¹ An editorial in *Life* in January summed up much of what appeared in 1966: professionalism, misery, stoicism. Speaking of the television networks, the editor wrote, "Their footage *in toto* runs together as an appalling record of surprise and death, its only coherence being the Kilroy-esque figure of the groggy GI slogging through the unfriendly terrain of any war, calmly convinced that he is getting a job done, the sooner the better."⁷²

As the Vietnam War bogged down into a stalemate in 1967—and amid increasingly dubious statements of progress from the Johnson administration—public support for the President's policies continued to erode. In July 1967, 52 percent of those questioned by Gallup disapproved of the president's management of Vietnam, compared to 33 percent who approved. Nearly half of those surveyed—48 percent—still did not believe that sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake, against 40 percent who thought it had been. Yet by October, those believing American involvement in Vietnam had been an error formed a majority, one that would expand in 1968.⁷³

In 1967 the press intensified its use of imagery that had circulated since 1965 and would be popularly associated with the looming Tet offensive. More and more, American GIs were shown to be bitter about their situation in Vietnam, resentful of the brass, and even emotionally scarred by combat, which was the hallmark of Vietnam imagery in subsequent popular mythology.

Some battle coverage in 1967 persisted in emphasizing American military successes. Typical was a report from CBS's Igor Ogenessov on a major U.S. victory in the Delta. Yet his words indi-

cated that even victory could be tragic. He spoke over footage of the American wounded: "The toll of American dead and wounded began rising this afternoon. It may be one of the most dramatic military victories in recent months; it's hard to say at this moment from here. But some American soldiers will never know how well they did."⁷⁴ Elsewhere in Vietnam, the war was beginning to take on the feel of a stalemate. Nowhere were depictions of futility and disillusionment among GIs more evident than in coverage of fighting near the DMZ.

Interviews with GIs at places near the border, such as Con Thien and Dong Ha, maintained the media's emphasis on individuals,

a practice that dated back to World War II. But now the press valorized the suffering of the individual rather than lauding his participation in a wider military project of unquestioned value. Increasingly, the American GI seemed the victim of foreign policy that landed him in a war that brought mounting devastation without gains on either side. CBS's Robert Schakne reported from Con Thien in September on the inadequacy of the American position: "Most of the wounded here are victims of shell fire. The bunkers in Con Thien are not deep enough, the trenches in the muddy ground are too shallow. They don't protect everybody when the heavy barrages come in. Simply surviving, day after day, is no easy matter on this hillside."

This dispatch celebrated simple endurance, and interviews with GIs did the same. When asked whether he was frightened by the shelling ("You don't look happy, but you don't look scared stiff."), Cpl. Ron Hensley told Schakne: "Well, I can't say that I'm scared stiff but I'm scared. I mean, after a while, you know it's gonna come, you can't do nothin' about it. And you just look to God. It's about the only thing you can do."⁷⁵ If other ac-

counts of GIs in Vietnam valorized their professionalism, skill, and teamwork, reports such as Schakne's made the individual soldier seem heroic for his ability to endure what Burt Quint of CBS called the "violent and bloody normalcy" of combat near the DMZ.⁷⁶

John Laurence of CBS conducted similar interviews airing in September 1967. Stan Ottenbacher, a good-natured GI from Montana, told him all about living with artillery shelling. His easy smile recalled something of the World War II-era brand of stoicism, showing that such a spirit was far from dead, but his words suggested that war was alternately terrifying, boring, dirty, and pointless. He spoke of "wallowing around in the mud," a hardship that got "pretty depressing at times." "Since we got up here it's been raining pretty bad and the mud gets thick, and you jump in it, you roll in it, you gotta dive in it to get out of the rounds and it's . . . you just learn to live with it." He talked wistfully about his hometown in Montana, a quiet place with "no incoming, no rockets, no artillery, no mortars, no nothin'." But most of all, he spoke of the terror of the shelling. Asked whether he had learned to live with it, he replied:

No. That's a new thrill every time it comes in. Stuff landing all

over, bouncing off you, and, uh, you're just so scared every time. And it gets worse. Closer they get the more they throw, the more you get scared, then you get up. It's a wonderful feeling just to be alive, to be able to walk around after one of those.

Even from a young man as positive as Ottenbacher, the sense was palpable that GIs near the DMZ were becoming rattled and disillusioned by the artillery barrages, focusing the entirety of their efforts on survival. Such was probably the reality for soldiers in all wars, but it was becoming an increasingly prominent part of the GI's image. Ottenbacher appealed to the American people to recognize the soldiers' suffering: "Sit up and take notice of what you've got, appreciate it. Because we don't have it, wish we did."⁷⁷

None of the emotions revealed in these interviews would have likely surprised combat veterans of World War II or Korea. Tension, depression, misery, and terror were simply a part of combat, yet in the 1950s and during the Vietnam War, especially after 1966, these experiences were more closely and vividly attributed to the American soldier than before. Journalists were widening the universe of acceptable male reactions to battle, just as image-makers of the Korean War had helped remove the stigma attached to men crying by showing that in photographs.

Also intensifying during Vietnam was the sense that the GI might be a victim of overly sanguine or even deceitful leadership. Widely associated with the Tet offensive, critiques of military officials had far deeper roots. As Hallin rightly pointed out, 1967 saw stirrings of doubt in the press corps, but they appeared in small hints even before that during the Vietnam War.⁷⁸

In his report from Con Thien, Schakne interviewed Major Gordon Cook, commander of the Marines stationed there. Cook admitted that the GIs "don't have too much flexibility as far as moving out of here," but he brusquely dismissed comparisons to the doomed French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in 1954: "I don't feel in any way, shape, or form that this is anything like Dien Bien Phu. This is a complete connotation that is erroneous, and I don't want anybody to think we're in this position. We're in a good position here. I feel pretty confident, frankly." Another officer cheerfully declared that he would be able to get his men all the supplies they needed by helicopter, despite widespread reports on the difficulties of flying aircraft into the DMZ area. If the gap between these assurances and the interviews with GIs was not obvious enough, Schakne concluded his report with words and footage that clashed with official optimism:

On this day, forty-three wounded Marines were brought out of Con Thien. Some of them had to lie on stretchers for over two hours before the helicopters could come in and get them and take them out. They had to wait through one ten-minute barrage of over one hundred

shells. This is the way it is, this is the way it's been, and this is the way it's going to be for quite a while at Con Thien.

When the network cut back to Cronkite, the esteemed anchor said journalists returning from the DMZ were describing Marine losses much heavier than the military was reporting. "And today," he intoned, "the U.S. command ordered sharp restrictions on information that is given out about the communist shellings." Though he purportedly lost faith in the American war only after the Tet offensive of early 1968, on the evening of September 25, 1967, he described a widening gap between image and reality in Vietnam.⁷⁹

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Three days later CBS broadcast an even more disturbing report. Laurence traveled to Con Thien in September, telling the soldiers he wanted to "take pictures of you winning the war up here" and to "tell the people back home how well you're doing."⁸⁰ He found a war different from what he expected: "The constant problem of cleanliness, the periodic shortages of food and water, the boredom, and the loneliness, and the fear, have created a kind of mass depression on Con Thien."

Once again the word "depression" showed up in a report from Vietnam. But more noteworthy were the words of Lt. John Theisen, who openly criticized the way that the military brass was running the war:

I think we're just occupying ground, and losing too many men, I'm losing too many men. [If] we were to stay here too much longer, we wouldn't have much left of this platoon, let alone the company. I see about three, four people get it a day. Not real bad, but enough to be medevac'd [medical evacuation by helicopter], [and] cut my platoon down.

But is that not part of war, Laurence asked, "as the generals say?" Theisen granted that it was, but he had his own ideas as well:

[F]or seven months up here one battalion ain't gonna have much left, if that's part of war. Gotta rotate a little more, I think. Send us back where we can get new men and train 'em. See, we're getting new men out here, they're coming out, well, what you might call green, and they don't know really how to act out here.

He went on to say these green troops caused other men to die by their own lack of experience.⁸¹ Such reports from Con Thien laid bare before the American public a mounting disgruntlement with the military brass on the part of soldiers—and officers—on the ground. In turn, CBS' grim portrayal of the situation at Con Thien irritated the brass. Col. Roger Bankson, director of defense information, told *Newsweek*, "The enemy firing 200 rounds of artillery at Con Thien doesn't mean a rat's ass tactically."⁸²

Despite official protests, reporters at the DMZ painted a bleak picture. American GIs were demoralized, dirty, tired, scared, hungry, thirsty, and often wounded or killed. Occasionally they seemed

skeptical of their superiors, and official accounts of the fighting often contradicted impressions given by interviews with individual GIs. In short, the American soldier seemed a stoic victim of forces far beyond his control.⁸³ The power of the military seemed particularly ominous during a CBS broadcast in April 1967. A military official interviewed by Wallace, when asked whether the American people would accept projected losses of 25,000 dead, replied, "Do they have any choice?"⁸⁴

By the end of 1967, with 486,000 American troops in Vietnam, the war was at an impasse. Despite suffering crushing losses, there were no signs that the enemy's will was breaking. Neither the North Vietnamese nor the Americans were willing to de-escalate unless the other side did so first. Johnson vowed at Christmas to no longer expect the enemy to honor overtures of peace. "A burned child dreads the fire," the president said, in what was surely one of his most ill-chosen metaphors of the war.⁸⁵

In September, CBS broadcast more words from the president. Grieving for the casualties of war—in that year, 9,378 Americans died in Vietnam, almost doubling the number of deaths in 1966—Johnson said, "No one hates war and killing more than I do. No sane American can greet the news from Vietnam with enthusiasm."⁸⁶ Given the grimness of imagery in 1967, few Americans, even the tenuous majority still supportive of the war, could muster enthusiasm for the news. "We want to tell people what this war is like," CBS' Schakne told *Newsweek* in a year-end article on television coverage of Vietnam. "It's nothing like a John Wayne movie."⁸⁷

On January 30, 1968, more than 70,000 communist troops launched coordinated attacks on at least 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam, including Saigon, Khe Sanh, and the ancient city of Hué. The seemingly desperate NLF and North Vietnamese forces achieved almost total surprise, violating a temporary truce in observance of Tet, the Lunar New Year. After the initial shock wore off, the Americans and South Vietnamese inflicted enormous and often irrevocable losses on the enemy, which was reported by the news magazines, albeit alongside bloody and discouraging pictures.⁸⁸ Although the communists paid dearly for the Tet offensive, they did succeed in further shrinking Johnson's credibility at home.⁸⁹ As Karnow put it, surprised American television viewers suddenly saw "a drastically different kind of war"—or in Engelhardt's phrase, Tet sparked a "home front televizual disaster."⁹⁰

It was true that urban combat and coordinated enemy attacks were novel elements in a war that had seemed, to American audiences, an endless string of jungle patrols. Yet much of what Americans saw and read of the war during Tet and thereafter reiterated, if more intensely, elements of media coverage between 1965 and 1968.⁹¹

The infamous footage of the South Vietnamese general Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a bound Vietcong prisoner in 1968 surely sickened millions as had no earlier image. Americans were no less disturbed in the following year when *Life* published photographs of South Vietnamese villagers massacred by GIs in the hamlet of My Lai. Yet close observers of the news between 1965 and 1968 would have long suspected that the United States and its ally were guilty of such offenses, if not on the scale of My Lai or with the boldness of Loan. A reporter was wounded on camera during the Tet offensive, contributing to the abiding sense of chaos surrounding the attack, but the same thing had happened during a television broadcast in April 1967.⁹² When, during Tet, an American soldier told a reporter on camera, "The whole thing stinks, really," he was only repeating more starkly what GIs at Con Thien

had been saying for months.⁹³ Frightened villagers shown in dispatches after 1968 evoked earlier images from Safer's Cam Ne report. At the same time, during and after the Tet offensive TV news continued to see evidence of American compassion toward the Vietnamese people, bravery in combat, and professional skill.

In brief, much early coverage of the Vietnam War, like the admittedly grimmer and more critical reporting after the Tet offensive, did not characterize combat as mere romantic adventure. Journalists covering the conflict described a wide range of behaviors and attitudes among American GIs. Almost from the moment those soldiers started humping through the jungles of South Vietnam, journalists publicized their acts of bravery and cruelty, feelings of loneliness and comradeship and bitterness, and expressions of patriotism and manliness. These reporters have drawn widespread criticism from two opposite poles—one arguing the media showed too much, the other claiming they did not show nearly enough. Yet a close examination of what they wrote, photographed, and televised shows that journalists, in fact, produced a body of work that faithfully reflected the complexities and perplexities of the American fighting man and the war in Vietnam.

NOTES

¹ For LBJ's quotations, see Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 183; and Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 286-87.

² See, for example, Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Robert Elegant, "How to Lose a War: Reflections of a Foreign Correspondent," *Encounter* LVII (August 1981): 73-90. On critics of the press among former military and diplomatic officials, see William M. Hammond, "The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat: A Critical Examination," *Reviews in American History* 17 (June 1989): 312-13; and Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). On scholars of American politics who find an "oppositional" tone in the media of the 1960s and 1970s, see Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media," *Journal of Politics* 46 (February 1984): 2-24.

³ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 433-34.

⁴ Mark Baker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1981), xv.

⁵ See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 169-252; Hammond, "The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat"; Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993); Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 192-93; Michael J. Arlen, *Living-Room War* (New York: Viking Press, 1969); and Lawrence W. Lichty, "Comments on the Influence of Television on Public Opinion," in Peter Braestrup, ed., *Vietnam in History: Ten Years after the Paris Peace Accords* (Washington: University Press of America, 1984), 158-60. For a useful overview of this literature, see Daniel Hallin, "The Media and War," in John Corner, Philip Schlesinger, and Roger Silverstone, eds., *International Media Research: A Critical Survey* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 206-31.

⁶ See Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"*, 9; and Hammond, "The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat," 316.

⁷ For general accounts of the Vietnam War, see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996); and Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁸ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 178. On early journalism in Vietnam, see William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War* (New York: Random House, 1995). For Sheehan's account of the period, see Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie:*

John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam (New York: Random House, 1988).

⁹ Arlen, *Living-Room War*, xi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Chester J. Pach, Jr., "And That's the Way It Was: The Vietnam War on the Network Nightly News," in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 90-118.

¹² Susan D. Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 387.

¹³ See, for example, CBS, Aug. 23, 1965, reel A-3, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives, College Park, Md.

¹⁴ Quoted in Moeller, *Shooting War*, 365. A later generation of government and military officials leading the United States into the Persian Gulf War of 1991, disagreed with Westmoreland's statement and exerted tight control over the news media. As for satellite technology, it was not until February 1967 that correspondents were able to transmit reports via satellite from Tokyo to New York, and even then it was exceedingly expensive. So most filmed dispatches continued to be flown from Vietnam to the United States, which was a far cry from the instant coverage of later international events. See Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 92.

¹⁵ For a description of these methods of censorship, see William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 42-43; Moeller, *Shooting War*, 363-66; Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 92-95; and Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War'*, 130.

¹⁶ Just a few contributions to the literature on media coverage of Vietnam include: David Culbert, "Television's Visual Impact on Decision-Making in the USA, 1968: The Tet Offensive and Chicago's Democratic National Convention," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (July 1998): 419-49; Hammond, "The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat," 312-23; Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, abgd. ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983); Arlen, *Living-Room War*; Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 90-118; Moeller, *Shooting War*, 349-51; and Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War'*.

¹⁷ Quoted in "Foreign Correspondents Covering Viet Nam: Crud, Fret and Jeers," *Time*, June 10, 1966, 59.

¹⁸ Media coverage of the Korean War is discussed further in Andrew J. Huebner, "Kilroy is Back: Images of American Soldiers in Korea, 1950-1953," *American Studies* 45 (Spring 2004): 103-29. See also Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 365-90.

¹⁹ In 1965, the majority of Americans, inasmuch as they thought about Vietnam at all, were guardedly supportive of the conflict. In April, a Gallup poll revealed that just 17 percent of those questioned believed the United States ought to withdraw from Vietnam; 57 percent felt the administration should continue its involvement, although they endorsed proposals ranging from negotiation to a declaration of war. In sharp contrast to later years of the war, 28 percent of the respondents declared they had "no opinion" on what the United States should do next in Vietnam. See George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, vol. III (New York: Random House, 1972), 1934.

²⁰ One statistic used to quantify the proportion of draftees to volunteers was the percentage of battle deaths. In 1965, when 1,369 Americans died in Vietnam, 16 percent of them were draftees. This figure increased dramatically over the course of the war, rising to 43 percent in 1970 and even higher later. Around 1970, it was common for fully two-thirds of combat units to be comprised of draftees. See Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 28-29.

²¹ "Armed Forces: The Fighting American," *Time*, April 23, 1965, 22-26. Daniel Hallin called this sort of soldier a "hero of technology." See Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"*, 175.

²² "Armed Forces: The Fighting American," 25.

²³ "Vietnam: The New War," *Newsweek*, July 5, 1965, 32.

²⁴ See NBC, Nov. 26, 1965, reel A-17, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

²⁵ See ABC, Nov. 26, 1965, reel A-17, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

²⁶ "Vietnam: No Contact," *Newsweek*, July 12, 1965, 34.

²⁷ "Bitter Dilemmas and a New U.S. Strategy," *Life*, July 23, 1965, 57.

²⁸ "Strategy's By-products," *Newsweek*, Aug. 16, 1965, 32.

²⁹ See ABC, Nov. 30, 1965, reel A-17, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

³⁰ Safer quoted in Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 102.

³¹ Johnson quoted in Ibid.

³² Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture*, 189.

³³ "Strategy's By-products," 30.

³⁴ "Bitter Dilemmas and a New U.S. Strategy," 57.

³⁵ Sam Castan, "The Navy War in Vietnam," *Look*, Nov. 30, 1965, 29.

³⁶ Ibid., 39.

³⁷ William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 325.

³⁸ "No Quarter," *Newsweek*, Sept. 13, 1965, 36.

³⁹ See CBS, Aug. 23, 1965, reel A-3, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁴⁰ See Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 103; and Safer quotation from CBS, Aug. 20, 1965, reel A-3, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁴¹ See CBS, Aug. 25, 1965, reel A-3, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁴² See NBC, Aug. 30, 1965, reel A-4, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁴³ "South Viet Nam: A New Kind of War," *Time*, Oct. 22, 1965, 28.

⁴⁴ "Man of the Year: The Guardians at the Gate," *Time*, Jan. 7, 1966, 20. Later census data (referenced by Christian Appy) revealed, in fact, that 1,369 Americans died in Vietnam during 1965. See Appy, *Working-Class War*, 29.

⁴⁵ See CBS, Nov. 29, 1965, reel A-17, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁴⁶ "Americans at War," *Newsweek*, Aug. 1, 1966, 30.

⁴⁷ "Man of the Year: The Guardians at the Gate," 19.

⁴⁸ "Captain Pete Dawkins Keeps on Winning," *Life*, April 8, 1966, cover, 91-100.

⁴⁹ See CBS, Oct. 28, 1966, reel A-65, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁵⁰ See CBS, Nov. 9, 1966, reel A-66; and ABC, Nov. 14, 1966, reel A-68. Both are in the *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁵¹ Christopher S. Wren, "A Marine Comes Home from Vietnam," *Look*, March 8, 1966, 30-35.

⁵² For these figures, see Appy, *Working-Class War*, 20-21.

⁵³ Christopher S. Wren, "The General Who Runs Our War in Vietnam," *Look*, Oct. 18, 1966, 30.

⁵⁴ Though most Americans still supported military intervention in Vietnam, displeasure with Lyndon Johnson's handling of it was rising. From March to September Gallup recorded a decline in the percentage of Americans who approved of LBJ's management of the war from 50 to 43 percent; those disapproving rose from 33 to 40 percent. See Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, vol. III, 1993, 2027.

⁵⁵ See CBS, Jan. 13, 1966, reel A-23, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁵⁶ The figure was cited in James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 618.

⁵⁷ See CBS, Nov. 21, 1966, reel A-69, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁵⁸ "Viet Nam: How Accidents Happen," *Time*, Sept. 2, 1966, 23.

⁵⁹ Wren, "A Marine Comes Home from Vietnam," 34.

⁶⁰ See "Deeper Into the Vietnam War," *Life*, July 2, 1965, cover.

⁶¹ See "The War Goes On," *Life*, Feb. 11, 1966, cover, 24D; and "Invasion

DMZ Runs Into the Marines," *Life*, Oct. 28, 1966, cover.

⁶² "Turmoil in Vietnam: War Within a War?" *Newsweek*, April 18, 1966, 30.

⁶³ See, for example, ABC, Nov. 11, 1966, reel A-68; and NBC, Nov. 14, 1966, reel A-68. Both are in the *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁶⁴ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 407.

⁶⁵ See CBS, Jan. 13, 1966, reel A-23, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁶⁶ Laura Bergquist, "Never Before a War Like This," *Look*, Dec. 13, 1966, 27.

⁶⁷ See "Angle Shots," *Time*, May 6, 1966, 29.

⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*; and "South Viet Nam: Dressed Fit to Kill," *Time*, Jan. 21, 1966, 25A.

⁶⁹ See NBC, Nov. 15, 1966, reel A-68, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁷⁰ The figure on combat deaths comes from Appy, *Working-Class War*, 29.

⁷¹ Laura Bergquist, "Never Before a War Like This," *Look*, Dec. 13, 1966, 27.

⁷² Brock Bower, "Worthy Try at Covering a Big Story: Vietnam on TV," *Life*, Jan. 21, 1966, 15. "Kilroy" was the fictional GI of World War II whose name appeared in the ubiquitous graffiti, "Kilroy was here."

⁷³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, vol. III, 2074, 2087, 2109.

⁷⁴ See CBS, April 11, 1967, reel A-90, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁷⁵ See CBS, Sept. 25, 1967, reel A-114, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁷⁶ See CBS, July 5, 1967, reel A-102, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁷⁷ See CBS, Sept. 28, 1967, reel A-114, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁷⁸ See Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 163-67.

⁷⁹ See CBS, Sept. 25, 1967, reel A-114, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives. In November, an article in *Newsweek*, "Whose Benefit? Whose Doubt?" similarly reported on the distrust growing between the press and the military brass. See *Newsweek*, Nov. 13, 1967, 68.

⁸⁰ Quotations originally appeared in Michael Arlen's article, "A Day in the Life," in *The New Yorker* on Sept. 30, 1967, and were printed in Arlen, *Living-Room War*, 90, 92.

⁸¹ See CBS, Sept. 28, 1967, reel A-114, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁸² "Whose Benefit? Whose Doubt?" 68.

⁸³ In his detailed account of television reporting of Con Thien, Daniel Hallin briefly described the imagery of soldiers in a similar fashion: "[I]n this period, for the first time, soldiers interviewed on the news can be heard expressing less than enthusiasm for the war. . . . [T]he troops who were the 'bait' in this war of attrition found themselves on the defensive for long periods, an unusual situation for American troops in Vietnam, and often taking high casualties for pieces of ground which were of little significance in themselves." Such imagery bore striking similarities to coverage of the Korean War and films about it in the 1950s. See Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 166.

⁸⁴ See CBS, April 12, 1967, reel A-90, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁸⁵ Quoted in "How Goes the War?" *Newsweek*, Jan. 1, 1968, 17.

⁸⁶ See CBS, Sept. 28, 1967, reel A-114, *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives. The casualty figure comes from Appy, *Working-Class War*, 29.

⁸⁷ "How Bloody Can It Be?" *Newsweek*, Dec. 25, 1967, 75.

⁸⁸ Peter Braestrup argued in his massive analysis of Tet coverage that journal-

ists overreacted to the offensive and inaccurately suggested that the Americans were losing. The author's research, as well as the work of Chester Pach, suggests a more complicated story. Although *Time* and *Newsweek*, for instance, showed alarming pictures, their text indicated that the Americans had effectively repelled the assault. See Braestrup, *Big Story*; and Pach, "And That's the Way It Was," 110.

⁸⁹ Those Americans disapproving of the President's war policies rose from 47 to 63 percent during February. See Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 122.

⁹⁰ See Karnow, *Vietnam*, 536; and Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture*, 205.

⁹¹ As Daniel Hallin put it, "Tet was less a turning point than a crossover point, a moment when trends that had been in motion for some time reached balance and began to tip the other way." See Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 168.

⁹² See NBC, Feb. 9, 1968, reel A-134; and ABC, April 11, 1967, reel A-90. Both are in the *Weekly News Summary*, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Records of the Department of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives.

⁹³ The quotation can be found in the PBS documentary, *Vietnam: A Television History*. The transcript for the episode on Tet is at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/107ts.html>.

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