

## Reading List for American Perspectives: Vietnam: A Retrospective

For those of you who wish to dip into the voluminous literature about Vietnam, and specifically our involvement there, here are few books available in libraries or book stores.

### **General**

Fall, Bernard. *Street Without Joy*

Fall, a French citizen and former soldier and academic, spent a year in Vietnam with French military forces in 1953. From this experience came a brilliant book that accurately forecast through the French experience our own military problems leading to an eventual withdrawal.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*

A thorough and detailed history of Vietnam, but dealing primarily with American involvement in Vietnam. Highly readable and valuable because Karnow was able to interview nearly all of the major American officials, as well as some of the Vietnamese, involved in our military operations and diplomatic initiatives during this period.

McNamara, Robert. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*

As Secretary of Defense from 1961-67, McNamara's view changed from ardent supporter of the war to painful believer that the war could not be won, leading to his resignation. This is his account of what and what didn't happen.

Sheehan, Neil. *A Bright Shining Lie*.

A brilliant account of the Vietnam war through the prism of the life of Lt. Col. John Paul Vann. Vann initially [1962-63] saw the flaws and mistakes in our policies and aired them to correspondents. When ignored, he resigned from the US Army, then returned to Vietnam in a civilian capacity aiding the South Vietnamese military. His many years in Vietnam gradually and greater personal involvement lead to his death in 1971. A gripping account. In the end, the war consumed John Paul Vann, leading to his death there in 1971.

### **Personal Accounts**

Caputo, Philip. *A Rumor of War*

Caputo was a young Marine officer in our first official Vietnam combat operations in 1965. From initial optimism and ambition, Caputo returned home "older than my father," a man who had seen "the heights and depths" of human behavior and "horrors so grotesque that they evoked more fascination than disgust."

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*

The author went to Vietnam in 1967 as a correspondent for Esquire magazine. In a series of wrenching vignettes, Herr as few authors have done details the corrosive effect of warfare on the human soul.

McDonough, James. *Platoon Leader*

Fresh from West Point, Lt. McDonough provides a gripping story of the day-to-day activities of an understrength platoon stationed in a sea of Viet Cong and their sympathizers. What makes the book particularly valuable is McDonough's understanding of his men and their capabilities and limitations, particularly important as the war was winding down in 1970.

Snepp, Frank. *Decent Interval*

An often bitter and scathing account of American behavior, including his own, from the perspective of a senior CIA analyst during the last days of the Saigon regime in 1975.

Van Devanter, Lynda. *Home Before Morning*

The memoir of an Army surgical nurse during her year in Vietnam, of the descent from idealism to fatalism caused by the constant human carnage that she endured during her tour. The author, a northern Virginia native, was a pioneer for the recognition of post traumatic stress syndrome among Vietnam veterans, including nurses.

Wolff, Tobias. *In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of a Lost War*

A well-written account by a young Army officer and his service in one of the less, but still dangerous, military districts in Vietnam. Military combat is but a small portion of the book, but the details of Army routine, the variety of Americans both military and civilian stationed there, and interactions with the Vietnamese make this an interesting counterpoint to combat stories.