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THE YANKEES ARE COMING! THE YANKEES ARE COMING!

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND VIETNAM'S WAR FOR NATIONAL UNIFICATION

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Many similarities exist between the American Revolution and the Vietnam War. Five of the most apparent similarities are examined. First, Great Britain and the United States made similar fundamental assumptions, in their respective conflicts, which proved equally flawed. Second, the distances between the combatants in both conflicts were vast. The lines of communication were extremely long. Third, similarities abound between the people involved, both generally and specifically. Fourth, both wars have a single campaign that can be described as the turning point. Though Saratoga and Tet occurred at relatively early stages in the respective conflicts, the outcomes of the wars were arguably decided after those campaigns. Fifth, the southern strategies in both wars are remarkably analogous. Both Great Britain and the United States succeeded in alienating the undecided, and arousing animosity among the common people.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: THE YANKEES ARE COMING! THE YANKEES ARE COMING!

Author: Major Jeffrey M. Dunn, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: This paper compares British involvement in America's struggle for independence in the late eighteenth century with the United States' immersion in North Vietnam's struggle for national unification in the twentieth.

Discussion: Many similarities exist between the American Revolution and the Vietnam War. Five of the most apparent similarities are examined. First, Great Britain and the United States made similar fundamental assumptions, in their respective conflicts, which proved equally flawed. Second, the distances between the combatants in both conflicts were vast. The lines of communication were extremely long. Third, similarities abound between the people involved, both generally and specifically. Fourth, both wars have a single campaign that can be described as the turning point. Though Saratoga and Tet occurred at relatively early stages in the respective conflicts, the outcomes of the wars were arguably decided after those campaigns. Fifth, the southern strategies in both wars are remarkably analogous. Both Great Britain and the United States succeeded in alienating the undecided, and arousing animosity among the common people.

Conclusion:

1. The United States became the oppressor in Vietnam, and closely emulated its enemy, Great Britain, in the Revolutionary War.
2. Many patterns repeat themselves through history and within those patterns are keys to success in the future.
3. The United States needs to become more proficient at searching for patterns in history (not just its own). By learning from the mistakes made by itself and others, the U.S. will make fewer mistakes in the future.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This paper will compare British involvement in America's struggle for independence in the late eighteenth century with the United States' immersion in North Vietnam's struggle for national unification in the twentieth. The patterns found in these two conflicts, that occurred centuries apart, mirror each other in many ways.

The similarities between the two wars are numerous, but this work will focus on the five most obvious. First, Great Britain and the United States made similar fundamental assumptions, in their respective conflicts, which proved equally flawed. Second, the distances between the combatants in both conflicts were vast. The lines of communication were extremely long. Third, similarities abound between the people involved, both generally and specifically. Fourth, both wars have a single campaign

that can be described as the turning point. Though Saratoga and Tet occurred at relatively early stages in the respective conflicts, the outcomes of the wars were arguably decided after those campaigns. Fifth, the southern strategies in both wars are remarkably analogous. Both Great Britain and the United States succeeded in alienating the undecided, and arousing animosity among the common people.

Finally, the question of “so what?” must be answered. Why do the similar patterns matter? The old cliché that history repeats itself is hard to ignore. By conducting disciplined pattern analysis in the future, the United States can avoid repeating mistakes and improve its performance throughout the entire spectrum of foreign relations.

CHAPTER TWO

FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS

Both Great Britain and the United States entered their respective conflicts under several similar assumptions that were vitally flawed. They both subscribed to a “Domino Theory” that hindered any kind of compromise or toleration of resistance. They assumed that the majority of the

people of the revolutionary countries were loyal, and wanted assistance in restoring order. Both great powers assumed that technological superiority and experience would make the conflicts inexpensive, short, and easily won. Neither great power anticipated, fully understood, or prepared for an asymmetric fight.

The Domino Theory

Great Britain, an island Nation largely dependent on her colonies for all manner of material, was very concerned that a secession or unchecked rebellion on the part of the American Colonies would cause a chain reaction throughout the Empire. Richard M. Ketchum articulates this in *Saratoga*:

> From the royal point of view, the great fear was that the rebellion in America would set off a reaction like the fall of a row of dominoes, with the West Indies becoming dependent on America and the Irish seeking independence, 'so that the island reduced to itself, would be a poor island indeed.'[1]

The British Monarchy also believed that successful rebellion would shake all of Europe to its foundation. In contrast to the United States' Domino Theory of the twentieth century, Great Britain's fears had validity, as the French would discover in the years to come.

[1] Ketchum, Richard M., Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War (New York: Henry Holt and Co. Inc., 1997) 67.

Like England, the United States had its own Domino Theory. Though the actual term was not used publicly until 1954 in a speech by President Eisenhower, the theory began to take shape in 1950 in documents like NSC-64. Kissinger articulates this in *Diplomacy*:

> NSC document 64 had concluded that Indochina was 'a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.' The memorandum marked the debut of the so-called Domino Theory, which predicted that, if Indochina fell, Burma and Thailand would soon follow, and that 'the balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.'[2]

NSC-68 outlined the "Fundamental Design of the Kremlin" as the U.S. leadership saw it. The Soviet Union's ultimate goal was absolute power over its territories. Within the minds of the Soviet leaders this meant everyone else had to be destroyed.[3] The leadership in the U.S. at the time believed that the Soviet Union and China were strong allies bent on world domination. One assumption was that if any country fell to communist rule, regardless of whether the impetus was internal or external, the rest of the region would fall like dominoes, and democracy would be extinguished. Although NSC-68 was initially subjected to strong criticisms, the invasion of South Korea in June of 1950 quieted all reservations and the "Domino Theory" became accepted as fact for the next twenty years.[4] This

[2] Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 623-624.
[3] S. Nelson Drew, NSC-68 Forging the Strategy of Containment, 39.
[4] Ibid, 98.

theory was the driving force behind U.S. involvement in Vietnam. According to Robert McNamara in his book, *In Retrospect*, the incoming Kennedy administration was briefed by the outgoing Eisenhower administration on 19 January, 1961. During this meeting, McNamara recalls:

> President Eisenhower stated ... 'If Laos [and, by implication, Vietnam] is lost to the Free World, in the long run we will lose all of Southeast Asia.'[5]

The Kennedy administration and, more importantly, the Johnson administration never questioned the paradigm of the "Domino Theory" during the Vietnam War.

Perceived Welcome

The British government was convinced (probably until February, 1781) that the rebellion was an unpopular movement driven by upstarts, and that there were a large number of colonists who were loyal to the Crown. Why they clung to this assumption is uncertain. Thomas Paine, an extremely popular journalist of the time voiced a widely held opinion in *Common Sense*:

> Every thing that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other, was never the design of Heaven.[6]

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[5] Robert McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Random House, 1995), 36.
[6] Fast, Howard, The Selected Work of Tom Paine, (New York: Random House Inc., 1945) 22.

Two glaring examples of Britain's imaginative fantasy that loyalists were abundant are the Campaign of 1777 and the Campaign in the southern Colonies during 1780 and 1781. British General John Burgoyne's strategy in 1777 relied heavily on an indistinct body of loyalists that would materialize once he proceeded south from Canada. They "failed to sign up in any significant numbers", and if they truly constituted one third of the Colonies' population "as John Adams believed ... they were not concentrated in any one place."[7] Even after Burgoyne's overwhelming defeat at Saratoga, due in part to the failure of the Loyalists to emerge, Great Britain clung to the belief that most Americans were loyal. In the southern campaign in 1780, the story was very similar. The pacification, which will soon be discussed in greater detail, relied heavily on the presence of numerous loyalists. When they failed to rally to General Cornwallis' side, his eventual defeat became inevitable.

Unlike the American Colonies in the eighteenth century, South Vietnam was not the property of the United States in the twentieth. However, the U.S. strongly supported the de-facto President of that country. Like Great Britain, the U.S. understood very little about the

[7] Ketchum, Saratoga, 109.

land or the people with which it was going to wage a war. Robert S. McNamara states in "In Retrospect" that, with regard to Vietnam they "did not have time to think straight"[8] and that:

> [They had a] profound ignorance of the history, culture, and politics of the people in the area, and the personalities and habits of their leaders.[9]

By his own admission, they (the Administration) were out of their element, and were ill equipped to handle the developing situation. For example, the U.S. had little appreciation for the religious make up of South Vietnam. Most of the people were Buddhist peasants. The American backed President, Ngo Din Diem, was a Catholic aristocrat from the North. In addition, democratic ideals were of little concern to the corrupt Diem regime, and irrelevant to the peasant farmer. Like Great Britain in the American Colonies, the U.S. saw its role in South Vietnam as liberator and champion to a Nation harassed with rebellion. In reality, the U.S. was an interloper in a civil war for the unification of North and South Vietnam.

Technology

The final assumption that Great Britain and the U.S. shared was that technology would assure victory and hasten

[8] McNamara, In Retrospect, Preface.
[9] Ibid, 322.

the conflict’s conclusion. Both great powers enjoyed technological superiority over their enemies. Great Britain’s Navy was unmatched by any nation, especially America. The United States possessed incredible air power, against which Vietnam could present only partial resistance. Both nations fielded the most well trained conventional armies of their time. Logic might suggest that these advantages would prove decisive and guarantee swift victory. In retrospect, it is evident that the technological advantages were rendered ineffective through the use of asymmetric strategies and tactics.

Summary

The flawed assumptions that Great Britain and the U.S. made were critical to their eventual defeat. In effect, the assumptions were the basis for involvement. Had either nation avoided those assumptions, or re-evaluated them at some point, disaster could have been prevented. The U.S. involvement is particularly tragic because the mistakes the U.S. made in Vietnam mirrored the mistakes made by their old enemy, Great Britain. The Vietnamese, like the Revolutionary Americans, took advantage of those mistakes at every opportunity. In any case, both nations were defeated by inferior enemies. They suffered a diminution

in world respect. Worst of all, many human lives were lost unnecessarily.

CHAPTER THREE

TIME AND DISTANCE

One of the greatest challenges that both Great Britain and the U.S. confronted was immense geographic separation from the theaters. That distance had an adverse impact on two critical requirements. First, all communications between the governments and their forces were delayed. In Great Britain's case the delay was two to three months in each direction. Second, every piece of equipment, all supplies, and every individual, combatant and non-combatant alike, had to be transported across a tremendous distance and at great expense.

Communications

In the Revolutionary War, every single British communiqué had to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Every order, report, request, and personal letter had to travel by ship. Each took approximately two to three months to reach the intended recipient. In the Vietnam War, communication was still a problem but for different reasons. Geographically, the distance between the U.S. and Vietnam was twice that

encountered by Great Britain during the American Revolution. The methods of communication, radio, phone, and mail partially compensated for the added distance.[10] The real delays came from the great control that civilian political leadership exercised over the military. In a discussion about target selection for Rolling Thunder 20, H.R. McMaster writes:

> On June 23 the president met with his advisors to approve the target package personally...no military officer was present. Six days after the JCS had made their initial proposal (which included 14 targets), Wheeler sent the final orders for RT20, consisting of seven targets, to CINCPAC. [11]

This tremendous civilian oversight caused long, often debilitating delays between target detection and target engagement.

Lord Germain sent approximately two hundred and fifty secret messages between 1775 and 1782.[12] If dispatched equitably throughout the months, Lord Germain sent three or four every month. They contradicted each other "from one month's letter to the next, even from paragraph to paragraph."[13] The time delay made requests for clarification impossible. It was not uncommon for entire campaigns to run their course before the King or his

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[10] While no sources were discovered that spoke specifically to communications delays between Washington and Saigon during the Vietnam War, it can be assumed that delays were encountered. Even today, in the era of satellites and email, distance causes delay in communication between Conus and Okinawa, the Arabian Gulf, and Korea.
[11] McMaster, H.R., Dereliction of Duty (New York: HarperCollins Publishers,1997) 286.
[12] William L. Clements Library, George Germain Papers. University of Michigan.
[13] Shy, John, A People Numerous and Armed (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 203.

Secretary of State had any idea of events or developments. General Burgoyne, for instance, officially surrendered his Northern army on 17 October 1777. The Crown received the news on 2 December, which was a fairly rapid response for the time.[14]

Beans, Bullets, and Band-Aids

From the British perspective, logistics in the American Revolutionary War was a tremendous challenge. Despite optimistic thinking on the part of the government, host nation support was fleeting at best. Because of this every need that British forces in America had would come from the homeland. Two major problems faced the British supply conduit. First, London was five thousand miles away from New York. The journey across the unforgiving Atlantic Ocean took eight to twelve weeks. Second, merchant shipping capable or willing to make the journey did not exist in adequate numbers.

Trans-Atlantic journeys in the eighteenth century were horrible experiences. According to Ketchum:

> For the army officers, they were bad enough...but to the common soldier they were an unmitigated horror. Crowded below decks...they had to endure the stench of vomit and unwashed bodies and the crudest sanitary facilities, with three men stacked in bunks in a

[14] Ketchum records on pg 441 of Saratoga that while waiting for news of Burgoyne's fate, Horace Walpole wrote, "It is so inconvenient to have all letters come by post of the ocean. People should never go to war above ten miles off, as the Grecian States used to do."

> space five feet high and seven feet wide, fed on the meanest rations—including water that was green with viscous algae and rock-solid hardtack, crawling with weevils.[15]

He reports that on German transports, 20 percent of the men on every shipload were sick, and a staggering 4 percent had perished at the end of a crossing. In addition to the horrible human conditions, the extended times at sea made sending fresh rations and stock ineffective. In some cases, provisions were spoiled or damaged to the extent that only a quarter were usable upon arrival in the colonies.

One significant reason for the British supply shortages (especially food shortages) in the Colonies was the lack of adequate shipping assets. Most transports were owned and run by civilian contractors, many were in poor shape, and many refused government business. According to an article in *Army Logistician*:

> Many British merchants did not want to lease their ships to the war effort because it was not profitable for them. They could not find return tonnage, and their ships could wait as long as eight weeks before they were unloaded in American ports. The Netherlands and Germany were scoured for available ships, and many were subsequently hired. French merchant ships were available early in the war, but the British held the quality of those vessels in contempt and would not consider their use.[16]

The combination of the vicious 3,000 to 5,000 mile journey and the lack of available merchant shipping made British logistics a nightmare.

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[15] Ibid, 91.

[16] Maj. John A. Tokar, "Logistics and the British Defeat in the Revolutionary War." *Army Logistician* (September/October 1999).

Although the U.S. in the twentieth century enjoyed technology exponentially superior to that of Great Britain during the American Revolution, the magnitude of U.S. involvement neutralized that advantage to a large degree. According to an article in *Dimension: Defense Logistics Agency Magazine*, it was the first time the U.S. had supported an operation of that size with a "pipeline that stretched 9,000 to 11,000 miles."[17] The article goes on to describe its continuing escalation:

> The Agency's total procurement rose from $3.0 billion in fiscal 1965 to $6.2 billion during fiscal 1967. During fiscal 1967, it managed 1.7 million items. The number of supply requisitions jumped from 15.4 million in fiscal 1965 to 19.4 million in fiscal 1966. The Agency's civilian personnel strength soared from 33,230 in fiscal 1965 to 64,448 in fiscal 1967...[18]

Every piece of clothing that Americans wore, every bullet they fired, every ration they consumed, and every stretcher they laid on came through that pipeline. In addition, most of the humanitarian aid provided to the civilian victims of the conflict made that journey as well.

That pipeline was non-existent prior to 1964, and had to be built. A formerly "secret" document, from MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) to Commander in Chief, U.S. Army Pacific dated 26 October 1964, sheds some light on difficulties faced. Of the numerous conclusions

[17] Dr. Janet McDonnel, "Defense Supply Agency Supports Vietnam Conflict and the Warfighter." Dimensions: Defense Logistics Agency's news magazine (November/December 1999).

made by the staff, two were astonishing. 1) Previous estimates of 6 months to stand up a military logistics command in Vietnam that was capable of supporting the 1964 forecast of 20,000 to 25,000 deployed troops was overly optimistic; Two years was more reasonable. 2) The J-4 anticipated that each man would consume 39.2 pounds of Class I-V supplies per day.[19] At the height of the United States' 500,000-man involvement, that equates to approximately 13 million pounds of supplies every week.

Summary

The most critical factors in warfare are time and distance. Sun Tzu wrote:

> Those adept in waging war do not require a second levy of conscripts or more than two provisionings. They carry military equipment from the homeland, but rely on the enemy for provisions. Thus, the army is plentifully provided with food. When a country is impoverished by military operations, it is due to distant transportation; carrying supplies for great distances renders the people destitute. Where troops are gathered, prices go up. When prices rise, the wealth of the people is drained away. When wealth is drained away, the people will be afflicted with urgent and heavy exactions.[20]

Great Britain and the U.S. were faced with extreme communications, and logistical challenges. The distances from the respective theaters, and the time required to traverse those distances ensured a protracted conflict that

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[18] Ibid.
[19] (U) Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (J-4), SECRET Staff Study to Commander in Chief, U.S. Army Pacific, subject: "Improvement of U.S. Logistical Systems in RVN," dtd 26 Oct 1964.
[20] Sun Tzu, The Art of War (chapter 2 waging war)

would eventually wear down the will of the people. The same challenges hold true today, so the will and interest of the people must be carefully nurtured.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSONALITIES

There are similarities among the personalities involved in the American Revolution and the Vietnamese War. For very different reasons, the people of the revolutionary lands were extraordinarily well suited to prolonged rebellion and asymmetric warfare. The American Colonist and the Vietnamese peasant were tough and accustomed to hardship. Also, though very different indeed, the leaders of the revolutions possess some commonalities that should not be overlooked.

The Americans

Exploration and settlement of North America occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The men and women who braved the vast wilderness were of European origin. Most were uneducated and possessed no appreciable social standing in the “Old Country”, but were of strong, yet varying faiths. The environment was brutal and

unforgiving. Richard Ketchum, relating accounts of diarists in the eighteenth century, described the land as,

> … a world virtually untouched and unspoiled by humankind. It was a place in which the laws of nature, not man, governed, in which man was the intruder and an alien being, unsought and unwanted, who survived only if he managed to accommodate to the environs.[21]

The rugged land changed the people that settled it into different creatures, a new breed that would become known as Americans. Frederick Jackson Turner described the phenomenon in his book, *The Frontier in American History.*

> It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him....he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion.[22]

The relatively civilized, soft European became a battle-hardened survivalist who was entirely self-sufficient. From those modest beginnings grew a nation of tough, individualistic men and women who worked the land with their hands and survived by wits, brawn, and sheer determination.

The Vietnamese

Mongolian Chinese migrated into what is now known as Vietnam in 208 B.C. They existed, for hundreds of years, under a feudal system of Lords and a King. Chinese "governors" maintained a non-interfering presence over the

[21] Ketchum, Saratoga, 95.

districts, making Vietnam a Chinese protectorate. The first successful uprising, beginning more than two thousand years of warfare, is recorded in 39 A.D.[23]. Numerous occupations, repelled invasions, and wars washed over Vietnam through the centuries. In 1407, the Chinese returned with a vengeance. They raped the country's resources, brutalized the people, and attempted to crush any semblance of nationhood. Surprisingly, the brutality only galvanized the national identity of the Vietnamese people. The life of the peasant was harsh and brutal. They were a poor and hungry people who survived from occupation to independence to occupation once again, generation after generation. When France came in 1858, and the U.S. began arriving in 1960, foreign occupation was far from new to the Vietnamese. In the early twentieth century Pham van Dong, a long time companion of Ho Chi Minh, wrote:

> There is nothing else in our history except struggle. Struggle against foreign invaders, always more powerful than ourselves, struggle against nature. Because we have nowhere else to go, we have had to fight things out where we were. After two thousand years of this our people developed a very stable nervous system. We never panic. When a new situation arises, our people say, Ah well, there it goes again.[24]

The Revolutionary Leaders

While very different, the leaders of the revolutionary forces have similarities. George Washington and Ho Chi

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[22] Turner, Frederick J., The Frontier in American History (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967) 4.
[23] Macdonald, Peter, Giap: The Victor in Vietnam (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1993) 39.

Minh are unlikely historical companions. One was born in Virginia in 1732, and the other in Annam, the central of three provinces in Vietnam in 1890. Though separated by geography and time, these men are alike in several key ways.

Perhaps the most valuable trait that Washington availed to his fellow countrymen was his tenacious nature. When all others wanted to quit and go home (many did), Washington held them together and stayed at the enemy's heels. He won the war "by tenacity rather than by Napoleonic *brio.* Though he could be dashing in action, his overriding service to America lay in his steadfastness. He was a fixed point in a shifting universe."[25]

In similar fashion, Ho Chi Minh possessed inhuman stamina of the soul. Lacouture writes:

> And there are numerous other scenes which testify to Ho's serenity and stoicism at this time and to the other qualities which had been molded by thirty years of fighting for the revolution: visual impressions of him standing outside the crude hut in which he habitually slept, not far from his soldiers; sitting deep inside a cave and typing out an order for the day for the troops; inspecting a volunteer commando group and wearing a scruffy lumber jacket...climbing a steep slope in the highlands, stick in hand.[26]

He was "an incomparable man of action...he is the man who remains awake when everyone else sleeps."[27]

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[24] Ibid, 37.
[25] Billias, George Washington's Generals, 15.
[26] Lacouture, Jean, Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography (New York: Random House, 1968) 175.
[27] Ibid, 4.

Both Washington and Ho are the human manifestations of their respective country's revolutions.[28] They were both intelligent and possessed remarkable intuition. They are both known for legendary charisma. Most importantly, they were both tenacious nationalists. These men never wavered in their commitment to victory. Their countries were successful, in large part, because of their personal sacrifices and efforts.

Summary

The American of the Revolutionary War, especially the frontiersman living on the fringe of civilization was a very tough individual accustomed to hardship. The Vietnamese peasant, like his eighteenth century counter-part, was hard and capable. He was also patient. Both breeds were natural revolutionaries. Both Great Britain and the U.S. grossly underestimated their capabilities. George Washington and Ho Chi Minh were the type of men that legendary struggles demand. They were charismatic, driven, and tenacious. Their nations rallied behind them and elevated them to demi-god status. An enemy nation that has

[28] For more on Ho Chi Minh, see Jean Lacouture's book *Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography*. "Uncle Ho" had a fascinating life. While most Americans casually brand him a communist, it is more accurate to describe him as a nationalist. He was the modern "father" of Vietnam.

a leader with those qualities should never be underestimated.

CHAPTER FIVE

LINCHPIN BATTLES

In each of the conflicts, there is a single campaign that can be identified as the turning point of the respective war. Saratoga and Tet both satisfy three turning point criteria. They shocked the world and shattered paradigms. The revolutionaries started winning after the conclusion. Had those campaigns not occurred, or had they ended differently (especially Saratoga), the overall conflicts would have ended differently.

Saratoga

In October of 1777 the Americans defeated General Burgoyne and approximately 7,000 veteran troops. After a

four-month campaign that began in Quebec and ended at Saratoga, the survivors surrendered on the Hudson River. The shock of Burgoyne's defeat confirmed England's worst fears. Not only would the Americans fight, but they were good at it! Ketchum writes:

> December 2 brought the official news from Carleton, reporting 'the total annihilation...of Burgoyne's army,' and according to Walpole the King 'fell into agonies on hearing this account, but the next morning, at his levee to disguise his concern, affected to laugh and be so indecently merry that Lord North endeavored to stop him.'[29]

The King's initial reaction was warranted. The world watched Burgoyne's campaign with great interest. When news reached Europe, that America had defeated one of Great Britain's finest armies, France allied with the Colonies and declared war on England.

After the victory at Saratoga, American confidence was bolstered. While several defeats still lay ahead for the Revolutionaries, the tide was turned. As the Continental Army headed into a cold winter at Valley Forge, the men were warmed by the knowledge of their recent victory. As they emerged from winter quarters in the spring of 1778, they were a different army; one that had shared victory and hardship. They were an army that had trained, drilled, and learned together. They had a common identity.

If Burgoyne's Campaign of 1777 had ended differently, the outcome of the war would have been entirely different.

Had Burgoyne stuck to his plan and proceeded down the waterway to Albany, instead of becoming mired in the wilderness, victim to starvation and piecemeal attack, the Revolution in America would have been in serious jeopardy.

Tet

Like the American Revolutionary War, the conflict in Vietnam has one campaign that was the turning point. On 31 January 1968 (Vietnamese lunar New Year), the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong began a massive offensive, attacking virtually every military base, city, and town in South Vietnam simultaneously. Up to that point, the Johnson Administration had been telling the American people that the U.S. was winning the war. The Tet Offensive lasted approximately six weeks, and had tremendous ramifications on world (especially U.S.) opinion. Though the casualties suffered by the Vietnamese were far more severe than the U.S. count and the People's Liberation Army Front (PLAF or Viet Cong) was crippled by Tet, the political victory belonged to North Vietnam. The American people, long tiring of the war, demanded de-escalation. The reversal of U.S. policy caused by the Tet Offensive is evident in two speeches given by Lyndon Johnson:

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[29] Ketchum, Saratoga, 442.

> [Feb 27,1968 (height of Tet Offensive)] There must be no weakening of the will that would encourage the enemy or would prolong the bloody conflict. Peace will come of that response, of our unshakable and our untiring resolve, and only of that.
>
> [Mar 31, 1968 (at the conclusion of Tet)] We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations, so tonight in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing-substantially reducing-the present level of hostilities, and we are doing so unilaterally and at once.[30]

After Tet, the resistance of the American people to further escalation was unmistakable. American presence in Vietnam was gradually reduced and, though the Viet Cong had been seriously attrited, the North Vietnamese were still combat capable. The losses sustained by the communist forces did little more than lengthen the road to victory. If the North had not prosecuted the Tet Offensive, the American presence would have continued at pre-Tet levels or greater. There are indications that Hanoi needed a decisive action, and the leadership was acutely aware of the political atmosphere in the United States.[31] Their timing was perfect. Hanoi succeeded in manipulating the U.S. political atmosphere extensively. Tet was the turning point of the Vietnam War.

Summary

The campaigns of 1777 (ending in Saratoga) and the Tet Offensive share similarities. They each meet the three

[30] Oberdorfer, Don, Tet!: The story of a battle and its historic aftermath. (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1971) 279.

criteria: 1) they shattered paradigms; 2) the rebels started winning afterward; 3) if the campaigns had not occurred, the outcomes of the wars would have been different. If Saratoga had gone in Burgoyne's favor, the French would not have allied with the Colonies or declared war on England. Burgoyne would have eventually linked up with Howe and the Revolution would have been crushed. In retrospect, the communists in 1968 had nothing to lose. By conducting the audacious and simultaneous attack on all the bases, cities, and towns in South Vietnam they garnered the attention of the world. They mastered the political realm and used it to their advantage. Both campaigns were linchpin battles that altered the overall conflict in which they took place.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

Although there are many comparisons that can be drawn between the "Southern conflicts" of both wars, this chapter will focus on three of the most apparent. First, the program of "Americanization"[32] in the Revolutionary War is

[31] For an in-depth discussion of why the uprising occurred see Oberdorfer's *Tet!* Chapter 2.
[32] "Americanization" is a term coined by John Shy to describe British national strategy with regard to the southern Colonies. It is very similar to the U.S. National Policy of "Vietnamization" in the 1960's, but was not a term used in the eighteenth century.

very similar to the policy of "Vietnamization"[33] in the twentieth century. Second, much of the pacification conducted in both wars seems more like a policy of "Alienation" directed toward the common people. Third, the Guerrilla tactics used by the revolutionaries, out of necessity, are similar and will be compared.

Americanization Vs Vietnamization

After the tragic defeat of General Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777 and the subsequent declaration of war by the French in 1778, Britain was desperate and grasping for solutions to its terrible situation. Many English, both Military and civilian alike, supported abandoning the struggle altogether. John Shy records:

> Major General Friedrich Wilhelm von Lossberg, for example, commanding German troops in Rhode Island, exuded pessimism over the prospects for ever pacifying the rebellious colonies: 'We are far from an anticipated peace,' Lossberg wrote, 'because the bitterness of the rebels is too widespread, and in regions where we are masters the rebellious spirit is still in them. The land is too large, and there are too many people. The more land we win, the weaker our army gets in the field.[34]

Shy goes on to say,

> Informed sources believed that Lord North himself, head of the government, was for peace 'at any rate,' and Lord Howe, commanding the navy in American waters, was said to be 'decided in his opinion that America must be abandoned.'[35]

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[33] Kissinger, Diplomacy, 682. The policy was designed to extricate Americans from Vietnam while simultaneously empowering the South Vietnamese to defend themselves in the absence of U.S. military power.
[34] Shy, A People Numerous and Armed, 195.
[35] Ibid.

But King George III was not ready to capitulate and England embarked on the campaign in the South. The ever-optimistic Lord Germain, Secretary of State for the American Colonies remained convinced that loyalism was rampant in the South. In March of 1778, Germain outlined his plan. American Loyalists in the southern colonies would be trained, equipped, and would police their own neighborhoods after the British and Hessian troops had cleared out any strong rebel resistance. Also contained in the plan were instructions to act in a manner that would endear any neutral Americans and convince them that it was a good thing to be a Colony of England. "Americanization" sounds remarkably similar to the United States' plan in Vietnam.

After the political nightmare that was Tet, President Nixon campaigned on a platform that included reducing American involvement in the war. Like the British plan in the South, the new President's plan required training the "loyalists", and returning to them responsibility for control of their country. Weigley writes:

> The means was a 'Vietnamization' program of gradually transferring responsibility for ground combat to South Vietnamese troops, prepared as well as they could be for an enlarged role by an accelerated schedule of American aid and training, and supported by a reintensification of American aerial operations. [ ] ...the aerial bombing campaign nevertheless permitted President Nixon to avoid any appearance of an intent to abandon South Vietnam, while still reducing American troop strength there from 565,000 to 24,000 by December 1, 1972.[36]

[36] Weigley, The American Way of War, 469-470.

Sadly, the “Vietnamization” program was only successful in extracting U.S. personnel. The South Vietnamese never had a chance for victory in the absence of a strong U.S. presence. They fell to the North Vietnamese in 1975, and Saigon is now Ho Chi Minh City.

A Policy of Alienation

The major problem with the British strategy was that it was duplicitous. It called for General Cornwallis, who inherited the Southern campaign, “to strike terror into American hearts by amphibious raiding at the same time British soldiers were being asked to win American hearts and minds back to the royal cause.”[37] The hawkish members of the cadre took great pleasure in antagonizing Americans and striking terror into their hearts. One such man was the Green Dragoon, Colonel Banastre Tarleton. This officer showed little mercy and permitted his men to slaughter rebels that surrendered; the practice became known as “Tarleton’s Quarter.”[38] As he moved into the interior of the southern Colonies, Tarleton burned properties and plantations along the way. One of Tarleton’s victims was Thomas Sumter, a retired Revolutionary Colonel who had been

neutral to the struggle for some time. After Tarleton burned his lands, Sumter re-entered the Revolution and killed British soldiers for the remainder of the war. There were many like Sumter. The policy that those not swearing allegiance to the crown be branded traitors forced many neutrals to join the Revolutionary side, and re-ignited the fires of rebellion in the south.

In 1962, the U.S., through the Diem regime, instituted the "Strategic Hamlets" program.[39] Based on the successful British program in Malaya, it was designed to counter the spread of "Vietcong activity and influence" by uprooting the country folk of South Vietnam and relocating them into controlled camps in order to protect them from the communists. The program was a terrible failure for three reasons. First, unlike the Malayans, the Vietnamese lived near, and worshipped the graves of their ancestors. In forcibly removing them from their lands, Diem and his American friends were creating sacrilege.

> ...the Malays are Moslems and do not venerate the graves of their ancestors as the Vietnamese do: though during the emergency they might not have liked moving from their homes, they had no deep spiritual objections to it, whereas when they were evicted the Vietnamese felt that they were deserting the spirits of their forebears, being torn away from their roots.[40]

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[37] Shy, A People Numerous and Armed, 201.
[38] Weigley, The American Way of War, 26.
[39] Macdonald, Giap, 186.

Second, the conditions were horrible. Vast quantities of U.S. money intended for quality of life was being embezzled by the corrupt Diem regime:

> Though millions of dollars were poured into the Hamlets plan and a gigantic effort was made to make it work, it was a loser from the start. People were forced to move into places that were lacking basic amenities because the money to pay for them had been diverted into the pockets of unscrupulous contractors...Villagers had to have identity cards but to get them often had to bribe officials.[41]

Finally, unlike Malaya, the guerrillas were the same race as the non-combatants and were indistinguishable from them. The VC often lived among and around the Hamlets. All that the Strategic Hamlets program achieved, not unlike the British campaign in the South, was to push many benign farmers into Ho Chi Minh's service.

Guerrilla Wars

The true guerrilla war in the America Revolution occurred in Nathaniel Greene's campaign in the south. Four factors made Greene's war a tremendous success. The first was the emergence of men like Sumter and, more critically, Francis Marion. Nicknamed "the Swamp Fox" for his ability to disappear into the numerous marshes, Marion was a man of exceptional tactical élan, who possessed an uncommon ability to work well with other commanders. The second was

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[40] Ibid, 187.
[41] Ibid, 188.

the appearance of the “over-mountain” men, hardy survivalists from the west side of the Appalachians. They were outstanding riflemen who knew the value of terrain and cover. Third was the battle at the “Cowpens”, where Daniel Morgan killed or captured most of Tarleton’s force. Finally, the coup-de-grace was the subsequent race to the Dan River, and the battles of attrition that followed. Most notable of those was the Battle of Guilford Court House.

Nathaniel Greene’s first move was to split his forces causing Cornwallis to do the same. The British General sent Tarleton and his crack troops to engage Dan Morgan’s element of the Revolutionary army. On January 17, 1781 they met Morgan in a field called “the Cowpens”, and in their arrogance, mistook a planned withdrawal by Morgan’s militia for a rebel rout. Tarleton’s forces charged into the defense in depth and were decimated. Morgan then moved quickly north to link up with Greene’s main body.

Upon receiving word of the Green Dragoon’s defeat, Cornwallis became enraged and ordered his army’s stores burned so that he could quickly catch the fleeing Greene. When the American general learned what Cornwallis had done,

he supposedly exclaimed, "Then he is ours!"[42] In the race to the Dan River, Greene stayed just out of Cornwallis' reach. Many under supplied British soldiers became exhausted, sick, and some died. Harried constantly on the flanks and in the rear by "the Swamp Fox" and the "over-mountain men", Cornwallis was denied forage and supplies. Greene played a cat and mouse game with the ever-weakening British army. Desperate for victory and unwilling to admit defeat, Cornwallis attacked an American force twice his size at Guilford Court House. Francis Kieron recorded an observation of a period historian in *The Journal of American History*:

> If Cornwallis had had the troops Tarleton lost at the Cowpens, it is not extravagant to suppose that the American Colonies might have been reunited to the Empire of Great Britain.[43]

Cornwallis won the field that day, but at the loss of approximately a quarter of his remaining troops. The game ended at Yorktown with Cornwallis' unconditional surrender to George Washington.

The Vietnamese eventually won their war for unification for three reasons. First, Like the American Rebels in the South, they were phenomenal guerrilla fighters. 2) Like the American Rebels in the South, they were incredibly tough and could endure tremendous hardship.

[42] Weigley, The American Way of War, 31.

3) Like the American Rebels in the South, they could blend into the population by day.

First fighting the French and Japanese, and later fighting the Americans, Uncle Ho's Revolutionary army became unrivaled in stealth and hit and run tactics. Both the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN - known to the west as NVA regulars), and the PLAF traveled light and could cook without making smoke.[44] Their goal was not to hold ground, but to appear, usually at night, kill as many Americans as possible without becoming decisively engaged, and melt back into the jungle.

In the personal account of Nguyen Van Tich, a Lieutenant Colonel with the 325th "Golden Star" Division of the PAVN, he described his first combat action, where his unit engaged three regiments of the 1st Air Cavalry:

> They walked toward us, talking on their walkie-talkies to the helicopters, which did not fire at us from the sky but made a lot of noise in the air above us. [...] When they got really close we started shooting. It was a very short distance. Some of them fell. Then their friends ran to help them and we shot them too. Often we were able to shoot Americans because they came back for their comrades. I killed about twelve of them that day." He goes on to say that "after the fighting we withdrew to a safe place.[45]

They were incredibly tough. Tich recalls that 100% of his men had malaria and many suffered from skin diseases due to their constant exposure to the elements. According

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[43] Francis Kieron,"The Battle of Guilford Court House" The Journal of American History, Vol. VII, 1913.

to him, they ate rotten rice dug from the paddies. When they killed Americans, they got chocolate bars and cigarettes. Still, they fought because there was nothing else that they could do, nowhere else for them to go. According to General Westmoreland, many of the Vietnamese killed bore the tattoo that said "Born in the North to Die in the South."[46]

Finally, they were indistinguishable from the South Vietnamese. The Revolutionaries moved in and around the civilian populace with ease. They would fight the war at their convenience and blend back into the masses when it suited their cause.

Summary

Both the American Revolutionary War and the Vietnam War were lost in the Southern campaigns. The American loyalists never had a chance to hold ground in the Colonies without the constant presence of their "big brothers" from Great Britain. Once the Americans withdrew, the South Vietnamese government and its forces were doomed to meet a tragic end. Also, it is impossible for a nation to pacify

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[44] Actually, they used an invention called the Hoang Cao cooker, named for the inventor. It used a small tunnel near the heat source to dissipate the carbon from the fire. The inventor was considered a hero of the people.
[45] Macdonald, Giap, 224.
[46] Ibid, 230.

a large body of people who are geographically separated, ideologically different, and armed to the man. An analogy would be the capture of a wild tiger. You can kill the tiger, or you can cage the tiger and throw food to it. You will never be able to pet the tiger. Finally, guerrilla fighting is asymmetric to conventional warfare. The only way to successfully counter it is by isolating the combatants and removing their support structure.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The American Revolution has many similarities to Vietnam's War for Unification. Yet America, victim in the eighteenth century conflict, became the oppressor in the twentieth century. If the U.S. had been able to see the similarities clearly it could have avoided the mistakes made in Vietnam, or avoided the conflict altogether. The ability or inclination to examine conflicts of the past, while planning and conducting present day operations does not come naturally. History is rich with stories of nations repeating the mistakes of others.

Throughout the United States' history, extraordinary patterns reveal themselves. Consider, as Shy suggests, the Seven Years' War, the Revolutionary War, and the War of

1812. In each of these conflicts the existence of our nation has been at jeopardy. In each, the U.S. suffered crushing defeats initially.[47] All of these conflicts ended with overwhelming American victories and expanded territories for the "Yankees." The nation saw similar trends in World War I and World War II. As the U.S. entered the latter half of the twentieth century, it can be argued that arrogance became an impediment to victory.

America has a tendency to consider conflicts from an egocentric point of view. The nation has habitually viewed current and future conflicts (or negotiations) by looking at the recent past, and only considering the U.S. perspective in those situations. An indictment of our defense establishment has been its propensity to "prepare to fight the last war." History is rich with many examples of mistakes and missed opportunities: Ho Chi Minh's attempt to befriend the U.S. during and immediately following World War II; the French defeat at the hands of the Vietnamese; Cuba's (Fidel Castro's) initial request for alliance with the U.S; the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan; Russia in Chechnya; the NATO coalition in Kosovo. In all those situations, great powers made mistakes that caused unneeded expenditure of resources and

[47] Shy, A People Numerous and Armed, 278.

loss of life. These are only a few of the lessons that exist in the library of mankind's existence.

On September 11, 2001 the U.S. was the victim of a brutal attack on its civilian population that began the war in which it is currently engaged. During the course of this war, there will be many opportunities and also many risks. By having a keen awareness of and searching for patterns throughout history, and by incorporating that awareness into the planning phase of national policy implementation, the Nation's civilian and military leaders will be better equipped to make sound judgments in this complicated future.

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