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Defend the North: The Case for the Alice Springs-- Darwin Railway

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a potential enemy, *The Great Betrayal* offers the national security community valuable lessons.

DORA ALVES
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Ball, Desmond; Langtry, J.O.; and Stevenson, J.D. *Defend the North: The Case for the Alice Springs—Darwin Railway*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985. 104pp. \$9.95

In 1942 the United States perceived a threat from the northwest. The Japanese had landed in Kiska and Attu, and it appeared that they would soon reach Seattle. The outposts in Alaska seemed to be in danger and an overland route to the north, safe from submarines, was needed. Construction of the Alcan Highway was the solution, giving the allies the capability to move men and materials north to meet the threat without having to divert naval forces from other critical theaters of operations.

Australia also faced a problem in 1942 in that country's northwest. The port of Darwin had been almost obliterated by Admiral Nagumo's carrier-based aviators. Just about everything needed to defend that part of the country had to be sent by ship. If the Canadian and American overland route north to Alaska was rugged, the Australian route north from the center of the continent at Alice Springs to the "Top End" also tested man's ability to suffer, his ingenuity, and his drive. A road, really only a track, was put in. It

wasn't much, but it was better than nothing.

The situation has changed greatly in the "Top End." Today there are several adequate roads to the Northern Territory from east, south and west. The days of the coastal steamer are now the business of museums. Vast "road trains" (tractors with three to four trailers) rapidly bring fresh vegetables and merchandise north. While this works well for the civilian population, it is inadequate for emergency military needs.

The authors are fully engrossed in their study of military issues in Australia. Among other topics, Desmond Ball has previously written on intelligence (with the American, Jeffrey Richelson), examining the U.S. Signals Intelligence facilities down under. The key authors of this book, Langtry and Stevenson, are retired officers and have experience in the area of logistics. *Defend the North* is about logistics.

The book begins with the political issue of a rail link north. Major public investments for this project, however, are restricted by the still small population. The authors argue that the railroad needs to ride the defense issue if it is ever to be built.

No doubt there have been threats from the north, real and imagined. The Australian military is increasing its presence there; the Royal Australian Air Force is establishing a new base at Katherine. Our B-52s are seen from time to time at Darwin, and even our ships have been to its enormous harbor. Still, a rail link, if you accept the authors' premises, is

needed. Sustained activity of any military nature in Australia will eventually require the logistical link that only rail can provide, given that country's seaborne limitations.

While this book can be viewed as part of a local debate over a defense-related and practical political issue, it has utility for Americans, for Darwin provides a position from which to reach Southeast Asia. At one time, Manus in the Admiralties attracted U.S. attention. We would do well to examine our alternate systems of supply delivery to the Western Pacific and Indian oceans. Do we have flexibility? Do we have the capacity to support large-scale operations? One can ask other questions of the type raised by these Australians viewing their strategic and geographical position. If nothing else, the authors' arguments will inform the reader of one issue that not only confronted the Australians yesterday, but still does today.

PETER CHARLES UNSINGER
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Hannah, Norman B. *The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War*. Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1987. 335pp. \$19.95

This book is yet another in a long series of efforts that attempts to discover the underlying causes of our defeat in Vietnam. The author is a retired foreign service officer with extensive experience in Asia (but not in Vietnam), whose appointments included that of political adviser to

the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet during a crucial early stage in the escalation of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Hannah's book portrays the origin and evolution of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam in a series of chapters variously evoking images of the bullring, the theater, and knitting. The author asserts that the failure of the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos and the subsequent U.S. failure to isolate the battlefield in South Vietnam led to our defeat in the Vietnam War. He states that, throughout the war, the principal American decision makers failed to appreciate this fact. As a consequence, although there was "a real [North Vietnamese] aggression through Laos," the United States "won the wrong war by expending its effort against . . . a largely simulated insurgency in South Vietnam." The result was a misguided "strategy of mirrors" compounded by a "dismally repetitive," incremental decision-making approach that continually missed coming to terms with the main chance in Laos.

Hannah argues that we could have done better and produces excerpts from his own memoranda of the time to show how the establishment of a flexible, mobile barrier south of the so-called Demilitarized Zone and across the Laotian panhandle would have isolated the battlefield in South Vietnam, "using our ground positions as the anvil and our aerial attacks as the hammer." Success was possible later in the war, despite the misguided beginning, in his opinion: 1969 was still a good time to