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Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Vietnam, 1954-1975

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reviews the problem known as the dirty hands of command. Overall, *Moral Issues* covers the same ground and is by far superior.

Each of these volumes, except *Moral Issues*, deals with nuclear morality, a topic I have bypassed in discussing individual military responsibility. None raises either distinctively naval professional questions or issues particular to the enlisted fighting man. Perhaps the next crop will explore an officer's special trust and confidence from the perspective of a seaman.

Weisner, Louis A. *Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Vietnam, 1954-1975*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 448pp. \$55

Modern governments profess that civilians and noncombatants should not suffer unnecessarily at the hands of military forces. The track record since Hiroshima and Dresden however, plainly shows the difference between theory and practice in tragic terms. On one hand, the prospect of indiscriminate death from weapons of mass destruction or terrorism can paralyze policymakers in a pool of pessimism. Yet the fate of innocent bystanders in any conflict, be it nuclear or "low-intensity," injects a sense of urgency into the debate about the role of civilians in war.

Excellent work on the subject has emerged since 1947, much of it from historians. Now we have a contribution from a first-time author with credentials that should appeal to veterans as well as to scholars. Louis Wiesner went to Vietnam in 1968 as a member of the United States Refugee Division. Since then, his life

has revolved around the plight of refugees worldwide.

Wiesner knows the civilian side of combat. His book focuses on refugees, but also discusses civil action, "pacification programs," and problems which European experts refer to as "civil-military cooperation." Both professional warriors and laymen with little knowledge of war can benefit from his perspective.

The first third of the book covers events and conditions in Vietnam between 1954 and 1968. Wiesner describes the 1954 exodus from the North, the strategic hamlet program in the South, and the various Montagnard resettlement efforts. Each chapter concludes with an evaluation of the program.

The refugee problem grew in the sixties. Wiesner's description of the Tet offensive, which he witnessed, is affected by his own experiences. Indeed, by the end of the book the reader has witnessed three different writing styles, each appropriate to Wiesner's role in the war.

Wiesner conveys his distaste for the Vietminh and the Vietcong, but the reader still senses that the Government of Vietnam (GVN) did

as much to lose the war as the communists did to win it. "The counterinsurgency programs of the government and of the American military advisers did not address the grievances of the people, which were among the most important factors in the rebellion, but instead added new causes for resentment. . . ." As examples, he cites the abuses in land reform, corruption among GVN officials and the attempts to eliminate non-Vietnamese ethnic groups. The GVN left no blunder untried in its twenty-year history of mismanaging the war. Then there were the atrocities: My Lai in 1968 and the senseless bombing exemplified by the attack on Binh Hoa in 1962. Reporting on the latter, Roger Hilsman noted "that it helped to recruit more Viet Cong than it could possibly have killed."

There were bright spots and lessons for future warriors to remember. Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt gets high marks for the Combined Action Platoons (CAPs) developed by units of his III Marine Amphibious Force in the mid to late sixties.

Wiesner has filled a gap in the history of the conflicts that have racked Vietnam for over sixty years. He has documented in detail the successes and failures of thirty-one years of refugee management in South Vietnam. The annotated bibliography and detailed notes justify the cost of the book. But more than that, he lists the lessons learned that policymakers and commanders

can apply to future small wars. Two examples:

"Some killing, injury and displacement of civilians are inevitable . . . however, the amount of damage to civilian populations and their property . . . are controllable by the belligerents. . . . Furthermore, if the harm done is perceived by the victims as excessive or disproportionate to legitimate military purposes—which people on the spot are often quite capable of judging—it produces resentments that may make an operation or campaign unproductive.

It is generally best to leave people on their land, even in enemy-held areas. Although they will be used . . . by the enemy, such exploitation, especially if it becomes excessive, will probably alienate the people from their oppressors. . . .

Refugees are part of the landscape of war. Wiesner has devoted his life to them. Through his book, he may reach the victims of conflicts yet to come. For their sake, he deserves our attention.

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Lieutenant Commander
U.S. Navy (Retired)

Hackworth, David and Sherman, Julie. *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989. 875pp. \$24.95

This is the story of a soldier who began his career as a 15-year-old, NCO-raised warrior. His early