

1979

Summons of the Trumpet

Warren Spaulding

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Spaulding, Warren (1979) "Summons of the Trumpet," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 1 , Article 30.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss1/30>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

118 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

United States bears the responsibility for the onset of the Korean war is a position which can, to a degree, be argued. However, Levine offers no rationale for this position. His "conclusion"—that China will continue to grow militarily, and that "the United States and the Soviet Union would be wise to recognize this emergent reality"—belabors the obvious.

The articles which form "Interactions Around China's Rim" are by Peter Van Ness, Michael H. Hunt, and Alexander Woodside. The last offers a fine view of the role of Southeast Asia in Sino-American relations, although Woodside's advocacy of formal U.S. relations with Cambodia seems unjustified in view of that country's institution of hysteria as a way of life. Van Ness rehashes Taiwan's role in Sino-American relations without offering any new ideas. Hunt's article should be important, addressing the historic and continuing importance of the northeast, the "cockpit of Asia." However, his efforts suffer from staleness—the 11 authors who precede him address many of the same topics—and end in a conclusion which is difficult to justify. Surely, if the United States withdrew her forces from the area and substituted "some less binding agreement for the current South Korean security treaty," as Hunt urges, it would *not* allow "Washington [to] gain the time and flexibility it needs in responding to any Korean crisis."

The final part of the book consists of an article by Jerome A. Cohen, "Sino-American Relations and International Law." It is the finest essay in the book. The author provides a straightforward insight into the two countries' perception of law. He concludes that both nations have a cynical view of international regulation and that international law—which he describes as a relative value—cannot by itself function to improve or even regulate Sino-American relations. It is a well-written and perceptively essay.

The articles in *Dragon and Eagle* are based for the most part on solid scholarly ground—although the essays by Levine and Hunt leave something to be desired in this respect. This is not a work for the reader who is already knowledgeable about Sino-American relations. However, it does provide a comprehensive, if unexceptional, introduction to the subject for the uninitiated student.

BERNARD D. COLE
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Palmer, Dave R. *Summons of the Trumpet*. San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1978. 277pp.

Colonel Palmer describes his book as "a broad history—the story of America's military involvement in Vietnam." And that's exactly what it is—a most enjoyable story. No footnotes interrupt the flow of his narrative, making this a highly readable account of 20 frustrating and futile years of military operations.

The book is constrained to an investigation of our military involvement; political, economic, and psychological factors are discussed only as required to provide a backdrop for the military story. However, even though he has explicitly limited his focus, some readers will feel his treatment is still overly condensed. For example, he discusses only six battles/campaigns and even those in very little detail. But this approach serves his purpose well—he communicates the flavor of combat without the usual plethora of tactical specifics that can easily pose a confusing maze for the reader who wasn't there. And he includes these actions as necessary to show the changing faces of the war, not to chronicle specific engagements as more important than others.

Although Palmer neither whitewashes nor condemns, he has his favorites and his "goats." General Westmoreland comes off well; although he is

sometimes shown to be overly optimistic on the conduct and expected outcome of the war, no question is raised about his strategic or tactical decisions. Only Giap rates higher on Palmer's list of effective generals, with references to his execution of the first phase of Tet 68 and the masking of his real intentions prior to initiation of that offensive.

Secretary McNamara is shown as having an understanding of the true complexity and eventual futility of America's involvement but not having ability to do anything about it. The reader without a previously formed opinion of the Secretary is more likely to feel sympathy than disapproval.

President Johnson does not fare as well and if anyone in Palmer's story is meant to be shown as the "heavy," it's Johnson. He is portrayed as reluctant and indecisive, as inflicting a humiliating gesture on the Joint Chiefs of Staff by exacting a pledge from each that he could hold Khe Sanh, as a perplexed president, and as possibly our most reluctant and indecisive wartime commander-in-chief.

One is tempted to chide Palmer for his almost complete absorption with the ground war in Vietnam for, with the exception of 17 pages devoted to the bombing of North Vietnam ("yet another example of a strategic air campaign which miscarried"), there is little mention of the naval and air contribution to our military involvement. And his claim that the rather unique fighting in Dalat during Tet was more representative of the battles of Tet than either Saigon or Hue is open to serious question. It is also surprising to find that the key figures in the few battles he describes just "happen" to be well-known personalities today; e.g., Generals Haig, Starry, Berry and Depuy.

But these are minor complaints about what is a most impressive job of bringing a long and confusing period of America's history into sharp focus.

PROFESSIONAL READING 119

Palmer provides clear support for Westmoreland's description, in 1966, of the conflict in South Vietnam as a protracted war of attrition with no clearly defined objective; and he demonstrates convincingly that the war's final outcome represented a political, not military, defeat for America. He closes with a trumpet summons of his own: "There must be no more Vietnams."

This is a book well worth reading and I particularly recommend it to those who are weary of the Hollywood-in-mind approaches, the half-or-worse truths, and the snide innuendoes of the Caputos, Herberts, Buntings and other pseudohistorians of their ilk. Palmer has painted a three-dimensional panorama of a frustrating military involvement that holds many significant lessons for military and political leaders of the future. One can only hope they will read this book and learn the lessons it contains.

WARREN SPAULDING
Colonel, U.S. Army

Safford, Jeffrey J. *Wilsonian Maritime Diplomacy 1913-1921*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978. 282pp.

This book propounds an ambitious thesis: Woodrow Wilson's was the first modern administration to recognize the merchant marine as an instrument of diplomacy. World War I provided first an opportunity to overcome earlier opposition to government involvement in shipping, then a challenge to wrest maritime supremacy from Great Britain. The author proposes to explain how the Wilson administration used the American merchant fleet "as a powerful bargaining agent in the creation of a liberal and pro-American postwar peace."

He begins by reviewing the conflicts among farmers, industrialists, shippers, and congressional leaders that previously had thwarted efforts to implement a national merchant marine