

1968

Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire

R. L. O'Neil
U.S. Navy

Thich Nhat Hanh

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

Recommended Citation

O'Neil, R. L. and Hanh, Thich Nhat (1968) "Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 21 : No. 4 , Article 21.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol21/iss4/21>

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.

nist Party, and its economic and social roles. The author achieves his stated purpose, but at the sacrifice of clarity. In essence, the book is a surface skimming of major shifts and changes and developments within the People's Liberation Army. It suffers from poor organization of the subject matter, shifting back and forth in time as the author discusses the relationship of the People's Liberation Army with other aspects of society. However, in spite of the organizational weakness and the fact that the book was not designed to be a study in depth, this is a very valuable addition to the literature on China for the student. The author reiterates again and again that self-reliance is, and has been, a major theme of the Chinese Communists even before their advent to power. There is a clear discussion of the evident friction within the People's Liberation Army between those desiring a more professional military establishment and those desiring a return to the revolutionary model of pre-1949. Since 1959 the revolutionaries have been in the ascendancy. Greatly underplayed is the current turmoil in China, which seems to have fractured the People's Liberation Army as well as the rest of Chinese society. The importance of these recent developments cannot be underestimated. It is the People's Liberation Army which, in the final analysis, supports the tottering regime of Mao Tse-tung. If the People's Liberation Army disintegrates, then so too might the whole Communist apparatus in China. While many aspects of the Chinese Communist military establishment are treated rather superficially, in the absence of any previously published research in this area this is a welcome start.

D.G. WORDEN
Commander, U.S. Navy

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967. 115 p.

This book, written by a Vietnamese

Buddhist monk, is short and exceedingly volatile. In his historical analysis of Western presence in Vietnam, the author is somewhat less than charitable to Christian missionary pursuits, a particular target of his criticism being the Roman Catholic Church. In reflecting further on Vietnamese history, Nhat Hanh establishes that Buddhism is the national religion and that for over 2,000 years the destinies of the nation and of Buddhism have been intertwined. He likens the Vietnamese people and Buddhism to a drop of mercury which can be decomposed into many smaller parts as a result of pressure being applied to it. The author points out that like mercury, however, the Vietnamese people and Buddhism will quickly run together once the pressure is removed. Buddhism is portrayed as "a great spiritual force in search of self-realization amid the chaotic disorders of a society in its utmost stages of disintegration because of the war and political intrigue." Thich Nhat Hanh describes the internal strife within the Buddhist movement and points out the inhibiting effect of this situation on Buddhism's fulfilling its obligations toward society.

The regarding of Ho Chi Minh as a national hero for having led the Vietnamese people against the French is, according to the author, an attitude prevalent in the minds of the Vietnamese people in general. The popular assessment of Bao Dai as a puppet of the French is compared to the view that President Ngo Dinh Diem and successor regimes have been puppets of the United States. The author states that when President Diem was overthrown in November 1963 the prestige of Buddhism had reached its apex but was unable to maintain a sustained position of leadership. The Vietnamese traditional resentment toward Western imperialism is particularly highlighted in the depiction of the Vietnamese peasant as regarding the American soldier with the same animosity that he held for the

French soldier. The author states in one passage that "as the destruction and terror intensify, so does the hatred of the [Vietnamese] villagers for the Americans, leaving the American soldier, who believed he came to help, caught in a quicksand of hatred and frustration." Thich Nhat Hanh contends that if the Vietnamese could speak freely regarding American involvement in Vietnam, they would disclose the falsity of the expressed American intent of saving the Vietnamese from communism. They want the Americans to be their ally for peace—not for war. He further contends that the only possible way of really weakening Communist influence in Vietnam is to take away from the Communists their claim to be the only defenders of patriotism. He concludes that the present Vietnamese situation is, in reality, an ideological war between the United States and Communist China and that Vietnam is the victim of this struggle. His suggestion is that the United States must change her attitude toward the People's Republic of China.

R.L. O'NEIL
Commander, SC, U.S. Navy

Hezlet, Sir Arthur. *The Submarine and Sea Power*. New York: Stein and Day, 1967. 278 p.

In a concise, explicit, and readable style, Sir Arthur Hezlet traces the complete evolution and history of submarines and their strategic employment. Specifically dealt with are the purposes for which submarines have been built, their employment policies and broad campaigns in time of war, and analyses of submarine problems, successes, failures, and future possibilities. In addition to outlining submarine evolution, the author postulates several conclusions, generally uncontroversial. Prior to 1914 the submarine mission had grown from base to coast defense, and thence to an offensive system to be used in enemy waters. The vast World War I Allied

patrol and barrier system that was implemented was ineffective. On the other hand, the convoy system was most useful in thwarting, although not defeating, the U-boats, which were never capable of stopping sufficient movement of men and materials to be decisive; however, submarines did prove themselves *potentially* decisive. In World War II the measure of the capability of submarines ranged from their unsuccessful employment by the Italians to the outstanding achievements of the Americans' submarines operating in the Pacific as commerce raiders. Continuing his thesis, the author notes that in the Atlantic it was the convoy system backed by excellent technological superiority which eventually defeated the German submarine campaign.

Submarines had again proved their potential as a decisive weapon of seapower. After aircraft from carriers or shore bases, submarines in World War II had a greater influence than any other arm of the Fleet. The most effective use of the submarine is as a weapon of attrition in enemy waters against merchant ships used to transport men or materials. As to the future, the Polaris submarine shows that the submarine has developed faster than have the ASW countermeasures, and, further, that the sonar of today is of less value against nuclear submarines than the early Asdic's were against the U-boats in 1939. There is nothing in the foreseeable future to challenge the Polaris submarine. Faced with a nuclear stalemate and a conventional war at sea, it is estimated that a force of 30 nuclear submarines could sink some 50 million tons of shipping per year, or more than three times the maximum rate at which free world vessels were being constructed at the height of the Second World War. In the future, therefore, the submarine is likely to be the dominating weapon of seapower.

J.G. THLSON
Commander, U.S. Navy