

**Remarks Delivered  
at the Morning Graduation of  
Texas Tech University  
May 10, 1997**

Governor and Mrs. Bush, Chancellor and Mrs. Montford, President and Mrs. Haragan, Members of the Board of Regents and Faculty of Texas Tech, Members of the Class of 1997, and their families and friends:

The award of an honorary degree to me by this great University is an honor I shall always cherish.

I surmise that I came to the attention of Texas Tech as a result of the work that I have done as Chairman of the Advisory Board of Texas Tech's Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict. The strong support of Chancellor Montford and President Haragan; the skillful and professional supervisory competence of Dr. Jim Reckner and his History Department seniors; and the heartwarming decision of the premier historian of the Vietnam experience, Dr. Douglas Pike, to bring his library, research, and teaching skills here—all have contributed to an **impressive beginning** to the understanding of events in an historical cataclysm that ended in the year many of you of the graduating class were born. Because of my relationship with Texas Tech and the role I played in the Vietnam era of our national life, I shall limit my brief remarks to discussing the role your University will play in developing understanding of those events and I shall leave it to Governor Bush to deal with the larger framework of your future.

I said “impressive beginning” because the successful establishment of the Center and its Archives and of an environment in which good research can be carried out is, in fact, just the first step.

Over the years, documents now unavailable will flow to this Center.

Over the years, the still missing pieces of the data from the files of the former enemy, from memoirs, oral histories, diaries, and letters of participants at all levels of responsibility on both sides will come to the Center.

Over the years, analytical research will mine these resources and historical insights will be distilled.

This facility, and the research it makes possible, will come to play a vital role. Our nation needs to know how it **stumbled** into a war that killed 58,000 American fighting men and untold thousands of Vietnamese.

When and why did our 30-year involvement in Vietnam, in the judgment of our Presidents, change from a matter of just some importance into a vital national interest worth investing American lives?

Was the 15 years of conflict by U.S. forces necessary; and, if such conflict was necessary, could the different strategies that were recommended and disapproved at several points have shortened and won that conflict?

Did the U.S. involvement in that War contribute to the **Cold War victory** as some Southeast Asian leaders have suggested by giving time for their economies and political systems to develop--thus preventing for the free world the communization of the nations of Southeast Asia?

After World War II, two Germanys emerged. In the subsequent economic competition between a free world capitalist West Germany and a communized East Germany, the economic and political success of the West brought reunification and elimination of the communist system there.

After the Korean War, two Koreas emerged. And in a similar way the democratic Republic of Korea has become the economic and political Goliath and communist North Korea the catastrophic failure.

At the time of the 1973 truce two Vietnams emerged. Could the same type of outcome have resulted if the truce had been preserved?

Did the constitutional crisis of Watergate make such a successful outcome impossible? Had President Nixon **avoided political destruction** by choosing an ethical course in Watergate, could he have maintained public support for the truce and for the use of force to checkmate North Vietnam's cheating on that truce? Or were the underlying circumstances in Vietnam so different from the two Germany and the two Korea situations that those who believe Watergate cost us victory are wrong?

Did the tradition of military subordination to civilian control cause military leaders to agree to fight in ways they believed inadequate and unlikely to be successful? Could wiser and more forceful exposition by these military chieftains have prevented disastrous decisions by their Presidents?

These and countless other issues remain to be analyzed. The existence here of the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict will provide the resources and environment in which historians can bring us closer to understanding.

The continually sharpening focus on these issues at this national treasure at Texas Tech will help decision makers among your generation to make better decisions in order to reduce the likelihood of future conflict in an increasingly interrelated global, economic, and political system.

When you members of the graduating class return to Lubbock in 2047 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of your graduation, this Vietnam Center will have made it possible for historians to approach good answers to these issues and for political leaders to benefit from them.

Since I am only 76 years old and you graduates look remarkably healthy to me, I will look forward to discussing their answers with you at that 50th reunion.

Until then may you have fair winds and following seas.

E. R. Zumwalt, Jr.  
Admiral, USN (Ret.)