



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

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August 1, 1994

Conference Programs
National Endowment for the Humanities
Room 318
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Sir:

The purpose of this letter is to submit a draft of the narrative and budget sections of our planned request for NEH support for a conference to be held in Lubbock, Texas, in April, 1996.

The conference's title, "After the Cold War: Reassessing the Vietnam War," clearly indicates the unifying concept and central theme of the conference. The proposed conference agenda will bring together senior decision-makers in the war, established academics, and new academics who will contribute their fresh perspectives to the study of this troubled period in American history. As for timing of the conference, the end of the Cold War and the new world realities stemming therefrom have generated a very real need to reassess Vietnam, and, perhaps, to draw new conclusions from that experience.

The conference's timing, too, will highlight the Vietnam-related \$13.3 million building program at Texas Tech University, as well as the university's acquisition of extensive new research collections, and thus will offer Vietnam academics an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the new facilities and resources for possible future research in the field.

We at the Vietnam Center, an element of the College of Arts & Sciences of the University, are most anxious to receive your evaluation of this plan. If you wish to discuss this with me over the telephone, I am more likely to be reached at my home during the remainder of August than at my office. Please feel free to call me at home [(806) 792-3441] at any time at your convenience.

Very respectfully,

James R. Reckner
Associate Professor &
Director

VIETNAM CENTER NATIONAL COUNCIL
Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (RET), Chairman
General William C. Westmoreland, Hon. William E. Colby
Hon. William P. Bundy, Hon. Bui Diem, Professor Douglas Pike

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ARCHIVE OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT
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Statement of Significance and Impact of Project

As recent developments in American foreign policy clearly indicate, America's reaction to foreign crises continues today to be strongly influenced by the experience of the Vietnam War. Many American liberals, anxious to encourage American military involvement to correct the injustices so apparent in the post-Cold War world, now complain that the military are too reluctant to become involved, while the military insist that the political leadership provide clear objectives and withdrawal dates before commitment to intervene in overseas situations. At the base of the military's reluctance is the bitter memory of Vietnam and the lessons derived therefrom. Yet even today our understanding of that conflict is far from complete. Without detailed information from our opponents in that conflict, our understanding must remain incomplete. Additionally, much of the early scholarship was tainted by the partisanship engendered by emotional involvement in the war or in opposition to it. Further, the end of the Cold War has created a pressing need to reinterpret Vietnam in the new strategic context, to re-examine Vietnam as but part of the Cold War, which has now concluded.

The object of the proposed conference will be to significantly broaden American understanding of the war. This will be accomplished through two different approaches:

a.) Invitation of scholars to present papers examining the role of America's principal adversaries in the war: The Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. A Russian scholar specializing in the Soviet role in Vietnam will be invited; a former PRC naval officer now an academic in the United States will examine the Chinese role in the defense of North Vietnam; and Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., former Chief of Naval Operations of the United States Navy will hand-deliver an invitation from the President of Texas Tech University for General Vo Nguyen Giap, founder and leader of the North Vietnamese Army, to provide the unique viewpoint of the Vietnamese communist military leadership in the war. We will invite, too some of our former allies: at least one former South Vietnamese head of state (General Nguyen Khanh), the former South Vietnamese ambassador to the United States, the Honorable Bui Diem, and other senior South Vietnamese officials now residing in the United States.

b.) We will actively encourage young scholars (new Ph.D.s and graduate students) to research and present papers on all aspects of the war, particularly post-Cold War reassessments, and offer them the opportunity to meet principal participants in the war.

This conference will attract the participation of the leading American scholars in the field; in fact, a number of proposals have already been received even though no call for papers has as yet been issued. However, it is exceedingly important, in the view of the conference organizers, to give great opportunity for the younger academics in the field, for therein lies the promise of fresh interpretations not burdened by the passions still harbored by academics of the Vietnam generation. Senior academics certainly will be included on the program, but our goal is to encourage *new* scholarship, and for this topic, in a unique sense, this strongly suggests a generational change.

Narrative Description

Nature, Background, and Significance of the Project.

At the time of the proposed conference (April 1996), more than twenty years will have passed since North Vietnamese tanks entered the grounds of the presidential palace in Saigon and, for all intents and purposes, ended the Vietnam War. That action, too, ended a full decade of American involvement that had begun with the highest idealistic goals: the preservation of democracy in the South and containment of the spread of communism. In the end, public opposition to continued involvement had generated growing protest and civil disobedience that tore at the fabric of American society, and the armed forces, lacking clear objectives and a winning strategy, had become bogged down and demoralized.

Despite the far-reaching impact of the war upon American society, the American military, and American foreign policy during the two decades since its close, research into the war has, to a remarkable extent, been limited to use of American and other western sources. The changed situation since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union offers a new opportunity to examine our adversaries' perceptions, and thus to view the existing American scholarship in new perspectives. The information we hope to learn from our former adversaries will, we believe, cause us to question, or confirm, some of our basic assumptions about the war. For example, the Chinese researcher, using newly released Chinese documents, will suggest that American fears of Chinese intervention, often derided by military historians, may have been very well-founded. Further, while Americans worried about a repetition in Vietnam of the Chinese intervention in Korea, the Communist Chinese worried about a repeat of the American amphibious assault on Inchon in 1950, and expended significant resources to protect the Red River delta of North Vietnam against a possible American amphibious assault.

Our Chinese researcher concludes that North Vietnam also delegated control of the air defense of North Vietnam north of the Red River over to the approximately 170,000

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Chinese troops then in Vietnam. This surrendering of control will be an important issue to address to General Giap, should he choose to attend our conference.

More than two decades after the war, it is appropriate to reappraise the fundamental assumptions of the war. Even as we place American scholarship into perspective with relation to our adversaries, is appropriate, too, to re-examine the entire war in a new strategic context: that of the now ended Cold War.

It is time, too, to reappraise the role and impact of the anti-war movement at home. Now, two decades after the war, we are sufficiently distanced from the war to reach a more balanced understanding of the movement's impact upon military operations in South Vietnam, as well as its impact upon the American political leadership. As Stephen S. Rosenfeld of the *Washington Post* commented following the suicide of the famous disabled Vietnam veteran Lewis Puller, Jr., "Congress and we of the anti-war public were responsible to the extent that we made sure the Nixon strategy would fail." (*Houston Chronicle*, May 30, 1994). The organizers of this conference will encourage academics to re-examine the anti-war movement, to reappraise the impact of that movement, for just as certainly as the operational and strategic aspects of the war deserve reassessment in the post-Cold War world, so also does the anti-war movement and its impact. The emphasis of this conference, in every instance, is to generate reasoned, academic critique of all events relating to the war. This will not be a forum for "America-bashing," or for undocumented or unsupported criticism of the military or of the anti-war movement. Rather, we view this forum as an opportunity to achieve a dialogue between academic left and right in order to provide balanced direction for a new generation of scholars studying events in Vietnam and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Vietnam Center and the Vietnam Initiative at Texas Tech University

It is appropriate that such a conference be held at Texas Tech University. Since the Autumn of 1989, when the Board of Regents of Texas Tech University established the

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Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict, Texas Tech University has developed a balanced program of research and document preservation that is rapidly propelling Texas Tech to the forefront of Vietnam studies in the United States.

The university has won State of Texas approval for a \$13.3 million construction program that will result in two major new facilities for the Vietnam Center and Archive. This conference will also serve to mark their completion, and to acquaint the Vietnam academic community with their existence and capacities.

Construction of a new \$8.8 million archive building is scheduled to begin this Fall. When completed, the building will house among its collections the growing Archive of the Vietnam Conflict. The holdings of this archive will include approximately 550 boxes of archival materials donated by renowned Vietnam scholar and retired foreign service officer Douglas Pike. Included in this collection is extensive documentation of the activities of the anti-war movement on the one hand and the American Friends of Vietnam, the organization that sponsored Ngo Dinh Diem to lead South Vietnam, on the other. We are hopeful that in due course Professor Pike will donate a further 750 boxes of post-1975 Indochina materials, and move to Texas Tech to continue his research.

We have now been offered and have agreed to accept two large collections of documents relating to Vietnam veterans and Agent Orange; these collections will form the core documents of an important new research area touching on the war, rehabilitation, science & technology, ecology, and veterans' affairs in general. We believe these collections' presence will attract even more documentation related to these fields.

Further, we have accepted the offer of a retired general officer to house his extensive papers which relate principally to the development of the airborne infantry concept within the Army and its first major combat application in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley in 1965. Another archival collection documents the massacre at My Lai in 1968 and subsequent courts-martial.

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In addition to the above original archival materials, we have spent a considerable sum on microfilm documentary collections, and plan to complete that collection with the purchase of approximately \$200,000 of microfilms in the near future. The combined Vietnam Archive and microfilm collections will constitute the most complete Vietnam research resource certainly west of the Mississippi, and possibly anywhere in the United States outside of the National Archives.

Texas Tech at the same time is building a \$3.5 million International Cultural Center that will provide office suites for the Vietnam Center and dedicate a portion of its library specifically for periodicals relating to contemporary Indochina developments. This new facility will be the venue for the proposed conference, and will offer the finest state-of-the-art conference facilities in the region. Its international focus makes it eminently appropriate both as the home for the Vietnam Center and as the venue for our proposed Vietnam conference.

In addition to these very significant infrastructure developments, the leadership of Texas Tech University, recognizing the importance of the Vietnam initiative, has requested a special line item in the State of Texas budget for the biennium beginning in 1996 for the Vietnam Center. This budget item, if approved, will provide staff and archivists to expedite research and preservation work and to carry on the routine administration of the Vietnam Center. This staff, too, tentatively, will undertake publication of a quarterly scholarly journal devoted to Indochina.

Vietnam Studies at Texas Tech University

The tempo of effort within the Vietnam initiative is reflected, too, in active programs for teaching Vietnam. Undergraduate and graduate courses on Vietnam are offered regularly, and are always oversubscribed. Additionally, the university is currently seeking to employ a tenure-track Asian historian focusing on Southeast Asia, in order that

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Vietnam might be taught as Vietnamese history, in addition to courses on the war and Vietnam as an episode in American history.

At the graduate level, Texas Tech University has produced three completed masters' theses on Vietnam during the past year. It is estimated that five Vietnam masters theses will be in progress during the next academic year, as well as two doctoral dissertations. At the time of the 1996 conference there will be approximately fifty undergraduate students enrolled in an upper-level Vietnam course as well as fifteen to twenty graduate students in a formal graduate course. These students will take an active part in the conference, as will members of the university's History Honors Society, Phi Alpha Theta.

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Conference Presenters:

At this early stage of planning, the conference organizers have confirmed the participation of the former PRC Navy officer, Dr. Xiaoming Zhang. An invitation from the President of Texas Tech University will be hand-delivered to General Vo Nguyen Giap in Hanoi in September of this year. A similar invitation will be sent to Professor Ilya V. Gaiduk at the Institute of General History of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

Principal wartime participants also will be invited to address the conference. Those to be invited include:

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.
General William C. Westmoreland
Honorable William E. Colby
Honorable William P. Bundy
Honorable Bui Diem
General Nguyen Khanh

These former officials will provide an extremely important input for the conference. Our goal is to encourage *new* scholarship. It is important for these new scholars, who we anticipate will attend the conference in large numbers, to actually meet the participants in the war. By the very nature of things, these principal participants are now relatively elderly men. The opportunities for young academics to meet them, and to connect the theory of their studies with the reality of the individual participants must, of necessity, exist only for a limited number of years in the future. This connection, we believe, is very important for new scholars.

The centerpiece of this conference, we believe, will be a panel discussion between Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., General Vo Nguyen Giap, and General William C. Westmoreland. Such a meeting and discussion would be historic in itself, and, we believe, would contribute to the continuing trend toward regularization of relations between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. If the participants engage in a frank

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and lively discussion, it will add very significantly to our understanding of military-political aspects of the war.

Other broad fields to be examined, we anticipate, will include a panel reassessing the war in Laos and the aftermath of that war upon the ethnic minorities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. We hope, too, to host a similar panel relating to Cambodia. Other panels will be determined from the response to our call for papers.

Concerning academic balance for the conference, this is a particularly important topic for any conference relating to Vietnam, and it is difficult to achieve due to a remarkable amount of emotional polarization that still exists. The conference organizers will take exceptional steps to ensure that there is balance. As a matter of policy, the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict has publicly announced on many occasions that the Center and its associated Archive encourage preservation and examination of all aspects of the American Vietnam experience. In the conference context, this means that papers embracing academic left interpretations are as welcome as those of the academic right. We firmly believe that it is only through dispassionate evaluation of the two divergent interpretations that the new generation, those *new* academics we are anxious to encourage, will achieve the balance that will result in sound historical evaluation of the Vietnam war in the years ahead.

Tentative Conference Agenda

The conference organizers have not, at this point in planning, sought any firm commitments to present papers at the 1996 conference. For the three day conference, we plan to begin with a fixed agenda of invited speakers for day one, part of day three and all special events, and will leave day two and part of day three open. For these periods we will assemble panels, probably some run concurrently, to permit very active participation from a broad range of scholars, including those with whom the conference organizers are not yet familiar. The scholars appearing in this portion of the agenda will, in the normal academic procedure, be required to appear at their own expense; only those specifically invited and included in the formal agenda and budget will travel at the expense of the conference. To ensure widest possible participation, the preliminary call for papers will be circulated to all universities in the United States and Canada, and will be published in academic journals. When the agenda is finalized, copies will be distributed to an extensive mailing list, which includes all American and Canadian universities.

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"After the Cold War: Reassessing the Vietnam War:

Proposed Agenda for Conference to Be Held at Texas Tech University

18 - 20 April 1996

Following is the broad program we intend to follow (Invitations will be sent during the next phase of planning):

Wednesday, 17 April 1996

Conferees arrive in Lubbock.

2000: **Welcoming Address:** Lt. Gen. Philip B. Davidson, "A Post-Cold War Reassessment of the Vietnam War" (At conference hotel)

2100: (Approx) Reception at conference hotel

Thursday, 18 April 1996

(All Sessions at International Cultural Center, Texas Tech University)

0815: Conference convenes: Administrative remarks by conference organizers

0830: **Opening Address:** Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., Chairman, Vietnam Center National Council

0900: **Session 1: Views from the Other Side**

"China and the Air Defense of North Vietnam, 1964-1969"

Dr. Xiaoming Zhang, Texas Tech University

"The Soviet Union and North Vietnam"

Prof. Ilya Gaiduk, Academy of Sciences, Moscow

"North Vietnam's Relationship with the Soviet Union and China"

Dr. William J. Duiker, Pennsylvania State University

1030: Coffee Break

1045: **Session 2: Reassessing the Threat**

"China, Russia, and American Vietnam Diplomacy"

Dr. George Herring, University of Kentucky

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"Chinese and Russian Support for North Vietnam: A South Vietnamese View"

Hon. Bui Diem, former South Vietnamese Ambassador to U.S.

"The American Intelligence Community's Performance: A Reassessment"

Dr. John Prados, Independent Scholar

1230: Lunch Luncheon Speaker: Professor Douglas Pike: Recent Events in Vietnam

1400: Session 3: After the Cold War Was Over: Reassessing Vietnam

Roundtable Discussion

Hon. William E. Colby

Hon. William P. Bundy

Prof. Robert A Divine, University of Texas

1530: Coffee Break

1545: Session 4: Vietnam and Civil-Military Relations

"Civil-Military Relations during the McNamara Period"

Dr. Brian VanDeMark, US Naval Academy

"Civil-Military Relations during the Nixon Presidency"

Dr. John M. Newman, University of Maryland

"The Impact of Vietnam on Civil-Military Relations since 1974"

Dr. Richard Kohn, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

1700: Transportation to reception

1715: Civic Reception for Conferees: hosted by local business leaders

---- Evening free

Friday, 19 April 1996

(The specific organization of the agenda for this day will be determined by the responses to our call for papers. It will include, as a minimum, a panel on Laos, and probably one on the anti-war movement)

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0830: **Session 4:** (May have two or more simultaneous sessions, involving new academics)

10:00: Coffee Break

1015: **Session 5:** (two or more)

1145: Lunch. **Luncheon Speaker:** General Nguyen Khanh

1315: **Session 6:** (two or more)

1445: Coffee Break

1500: **Session 7:** (two or more)

1630: Return to Hotels

1900: Formal Dinner, followed by keynote speech **General William C. Westmoreland**

Saturday, 20 April 1996

0830: **Session 8: Armed Forces Reassessments**

Air Force: Dr Earl H. Tilford, Jr., Army War College

Army: LTC Conrad Crane, USMA, West Point

Navy: Dr. Edward Marolda, Navy Historical Center

1015: Coffee Break

1030: **Major Panel Discussion:**

General Westmoreland, General Giap, Admiral Zumwalt

1230: Lunch. **Speaker:** Lieutenant General Dave R. Palmer

1400: **Session 9:** (two or more sessions)

1530: **End of Formal Agenda.** Ceremonial opening by Admiral Zumwalt of the new Archive of the Vietnam Conflict at Texas Tech

Recognition of Douglas Pike for donation of his papers

1630: (Approx) Tour of Texas Tech campus, then return to conference hotel

