Vietnam: America's longest war

Fascinating overview tackles key questions

By JOSEPH A. GEARY

This history has been billed as the "companion to the popular P.B.S. series bearing the same name," but Stanley Karnow's work deserves much better than that. Here is a book that is thorough, indeed exhaustive, but is readable and at times fascinating in its conclusions.

Karnow has produced a seminal work on the Vietnam War and at a time it was seriously needed. So-called "photo-histories" are pathetic efferings of only graphic glimpses of America's longest war. These histories are shallow in the sense they do not tackle the serious questions that need to be addressed.

addressed.

Such questions include: Why were the Vietnamese willing to take extensive casualities over many years in order to win this war? One was the ward of explosives since World War II were the North Vietnamese still able to survive with a respectable economy and, most important, were still able to move needed supplies and war material down the Ho Chi Minh trail into South Vietnam? These and other serious questions are dealt with comprehensively in Karnow's work and he should be commended for it.

commended for it.

Karnow is well qualified to write
on the subject of Vietnam. He
erved as a correspondent there
uring much of the moders conflict
volvement until American departure. The author had made numerous interviews with persons on all
fronts of the war — the French,
Vet Minh, North and South Vietnamese government, civilian and
military officials and, most important for American readers, members of the National Liberation
Front or the Viet Cong.

icle of the war which consumed most of the intervening years since World War Π ; it is a history of the

Vietnamese. Beginning in ancient times, Karnow heralds the struggles of the Vietnamese with problems of regional differences, relations with China and the outside world, the often bloody struggle against Roman Catholicism.

Much time is spent in developing the French interest there and their subsequent rise to colonial domination and the Vietnamese hatred of the mandarins who enforced Chinese and later French policies.

Karnow has given much attention to Ho Chi Minh, the undisputed leader of the resistance movement who led Vietnam out of Japanese occupation, from under
French possession and through
American intervention for and
support of the South Vietnamese
government. Ho is depicted as a
brilliant and forceful leader whose
life was shaped by a zealous an
tionalism rather than the communism be embraced as a means to
national unit.

Karnow asserts that Ho made it.

mational unity.

Karnow asserts that Ho made it known after World War II that be favored a good relationship with the United States whom he hoped would convince their French allies to gracefully allow Indo-China to become free rather than to rebuild her pre-war presence. It should he noted that Ho worked with American military figures to over the work of the work

national unity.

The United States, motivated by
the rheteric of the cold war years,
was drawn into the war to contain
communist expansion: initially,
enormous aid to the French, then
continuing aid and American military advisers, then the introduction of U.S. combat troops and finally increased aid and training in,
an attempt for "Vietnamization"
and the eventual but always elusive "peace with honor."

Karnow writes of bow govern-ment corruption, military rivalry, peasant distrust and an unwilling-ness to decisively fight the war by



Trauma of Southeast Asian conflict lingers

By B. FRANKLIN COOLING

The basic premise of this book is simple. While hostilities of the Vietnam war ceased on May Day, 1975, the war isn't over. Perhaps if

Now, beyond the first sentence above, Capps goes on to explain why the way hasn't ended in many Americans' hearts and minds. His book will appeal to the growing corps of teachers using the Viet-nam experience in the classroom.

It is succinct, but has a measage, and it explores just about every facet of life in America after Vietnam. Beginning with a fast-paced historical background account, he shows how the United States got itself — quite willingly—sucked into the whirlpool of colonial politics between Franch and Indochina. Indochina, like Korea, then was a natural product of our trying to prop up democracy around the world against world-wide communism.

Capps then shows that once in, the United States and its messionic mission, mixture of religion, social consciousness and batant colori-al militarism of its own could not set out. But, it could not bring about a battlefield solution el-ther.

we had won or lost — traditionally—via a surrender, then it might be over. Of course, it did pretty much end in a surrender, only we Americans haven't gotten it through our hick skulis that there wasn't much we could do about it one way or another.

We, like the French before us, had had a shot at bringing a solution to the jumgles of Southeast Asia. We could not, they could not it was a purely Vietnamese problem to solve—and they have solved it. We may not like how they solved it, but we—like they must live We may not like how they solved it, but we—like they must live with it!

Now, beyond the first sentence above, Capps goes on to explain why the way hasn't ended in many when like her has on Vietnames.

But Vietnam was simply an event whose time had come. Look at the situation — post-Kennedy's New Frontier, Peace Corps and all that. It was after the dull years of like and the Republicans whereby the New Frontier boys promised the moon and began to deliver until their man was snuffed out.

er until their man was snuffed out.

Then came Lyndon Johnson, bent on redeeming the New Frontier at home and abroad. Blustery Texan, there was simply no war — either against poverty or little yellow hordes — that couldn't be won a la John Wayne. Capps suggests that an awfully great number of young Americans got suckered into uniform on that play — only to become distillusioned by what they experienced in Vietnam. Hence, all the boopla of the Vietnam veterans who came home to psychiatric disorders.

The bottom line for Capps is simply that we picked the wrong time and place to fight the wrong war

against the wrong enemy. He suggests that the tragedy might have been avoided if we had chosen (a) to view the struggle as an internecine or civil battle between Vietnamese, (b) not to invest the struggle as some Armagedon with the Communist power of the world, (c) if we had seen the conflict as part of a simple colonialist-nationalist battle which had cut through most of Asia and Africa since the end of World War II.

"But, because it viewed the war as part of the fundamental conflict between the world is two great superpowers," says Capps, "the control of the fundamental conflict between the world is two great superpowers," says Capps, "the control of the fundamental conflict between the world is two great superpowers," says Capps, "the conflict had been the superpowers," says Capps, "the conflict had been the superpowers," says Capps, "the conflict had been the superpowers," says Capps, "the superpowers," says Cap

best sellers

- matary," Stephen King
- 2. "Who Killed the Robins Family?" Adler & Chastain
- 3. "Poland." James Michener
- 4. "Changes," Danielle Steel

crossword

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5. "Moreta," Anne McCaffrey

- 6. "Berlin Game," Len Deighton
- 8. "The Story of Henri Tod," William Buckley Jr.
- 9. "The Name of the Rose," Umberto Eco

NON-FICTION

- 1. "In Seorch of Excellence," Peters & Waterman
 2. "Motherhood," Erma Bombeck
 3. "Tough Times Newer Last, but Tough People Do,"
 Robert Schuller
 4. "Weightwelders Fost and Fabulous Cockbook"
 5. The James Coco Diet"
 6. "On Wings of Eagles," Ken Follett
 7. "The Best of James Herriott"
 8. "Nothing Down," Robert Allen
 9. "Creating Weath", Robert Allen
 10. "Seeds of Greatness," Denis Waitley

Words listed below are in the puzzle horizontally rertically, diagonally and bockwards. Find them of pircle their letters only; do not circle the word. Lefton etters spell the Wonderword.

TEXTILES Solution: 8 letters														
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This book is mandatory reading not only for students of recent hiswanted to understand the war it eventually would be America's ter of world history, we stand to benefit from the heading balm than comes from the knowledge gained

Trauma of Southeast Asian conflict I

The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience. By Walter H. Capps. Beacon Press \$6.95 paperback.

By B. FRANKLIN COOLING

The basic premise of this book is simple. While hostilities of the Vietnam war ceased on May Day, 1975, the war isn't over. Perhaps if

" Anne McCaffrey ame," Len Deighton od Wives," Jackie Collins of Henri Tod," William Buckley Jr. me of the Rose," Umberto Eco Nomen," Judy Blume

NON-FICTION

h of Excellence," Peters & Waterman ood," Erma Bombeck imes Never Last, but Tough People Do,"

ratchers Fast and Fabulous Cookbook" es Coco Diet" s of Eagles," Ken Follett of James Herriott" Down," Robert Allen Wealth," Robert Allen of Greatness," Denis Waitley

rword

elow are in the puzzle horizontally, onally and backwards. Find them and s only; do not circle the word. Leftover Wonderword.

Solution: 8 letters

TRYSA TSSR CETOIOOA LTSRLCDC

we had won or lost — traditionally - via a surrender, then it might be over. Of course, it did pretty much end in a surrender, only we Americans haven't gotten it through our thick skulls that there wasn't much we could do about it one way or another.

We, like the French before us, had had a shot at bringing a solution to the jungles of Southeast Asia. We could not, they could not it was a purely Vietnamese problem to solve — and they have solved it. We may not like how they solved it, but we - like they must live with it!

Now, beyond the first sentence above, Capps goes on to explain why the way hasn't ended in many Americans' hearts and minds. His book will appeal to the growing corps of teachers using the Vietnam experience in the classroom.

It is succinct, but has a message, and it explores just about every facet of life in America after Vietnam. Beginning with a fastpaced historical background account, he shows how the United States got itself — quite willingly sucked into the whirlpool of colonial politics between Franch and Indochina. Indochina, like Korea, then was a natural product of our trying to prop up democracy around the world against worldwide communism.

Capps then shows that once in, the United States and its messianic mission, mixture of religion, social consciousness and blatant colonial-militarism of its own could not get out. But, it could not bring about a battlefield solution either.

Capps suggests why in revealing passages about Ho Chi Minh, the disintegration of the American homefront, as well as the misguided leadership in the Oval office. Nothing of this is really very new — but Capps encapsulates its nicely.

What Capps really discusses is the impact of the war on America's sense of mission. We have always had it and it came to the front in two world wars whereby we "saved" civilization in Europe and Asia, or at least the Pacific. Korea gave us self-doubts — a fact that just about everyone has forgotten, and we probably need Capps to do a similar job on that "unwon" war like he has on Viet-

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Southeast Asian conflict lingers

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W.1715

"But, because it viewed the war as part of the fundamental conflict between the world's two great superpowers," says Capps, "the United States eventually felt a responsibility to commit its forces." Ah, doesn't that sound faintly familiar? There seems to be a presentist ring to that refrain — which is precisely what Capps is trying to get the reader to recognize.

The book will sadden and anger, stimulate and soothe — all at the same time. He entitles his final chapter "The Healing Process," which is only just. Meanwhile, the wails of Vietnam veterans make headlines, the atrocities of the united Vietnam sell copy, and everyone from the president to the low-liest schoolchild tries to fathom the meaning and "lessons" of those 10 years we wasted in southeast Asia.

Capps questions whether they were truly wasted years. He would suggest that they were only if we do not bind up the wounds of our psyche from that war and rediscover the wholeness of America "before the trauma of the unfinished war is reenacted."

B. Franklin Cooling is associated with the Office of Air Force History, Washington, D.C.