

Book Reviews



***Stalking the Vietcong, Inside Operation Phoenix: A Personal Account.* By Stuart A. Herrington. Published by Random House Publishing Group, New York, NY., 279 pages, softcover, \$6.99.** Reviewed by Major Keith Everett.

Originally published as *Silence Was a Weapon* in 1982, this 2004 reprint with its catchy title is especially useful today. Stuart Herrington recounts his days participating in the Vietnam war, as a Military Intelligence officer. After a first Vietnam tour, Herrington returned to Vietnam putting his increased language capability and formal intelligence training to the test.

Herrington worked with the Phoenix program in Military Region III, fairly close to Saigon. The primary goal of the Phoenix program was to attack and dismantle the Vietcong shadow government. Herrington vividly describes the frustrations of advisor life as he develops ties working alongside South Vietnamese troops often disinterested in actual action against the Vietcong. Meanwhile the Vietcong successfully pushed the belief on the North Vietnamese that Americans are using the puppet South Vietnamese government to get the wealth of Vietnam. The inability of American and South Vietnamese troops to provide adequate security lent credence to Vietcong propaganda. The Americans provided only an inadequate security protection for the Deim regime, and the parallels with the current Iraqi war are striking.

Promoted to captain, Herrington introduces some of the personalities of his second Vietnamese tour, such as Nguyen Von Pich, a VietCong defector. Pich served as the executive officer of his VC company. This father of six sacrificed his life, as he was assassinated by insurgents for aiding the South. CPT Herrington pulls us into his personal relationships with Pich and several others. The frustration and anxiety are clearly felt as American efforts to protect their defector allies fail. Herrington later introduces Captain Hai Tiet, a Vietcong company commander, and the successful techniques used to get tactical

information from Tiet as well as others is revealed. Modern U.S. Military Intelligence Soldiers would easily gain insight on the application of the tactical intelligence gathering methods learned in Army schools.

The heart of this account is CPT Herrington learning from another Army officer how to extract information from defectors or captured enemy soldiers. He learned one of the keys to getting captured Vietcong to talk was decent treatment. Decent treatment was the first step to set up those hard core soldiers for intel exploitation. Also, the careful preparation of a case file for each Vietcong source is explained as the only way to get a conviction of alleged insurgents under Vietnamese law. By studying Herrington's selected use of case studies, a Military Intelligence Soldier could learn how to set up procedures to make the most of captured soldiers. In fact, this account is a good primer for commanders, intelligence officers, and Military Police as well on how to work with the enemy and exploit the information gained.

The successes outlined in *Stalking the Vietcong* are valuable lessons learned. Ba Tung, a Vietcong who gave himself up, identified 28 enemy cadre members. Tung's story is a shining example of how skillful handling can result in wrapping up enemy infrastructure. Tung identified 23 of the Vietcong cadre in his area and they were later arrested. These arrests snowballed to more than 300 captured cadre, and many of these subjects were also recruited to work against their former organization.

The failures of the Saigon special police are a direct result of their brutal interrogation methods, which sometimes resulted in deaths. Teaching the special police effective techniques and monitoring their work was the toughest part of Herrington's job. The success or failure of counterinsurgency intelligence efforts can be directly traced to the ability of advisors to train and persuade their native

counterparts to use humane detention and effective interrogation methods.

Stalking the Vietcong is a valuable guide to build a foundation to defeat an insurgency. Every Soldier interested in defeating an insurgent enemy should read and study this book.

***Russian Sideshow: America's Undeclared War, 1918-1920.* By Robert L. Willett. Brassey's Inc., 2003, 327 pages, \$34.95.** Reviewed by Randy Talbot, Staff Historian, USATACOM.

In the closing days of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson authorized one of the more curious "expeditions" of his tenure in office. Bowing to pressure from the British, two separate expeditionary forces boarded transport vessels to begin what one military officer has described as "how not to conduct a foreign intervention." One of the forces was a brigade-sized element from the 31st Infantry stationed in the Philippines, and augmented by Soldiers from California, that would land in Vladivostok. The other was major components of the 85th Division, the "Custer Division" from Camp Custer, Michigan, which would land at Archangel.

While this "Siberian misadventure" was not the only foreign intervention of the Wilson administration — there were somewhere near 19 in all — the parallels between what is described in current military parlance as counterinsurgency operations and urban warfare are striking. Additionally, in the never-ending search for "lessons learned," a direct connection can be drawn between those lessons the United States Army "learned," "relearned," and "forgot" in comparing current operations and historical examples of armed intervention in Russia. At times, the similarities as well as the differences are alarming.

Willett's book introduces the reader to the internal and external political reasons for the United States' intervention in Russia

following the Bolshevik Revolution, however, defers in-depth analysis to works already published. Instead, his impeccable and exhaustive archival research provides the basis to view the intervention through the words, letters, and diaries of the participants.

Russian Sideshow concerns itself with the military operations of the United States Army and Navy in both theaters of war: the Archangel to Murmansk front where the Army Expeditionary Force North Russia (AEFNR) became involved in combat operations, and the Siberian front that encompassed Northern China and Siberia from Vladivostok to the Ural mountains where the Army Expeditionary Force Siberia (AEFS) tried to protect the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the infamous "Czech Legion."

The intervention for the allied forces, and the Americans in particular, was a recipe for disaster, and it began with the issuance of Wilson's Aide Memoir in July 1918. American forces were dispatched to conduct defensive operations to protect allied stores and supplies already on Russian docks, to assist the Czech Legion in evacuating their forces from the Siberian interior, and to not interfere in internal Russian affairs. Although they were to be a defensive force, the doughboys quickly found themselves on the front lines conducting offensive operations.

Placed under British command, and issued a hodgepodge of British and Russian equipment, the Americans quickly found that in Archangel, the Canadians and them would face the brunt of combat in many loosely connected, poorly executed engagements. The American commander in Archangel had very little contact with his troops in the beginning of the intervention as their force was dispersed to conduct small scale patrols, river operations, and amphibious assaults to secure either World War I style trenches or Boer War era blockhouses.

Command and control was a shambles as one inept commander after another suffered relief following incidents of friendly fire, failing to follow orders, or engaging in meaningless offensive operations. Mutinies, low morale, self-inflicted wounds, courts martial, capture, and frostbite depleted the ranks of a force

that had lost many to a flu epidemic during the journey to Archangel.

In the woodland areas where the majority of combat occurred, the Bolo's constantly adapted new tactics to counter the effectiveness of the allies. They adopted white camouflaged suits to blend in to the terrain as they scouted and ambushed allied patrols with exploding bullets. As the allies trained the Russian population to take over the fight when they left, the Reds turned the peasant population against the Americans, despite medical personal, providing humanitarian assistance to the population.

With the Archangel mission almost exclusively combat operations, the Siberian mission was described by Secretary of War Baker as "walking on eggshells loaded with dynamite." The commander of the Siberian force, General William S. Graves added that "the fuses were lit." For Graves, the mission was both diplomatic and military, with the caveat that he not intervene in internal Russian affairs. This position left Graves and his force in a precarious position with the different factions in Siberia; the Reds saw him as a White, the Whites saw him as a Red, and the allies had their own agenda's that conflicted with Graves' orders. Attempts to obtain clarification of his position in a quickly deteriorating situation were unanswered by either the political or military leadership back in Washington as they did not consult each other on the situation in Russia.

For the American forces, protection of the railroad was paramount to their survival. However, the railroad was the main link of moving troops and supplies from the east into the Siberian heartland. Additionally, the coal mines received American protection as this valuable resource kept the trains running. The Trans-Siberian railroad became the main battleground not only between the Red and White forces, but the loaded eggshells that Graves was warned about. The Whites and their Cossack allies fought for domination of the railroad, often times putting the Americans between them and their Japanese allies. Worse still as the White government started losing control and retreating, the Japanese continued territorial expansion, the Cossacks increased their murderous killing spree

against opposition groups and the British departed, leaving the Americans in the middle of this explosive power struggle.

The last straw for the Americans came when Red forces attacked the coal mines killing 24 and wounding another 16. From that point on, the gloves were off. American troops started conducting nighttime raids into the villages, rousting males from houses and detaining them for questioning. Combat patrols focused on destroying bomb-making facilities hidden away in village houses, and there were retribution attacks against population area that harbored what we would call "terrorists" today.

By July 1919, American forces boarded ships for the journey home, ending the North Russia intervention, and by January 1920 the remaining forces departed Vladivostok.

Willett does an exceptional job of explaining the intricate situation the intervening forces were up against. Compounding the United States Army's difficulties during the two separate and distinct interventions were unclear orders regarding the limits of their involvement from the political administration, a lack of support from the Army Chief of Staff, poor intelligence, maps and battle plans, an unfamiliar chain of command, unfamiliar equipment, and mutiny from the British and French allies that refused to fight following the armistice ending World War I.

Exacerbating an already delicate and precarious balance of power in the region, the Russian people would not support the intervention and the peasants would not join in military operations against the Bolo's (Bolsheviks or "Reds") and side with the "Whites" (former Tsarists officers). Most disheartening for the American troops was the desertion of U.S. Soldiers that were handpicked for the intervention because of their language skills. Some of these deserters would lead Bolo forces against the Americans and engage in kidnapping U.S. Soldiers and contracted railroad employees for ransom.

Adding to the confusion for the American soldiers was the dichotomy in distinguishing ally from enemy. In towns and villages, local peasants worked with the "doughboys" during the day and conducted raids against their billets at

night. At other times, the doughboys found themselves protecting the Red forces from the brutal actions of their Japanese allies, the White forces and the lawless Cossack hordes loosely affiliated with both groups.

Russian Sideshow is a fitting tribute to the "Polar Bears" that fought in horrific weather, against an enemy whose motivations, language, customs and traditions were not understood; for Russian allies that were more brutal and repressive than the enemy they were fighting; and with other allies bent on territorial expansion, political intrigue, and mutiny. No greater honor can be paid to these forgotten warriors than a proper acknowledgment of their bravery and sacrifice. Willett accomplishes this through his day-by-day narrative accounting that incorporates every soldier and sailor wounded, missing, and killed in action during the campaign and the individual honors received through courage in action throughout his book.

***My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing.* By Christoph Reuter translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 179 pages, 2004.** Reviewed by Lieutenant Commander Youssef Aboul-Enein, MSC, USN.

Christoph Reuter is an international correspondent for the German magazine *Stern*. He spent eight years moving among the society that produced suicide brigades for the Iran-Iraq War of the '80s. He reported and interviewed whole communities from Lebanon's Hizballah and Palestinian militants to Sri Lankan Tamils, investigating the culture of martyrdom. Originally published in German as *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, it offers insights into the nuances of the justification and conditioning of suicide missions. The book opens by challenging the assumption that suicide bombers fit into neat typical profiles, and the book draws examples of rich and poor, secular and religious, Marxist or jihadist, as well as female and male.

Reuter quotes Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin Ali Ibn Abi Talib, who rose to become the fourth rightly guided caliph after Muhammad's death,

respected Sunnis and revered by Shiites who said: "*The Quran (Islamic Book of Divine Revelation) is but ink and paper, it does not speak for itself. Instead, it is human beings who give effect to it according to their limited personal judgments and opinions.*" This is a significant statement for the book highlights that the Quran, if followed literally, contains no theological or judicial system except for 200 clear rules of conduct. Therefore the Quran represents the first building block to an interpretive form of moral and social life. This means that particular aspects of Islam can justify democracy or it can justify outright war against the west. Chapter 1 also argues that Shiite Islam with its core cult of martyrdom, self-sacrifice and being the underdog in Islamic history makes it well suited for war and the author uses Chapter 2 a detailed discussion of the ease by which Ayatollah Khomeini created mass suicide battalions to throw at Iraqi forces.

What is revealing are the methods the Iranian Revolutionary Guards used to basically collect children indiscriminately from schools, and with little training send them to the front. In autumn 1982, Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) declaring that young people need not have the consent of their parents to volunteer in the Iran-Iraq War, and he rejected an Iraqi offer to return Iranian children in an exchange. Another Shiite organization is Hizballah, which is more refined than the Iranian radical mullahs in its arguments and rationale about suicide bombings and exporting Islamist revolution. Hizballah's clerics believe in exporting their revolution in parts and not in one whole effort, and regarding suicide it developed a corpus of justifications for suicide attacks delineating between those who want to escape life and those who take their own life to inflict harm on an adversary. They have exported their doctrine and even technical expertise to many other organizations including the Sunni-dominated Palestinian terror group Hamas and Al-Qaeda affiliates.

Readers will also learn of how one suicide bomber in a crowded café in Israel simply revealed his dynamite belt to the terror of patrons, allowed several to escape, and then detonated himself. The message was not the casualties but simply, you are

not safe, flee from here and tell others. As one reflects on the chapter regarding Palestinian suicide bombers, it is the corrosive effect it has on many generations that will make it very difficult for whole communities to integrate into normality once the Palestinians gain their state. Suicide bombing in Palestine has been marketed to such an extent that the young view this is an acceptable and even glorified way of settling major political problems. The author reveals the strong veneer the parents and spouses of suicide bombers put up for the media that disguises their anguish and confusion.

Reuter's book is recommended for those wanting to expand their understanding of counterterrorism or who engage in the business of force protection. He has a very European point of view that many in America may disagree with or take exception to, however his book is recommended as a means of enhancing the debate on suicide bombing.

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Around the Infantry

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Tech Sergeant Andy Dunaway, USAF

Private First Class John Anderson from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, provides security during a civil affairs mission in Reehana, Iraq, September 30.



Specialist Mike Pryor

Private First Class Aleksey Butkov of the 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, stands guard in Puli Alam, Afghanistan.



Sergeant Michael J. Carden

Paratroopers with the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, patrol through the French Quarter district of New Orleans September 9.



Staff Sergeant Reynaldo Ramon

Soldiers with B Company, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, search an area near Al-Radwnea, Iraq,