



Vietnam

DECLASSIFIED

Kennedy + Johnson + Nixon

by James DiEugenio

Preamble

For about the last three and a half years, I have been studying the foreign policy of President Kennedy, outside of Vietnam and Cuba. I thought that had been done to death, while his policies in places like Africa, Indonesia, and the Middle East had been ignored to the point that no one knew he had such policies.

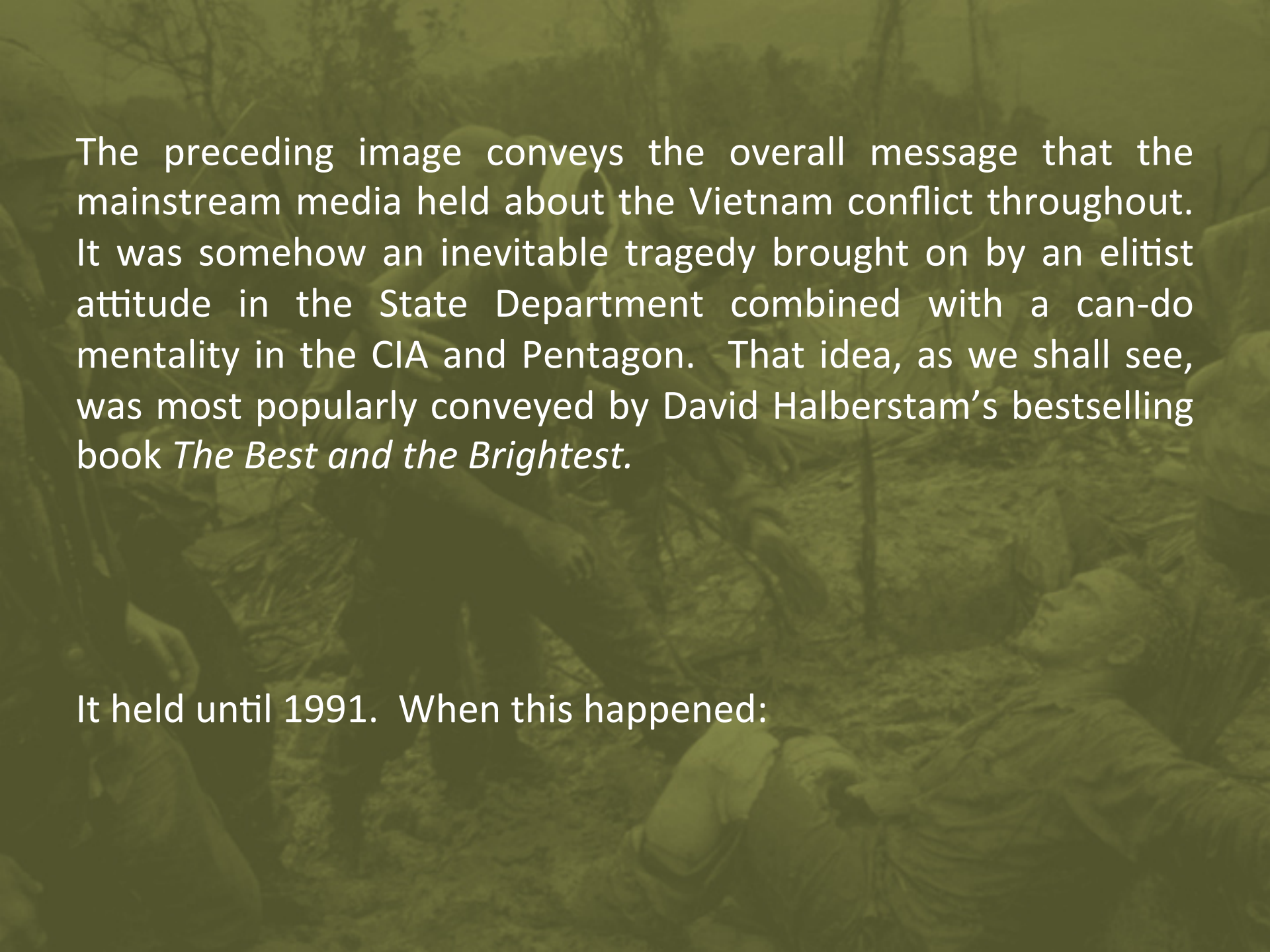
Recently, I decided to return to Vietnam because I think we can learn something in comparative terms with new documents and tapes that have been declassified on Johnson, Nixon and Kennedy. If you read the Second Edition of *Destiny Betrayed*, you will see that I make the case that Johnson deliberately broke with several of Kennedy's new foreign policy forays, e.g., Indonesia and Congo, and returned to the Dulles/Eisenhower policies that Kennedy had consciously and deliberately broken with in 1961. Kennedy had spoken about the split between him and Dulles more than once; for example, on the eve of the 1960 convention, he said that if Stu Symington or Lyndon Johnson won the nomination, it would just be a continuation of John Foster Dulles. And as we will see, he was right. What I am working on now is a new essay which is an extension of this thesis — that is, how Nixon and Kissinger extended Johnson's policies even further than LBJ had gone in certain places. To the point that by 1974, when Nixon resigned, Kennedy's reforms were essentially dead and buried forever. What you see here is a summary of the Vietnam part of that essay.



Casualties:

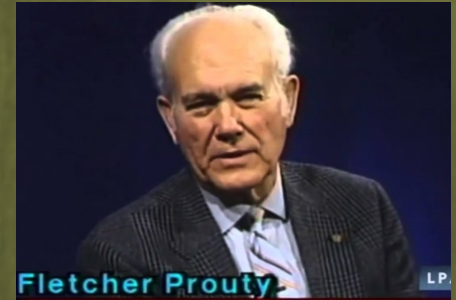
**Total dead including
U.S., North and South
Vietnamese
civilian and military:**

1,291,425 – 4,211,451



The preceding image conveys the overall message that the mainstream media held about the Vietnam conflict throughout. It was somehow an inevitable tragedy brought on by an elitist attitude in the State Department combined with a can-do mentality in the CIA and Pentagon. That idea, as we shall see, was most popularly conveyed by David Halberstam's bestselling book *The Best and the Brightest*.

It held until 1991. When this happened:



In December of 1991, Mr. X met Jim Garrison, and the general public was first alerted that X (Fletcher Prouty) had been working on President Kennedy's plan to withdraw from Vietnam.

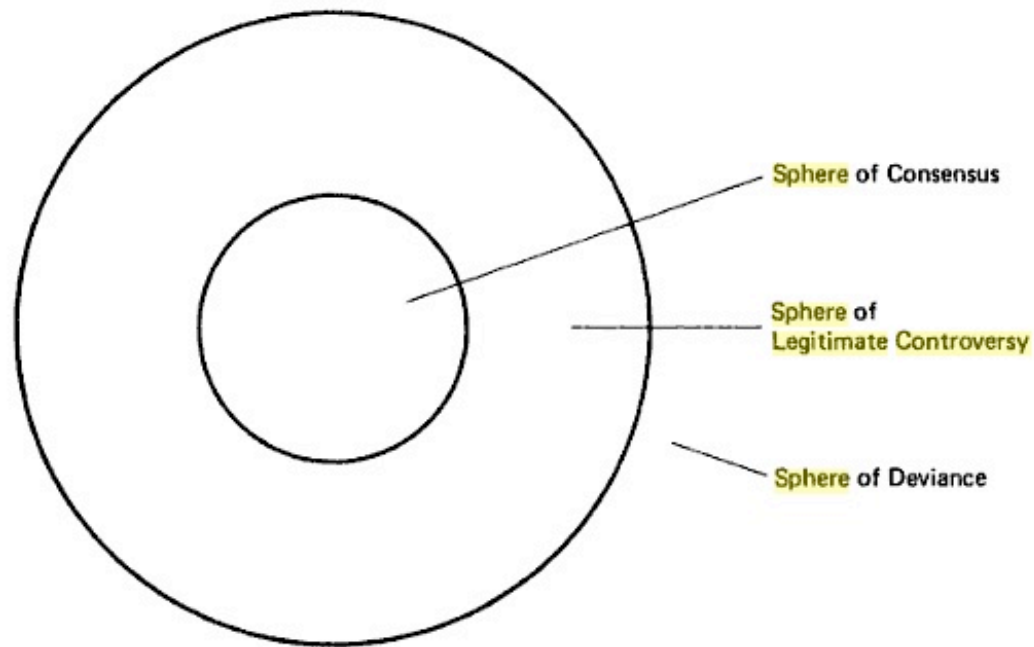


Figure 1 Spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance.

Historian Daniel Hallin mapped out the above chart as to how the MSM works. The meeting between X and Garrison was in the sphere of deviance, where even if the story is true, it does not get printed. Therefore the film was attacked seven months in advance.



ON THE SET DALLAS IN WONDERLAND

By George Lardner Jr. May 19, 1991

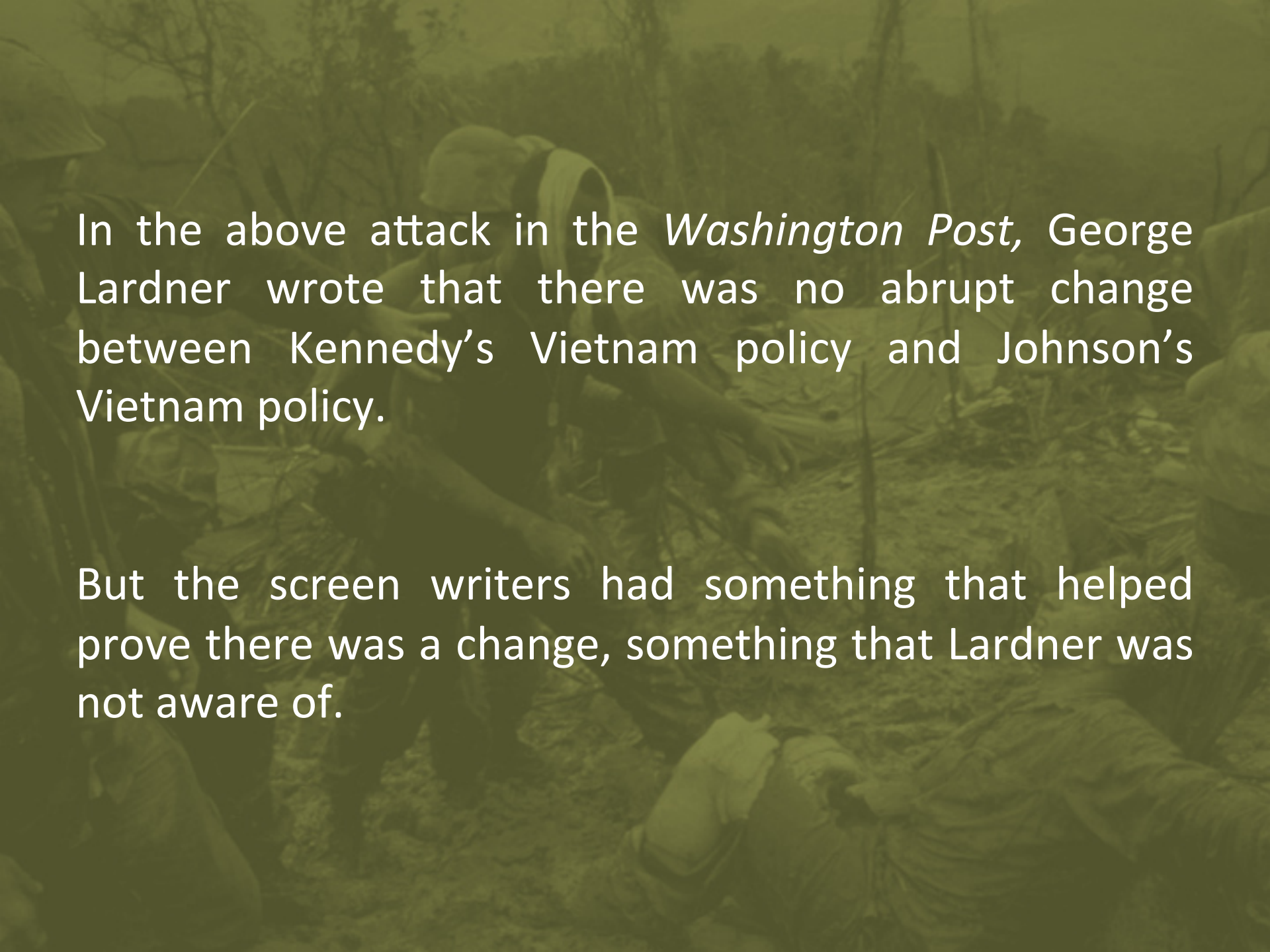
DALLAS -- The presidential motorcade is revving up on Main Street. The crowd outside the Texas School Book Depository gets ready for another round of cheering until the gunshots ring out. John F. Kennedy is about to be killed in Dealey Plaza again, and again, and again.

The director's instructions bark out over the walkie-talkies, making sure his sharpshooters get the message.

"I said, 'all five shots.' All right. Everybody in position now. Ready to fire."

Five shots? Is this the Kennedy assassination or the Charge of the Light Brigade?

Film maker Oliver Stone seems unperturbed. The controversial, Oscar-winning chronicler of the 1960s and the war in Vietnam ("Platoon," "Born on the Fourth of July") is in the midst of a \$35- to \$40-million production about the murder, tentatively titled "JFK." His hero: former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison whose zany investigation of the assassination in the late 1960s has almost faded from memory.



In the above attack in the *Washington Post*, George Lardner wrote that there was no abrupt change between Kennedy's Vietnam policy and Johnson's Vietnam policy.

But the screen writers had something that helped prove there was a change, something that Lardner was not aware of.

National Security Action Memorandum 263

2

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~ - EYES ONLY October 11, 1963

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 263

TO: Secretary of State
 Secretary of Defense
 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: South Vietnam

At a meeting on October 5, 1963, the President considered the recommendations contained in the report of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on their mission to South Vietnam.

The President approved the military recommendations contained in Section I B (1-3) of the report, but directed that no formal announcement be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963.

After discussion of the remaining recommendations of the report, the President approved an instruction to Ambassador Lodge which is set forth in State Department telegram No. 534 to Saigon.

McGeorge Bundy
McGeorge Bundy

Copy furnished:
Director of Central Intelligence
Administrator, Agency for International Development

cc: Mr. Bundy ✓
 Mr. Forrestal
 Mr. Johnson

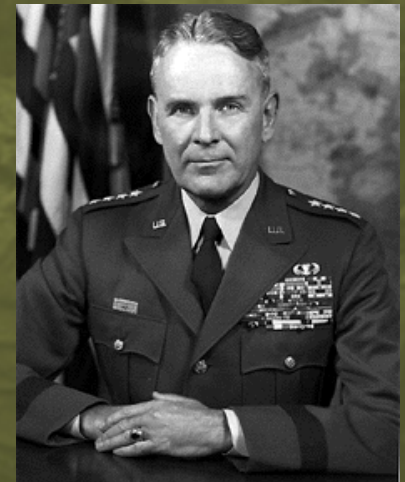
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Lt. Gen. Victor Krulak

Fletcher Prouty, a consultant on the film, actually wrote the McNamara/Taylor report along with his boss Victor Krulak. That report was the basis for NSAM 263. Their writing was supervised by Bobby Kennedy, at the request of President Kennedy. That report was then jetted out to Hawaii and handed to McNamara and Taylor on their return from Saigon. It was in bound form. They read it on the way to Washington.



Gen. Maxwell Taylor



In 1997, the ARRB declassified McNamara's Sec/Def Conference of May 1963.



“b.) The program currently in progress to train Vietnamese forces will be reviewed and accelerated as necessary to insure that all essential functions visualized to be required for the projected operational environment, included those now performed by US military units and personnel, can be assumed properly by the Vietnamese by the end of calendar year 1965.”

The New York Times

Kennedy Had a Plan for Early Exit in Vietnam

By TIM WEINER DEC. 23, 1997



Pentagon documents declassified today may rekindle the still-smoldering argument over whether President John F. Kennedy would have pulled American forces out of Vietnam.

The documents show that shortly before Kennedy was assassinated, the nation's top military leaders were going forward with his plan to withdraw American advisers from Vietnam.

"All planning will be directed towards preparing Republic of Vietnam forces for the withdrawal of all United States special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965," reads an Oct. 4, 1963, memorandum drafted by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and discussed that day by the Chiefs.

"Execute the plan to withdraw 1,000 United States military personnel by the end of 1963," the memorandum continues.

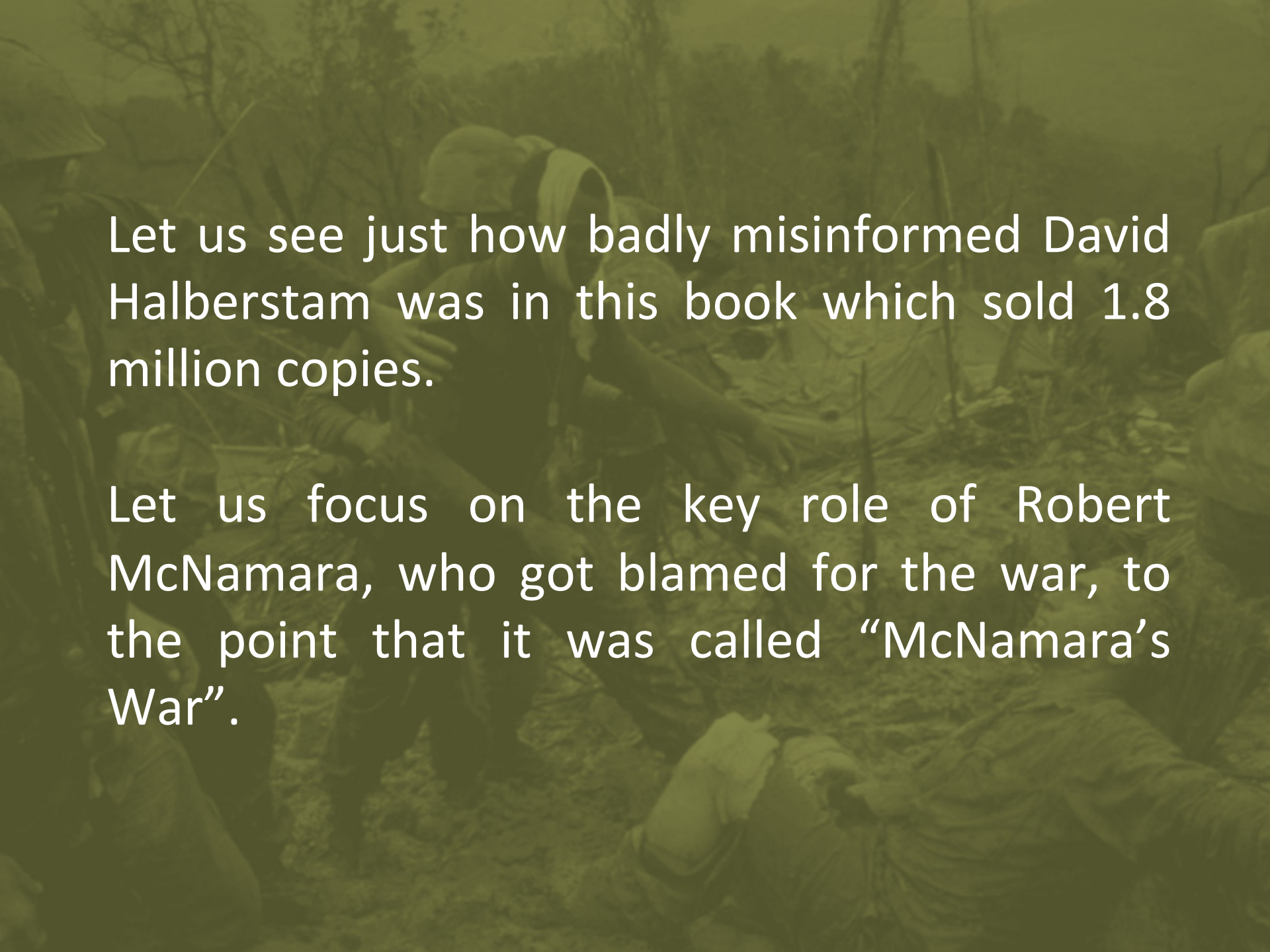
The Philadelphia Inquirer

“Papers Support Theory that Kennedy Had Plans for a Vietnam Pullout”

The Best and the Brightest
David Halberstam

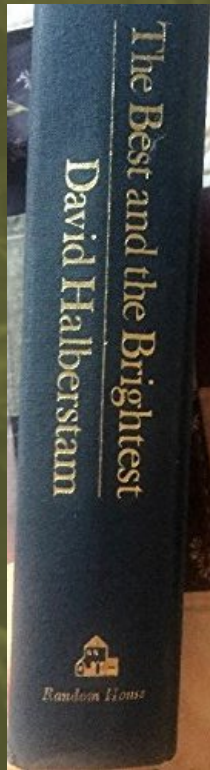


Random House



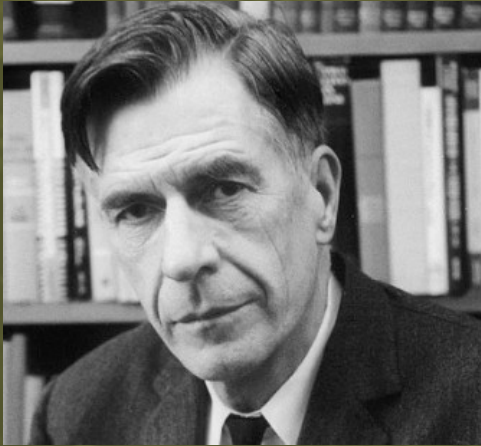
Let us see just how badly misinformed David Halberstam was in this book which sold 1.8 million copies.

Let us focus on the key role of Robert McNamara, who got blamed for the war, to the point that it was called “McNamara’s War”.



“He became the principal desk officer on Vietnam in 1962 because he felt the President needed his help.” (Halberstam p. 214)

Next page, he writes that McNamara had no different assumptions than the Pentagon did.



John K. Galbraith

It was not McNamara who went to Kennedy on Vietnam. As we know today, Kennedy sent John K. Galbraith's report recommending withdrawal to McNamara in the spring of 1962. From that point, until Kennedy's death, McNamara was fulfilling JFK's intent to leave Vietnam beginning in late 1963, with complete withdrawal accomplished by 1965.

For more evidence of this, consider the following tape made in the fall of 1963 when Kennedy was forcing NSAM 263 through his reluctant advisors.

October 2, 1963:



[McNamara] ... we believe we can complete the military campaign in the first three corps in '64 and the fourth corps in '65 ... we believe we can train the Vietnamese to take over the essential functions and withdraw the bulk of our forces. And this thousand is in conjunction with that



[Bundy] What's the point of doing it?



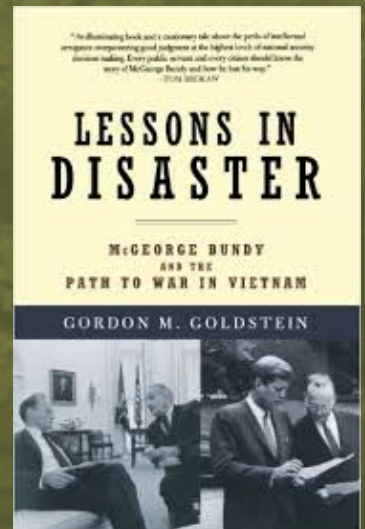
[McNamara] We need a way to get out of Vietnam. This is a way of doing it.



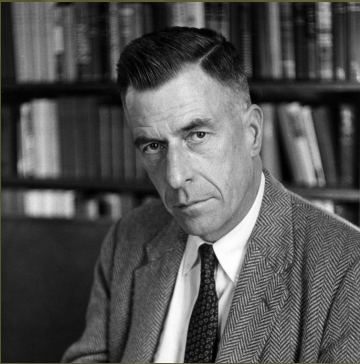
When National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy listened to the above tape with his biographer Gordon Goldstein, he realized what had happened.

Kennedy had implemented his withdrawal plan by going around him since he knew Bundy was too hawkish. Retroactively Bundy had nothing but admiration for that move.

After reviewing the declassified record, he told Goldstein that Kennedy was never going into Vietnam.



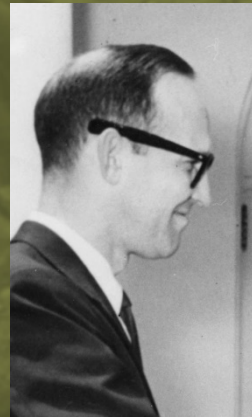
Witnesses for Kennedy handing off this withdrawal plan to McNamara:



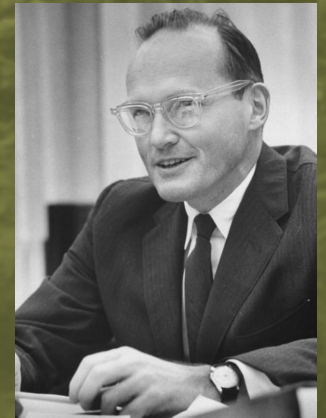
John K. Galbraith,
Ambassador to
India



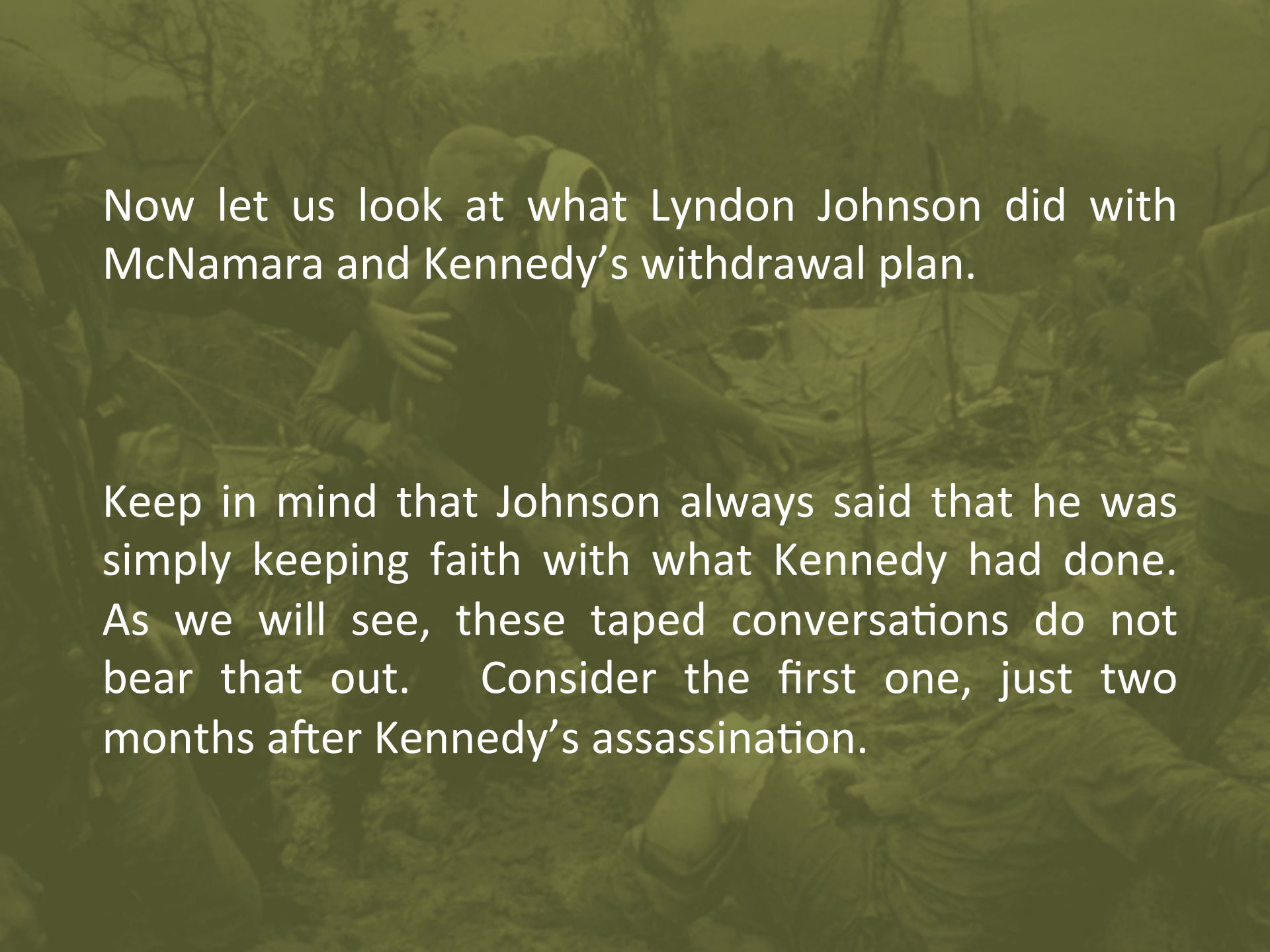
Roswell Gilpatric,
Deputy Secretary
of Defense



John McNaughton,
Assistant Secretary
of Defense



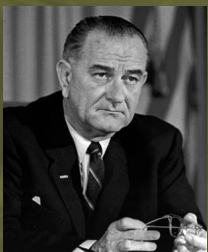
McGeorge Bundy,
National Security
Advisor



Now let us look at what Lyndon Johnson did with McNamara and Kennedy's withdrawal plan.

Keep in mind that Johnson always said that he was simply keeping faith with what Kennedy had done. As we will see, these taped conversations do not bear that out. Consider the first one, just two months after Kennedy's assassination.

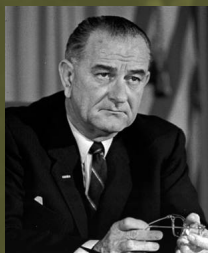
February 20, 1964:



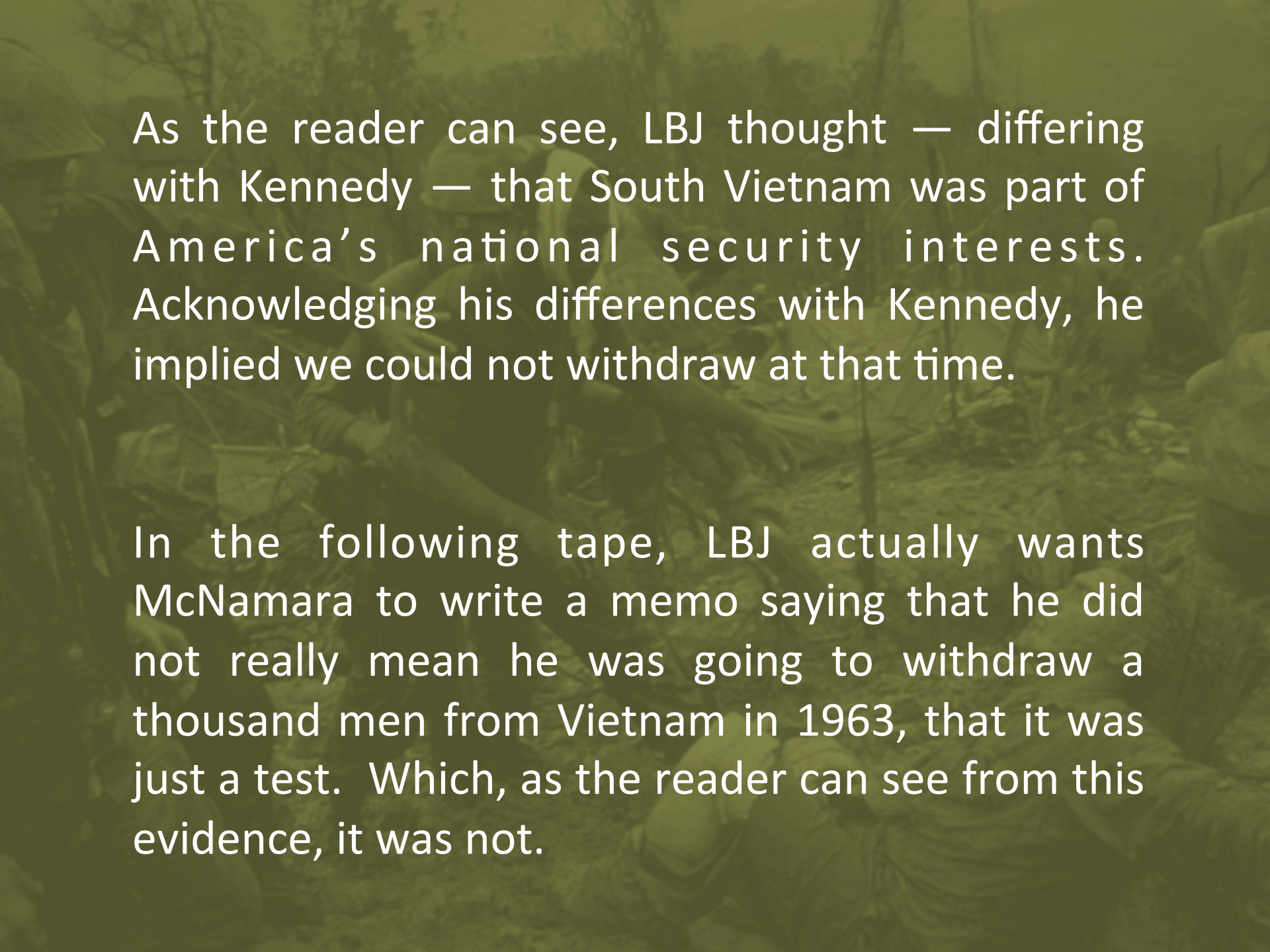
[Johnson] I always thought it was foolish for you to make any statements about withdrawing. I thought it was bad psychologically. But you and the president thought otherwise, and I just sat silent.



[McNamara] The problem is...



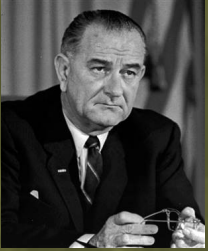
[Johnson] Then come the questions, how in the hell does McNamara think when he's losing the war he can pull men out of there?



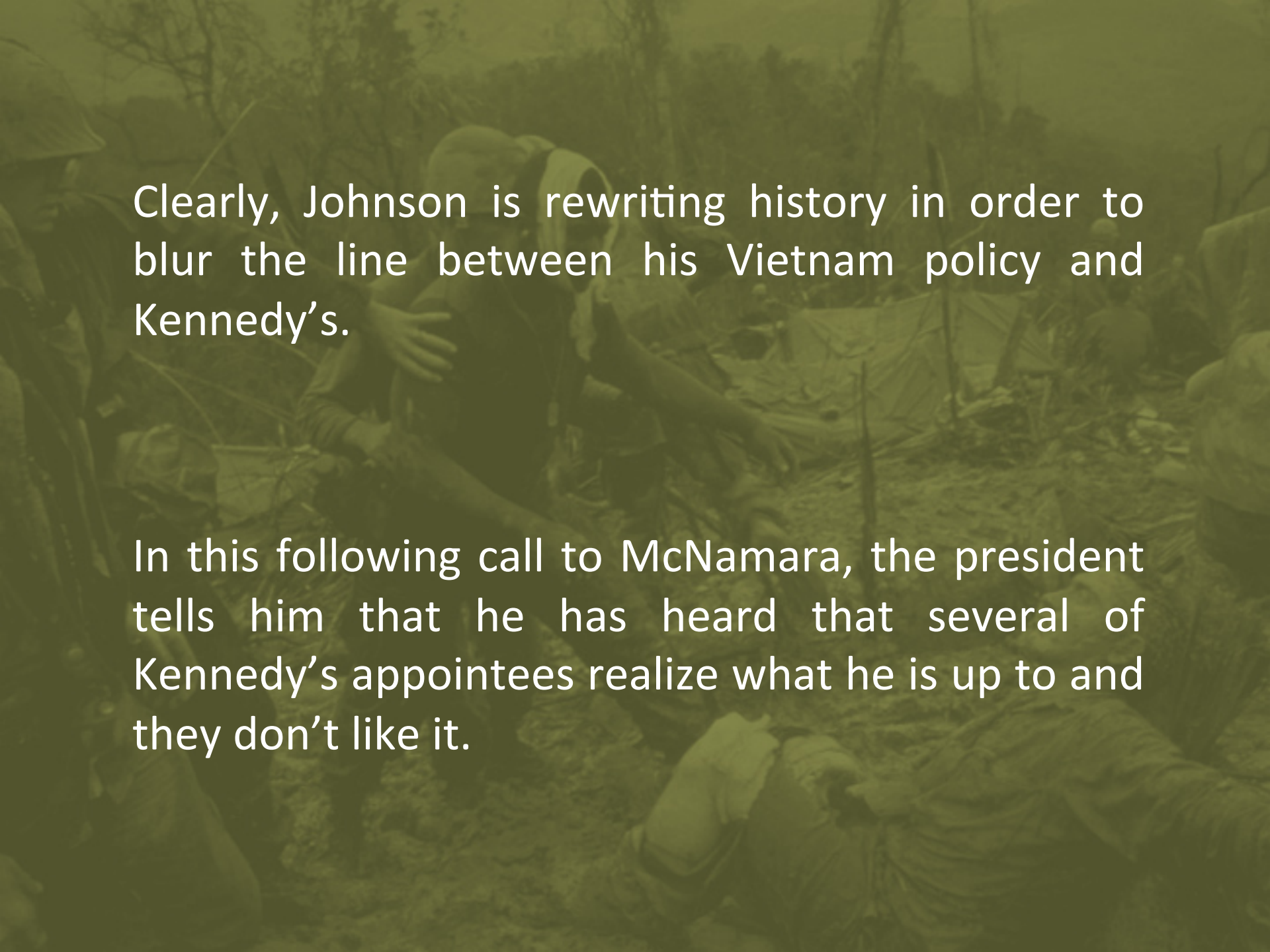
As the reader can see, LBJ thought — differing with Kennedy — that South Vietnam was part of America's national security interests. Acknowledging his differences with Kennedy, he implied we could not withdraw at that time.

In the following tape, LBJ actually wants McNamara to write a memo saying that he did not really mean he was going to withdraw a thousand men from Vietnam in 1963, that it was just a test. Which, as the reader can see from this evidence, it was not.

March 2, 1964:



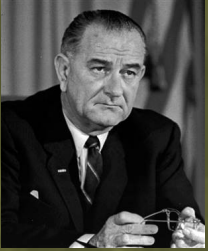
[Johnson] I want you to dictate me a memorandum ... Now why'd you say you'd send a thousand home in October of 1963? Why did McNamara say they were coming back home in '65? ... That doesn't mean everybody comes back, but that your training ought to be in pretty good shape by that time. That's what's said, not anything inconsistent.



Clearly, Johnson is rewriting history in order to blur the line between his Vietnam policy and Kennedy's.

In this following call to McNamara, the president tells him that he has heard that several of Kennedy's appointees realize what he is up to and they don't like it.

January 13, 1965:



[Johnson] Well, it was at [Rowland] Evans' house. And the Kennedy crowd decided that I had framed up to get the Armed Service committee in the Senate to call McCone to put the Vietnam War on Kennedy's tomb ... and this was my game ... to lay Vietnam off onto Kennedy's inexperience and immaturity and so forth.

One by one ...



Salinger



O'Donnell



Bundy

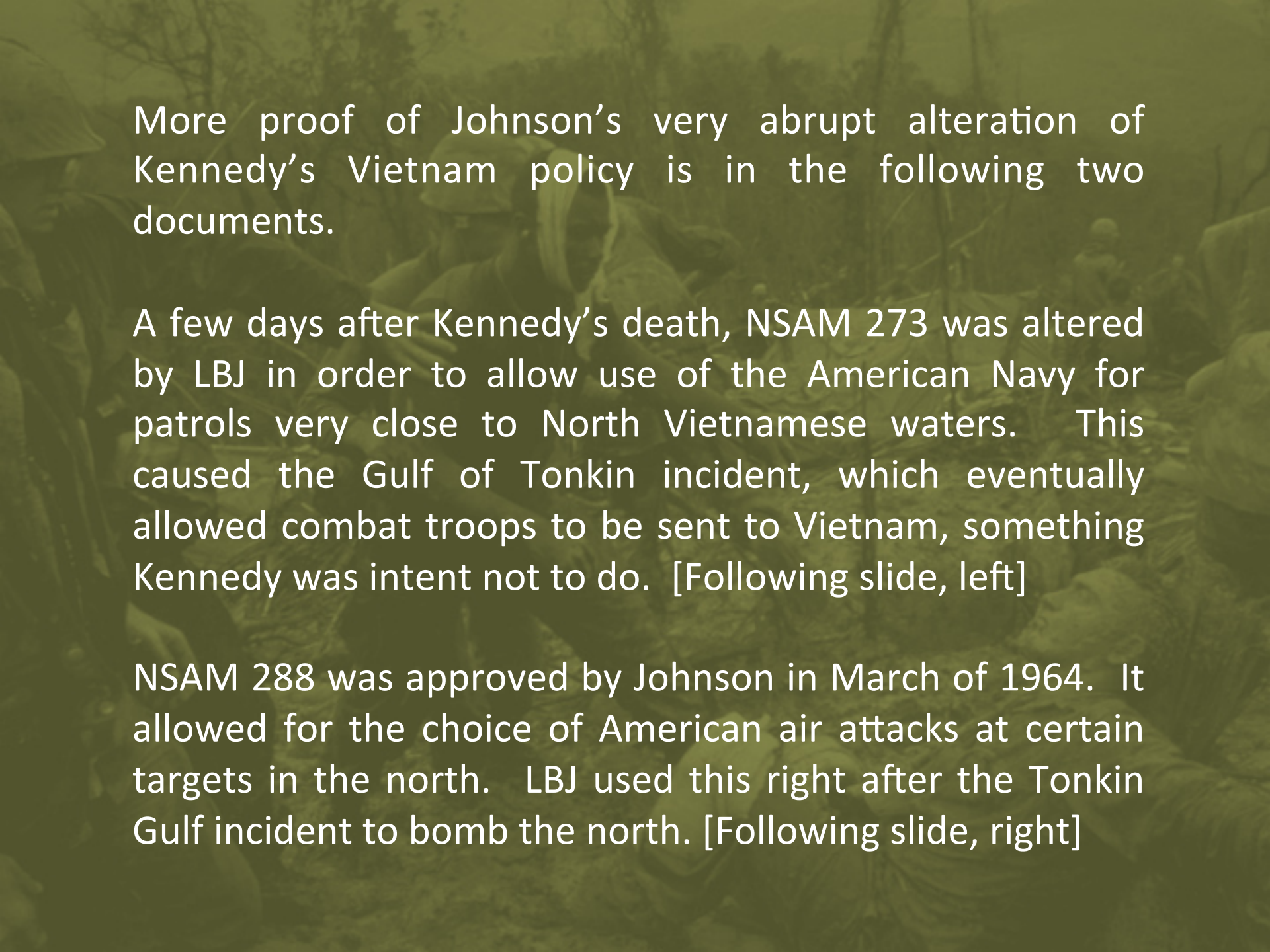


Ball



McNamara

... leave the White House.



More proof of Johnson's very abrupt alteration of Kennedy's Vietnam policy is in the following two documents.

A few days after Kennedy's death, NSAM 273 was altered by LBJ in order to allow use of the American Navy for patrols very close to North Vietnamese waters. This caused the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which eventually allowed combat troops to be sent to Vietnam, something Kennedy was intent not to do. [Following slide, left]

NSAM 288 was approved by Johnson in March of 1964. It allowed for the choice of American air attacks at certain targets in the north. LBJ used this right after the Tonkin Gulf incident to bomb the north. [Following slide, right]

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~

November 26, 1963

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 273

TO: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Administrator, AID
The Director, USA

The President has reviewed the discussions of South Vietnam which occurred in Honolulu, and has discussed the matter further with Ambassador Lodge. He directs that the following guidance be issued to all concerned:

1. It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U. S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.
2. The objectives of the United States with respect to the withdrawal of U. S. military personnel remain as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963.
3. It is a major interest of the United States Government that the present provisional government of South Vietnam should be assisted in consolidating itself and in holding and developing increased public support. All U. S. officers should conduct themselves with this objective in view.
4. The President expects that all senior officers of the Government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U. S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the Government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be scrupulously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese Government and with the press. More specifically, the President approves the following lines of action developed in the discussions of the Honolulu meeting of November 20. The offices of the Government to which central responsibility is assigned are indicated in each case.

DECLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET~~

(page 1 of 3 pages)

Authority: NSC memo 5/23/78
By: MJE/LW, NARS, Date: 9/16/83

FILE COPY

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~

March 17, 1964

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 288

TO: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Secretary of the Treasury
The Attorney General
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Director, United States Information Agency
The Director, Bureau of the Budget
The Administrator, Agency for International Development

SUBJECT: Implementation of South Vietnam Programs

1. The report of Secretary McNamara dated March 16, 1964 was considered and approved by the President in a meeting of the National Security Council on March 17. All agencies concerned are directed to proceed energetically with the execution of the recommendations of that report.
2. The President, in consultation with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, has designated the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to coordinate the execution of the recommendations in the report.

McGeorge Bundy

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NSC # 76-00574
By: MJE/LW, NARS, Date: 12-4-87

cc: Mr. Bundy
Mr. Forrestal
Mr. Johnson
NSC Files

C. Casper 3/16/65

~~SECRET~~

NSAM 273

NSAM 288

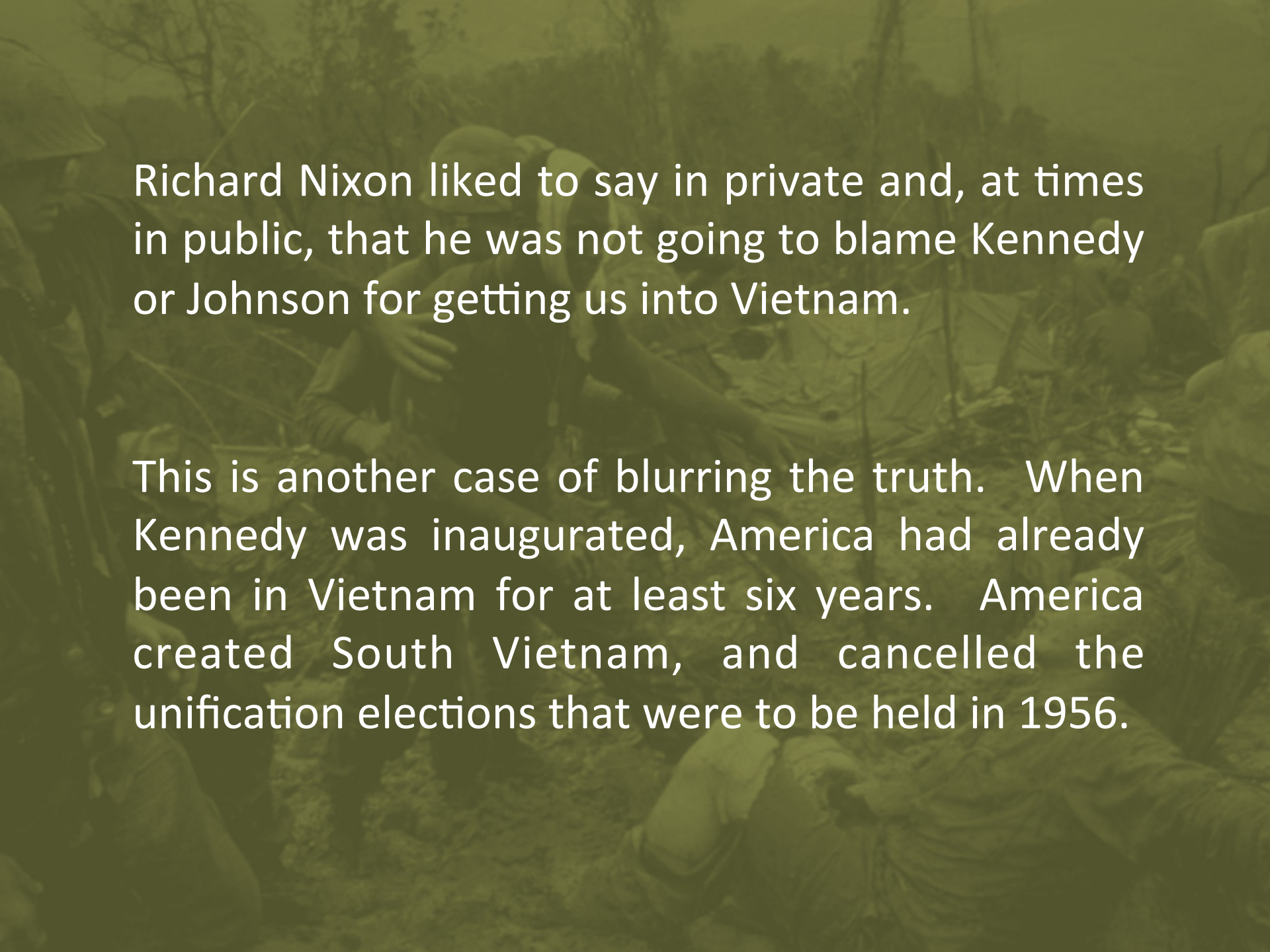
“Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye”

Memories of
John Fitzgerald Kennedy



Kenneth P. O'Donnell
and David E. Powers
with Joe McCarthy

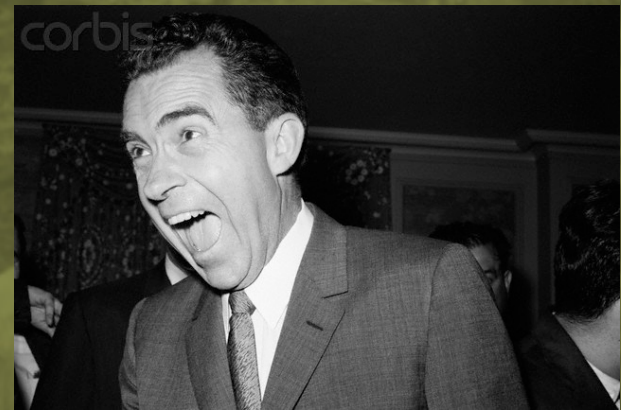
In this 1972 book, two of Kennedy's closest advisors wrote that LBJ broke with Kennedy's Vietnam policy. They mention how NSAM 263 was rescinded and the number of advisors actually increased under LBJ.



Richard Nixon liked to say in private and, at times in public, that he was not going to blame Kennedy or Johnson for getting us into Vietnam.

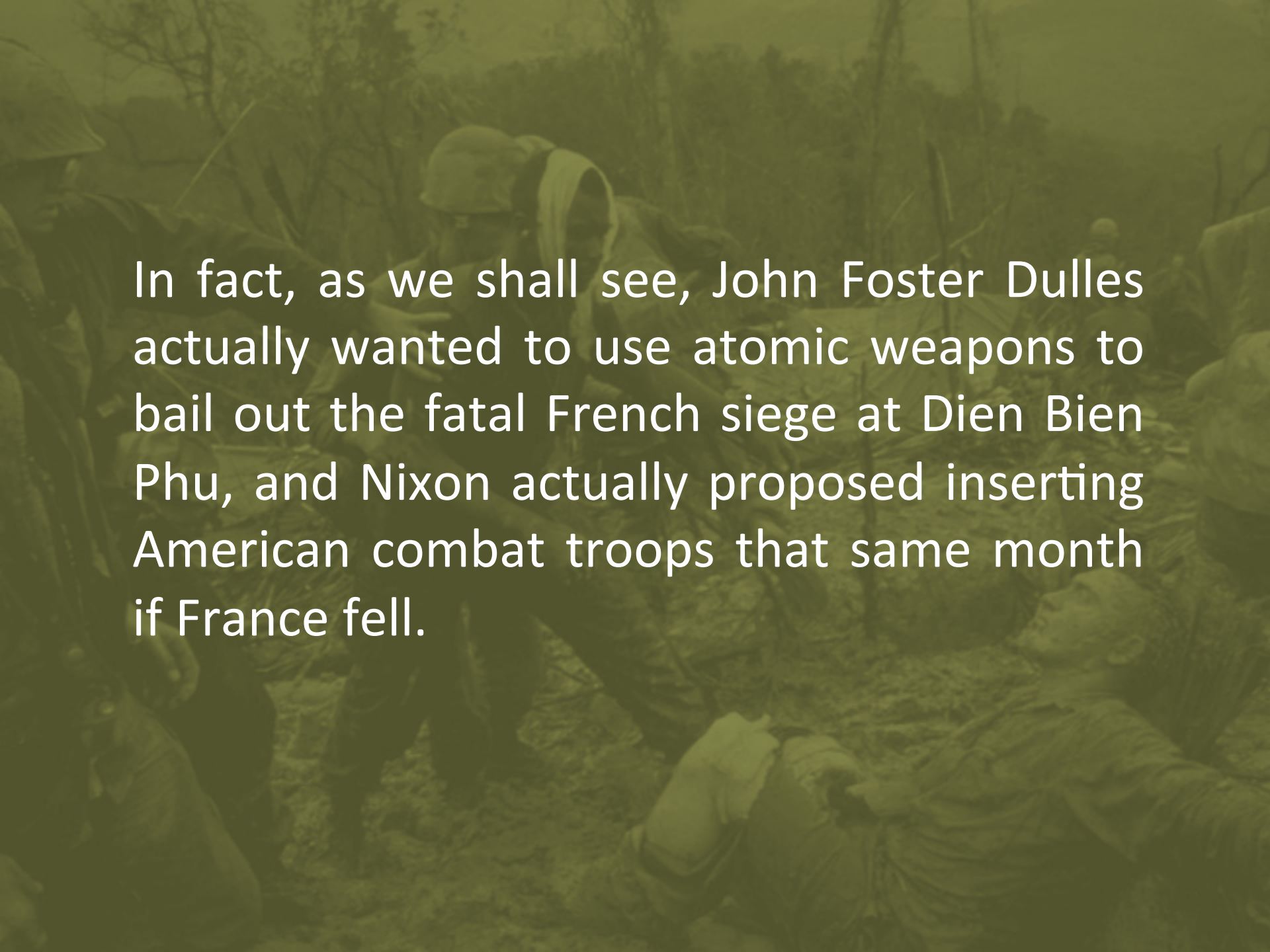
This is another case of blurring the truth. When Kennedy was inaugurated, America had already been in Vietnam for at least six years. America created South Vietnam, and cancelled the unification elections that were to be held in 1956.

The Four Men Who Got Us into Vietnam



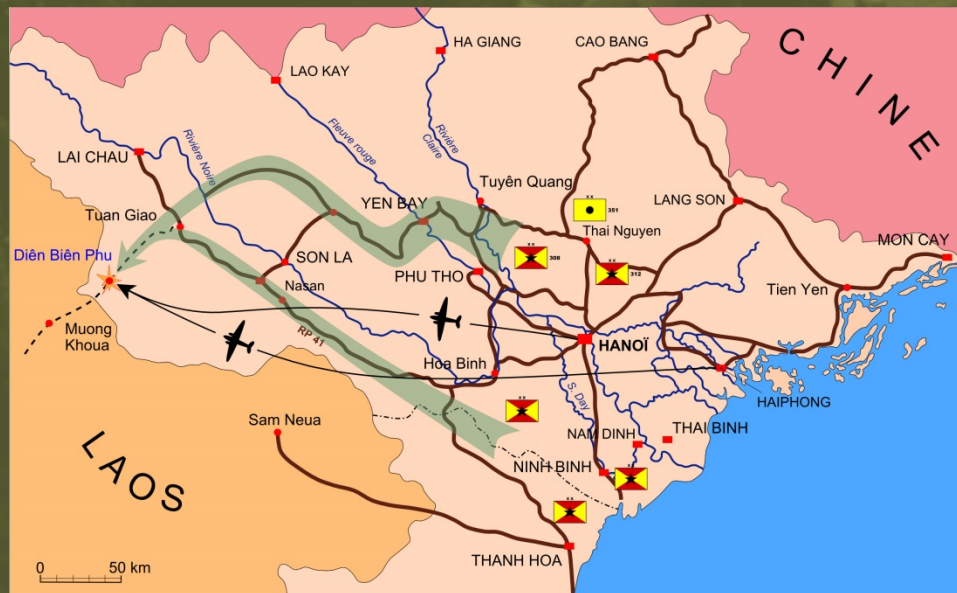


[John Foster Dulles] “We have a clean base there now without a taint of colonialism. Dien Bien Phu was a blessing in disguise.”

A sepia-toned photograph of soldiers in a jungle setting. In the foreground, a soldier is crouched, looking down at the ground. Other soldiers are visible in the background, some standing and some crouching. The scene is dense with foliage and trees.

In fact, as we shall see, John Foster Dulles actually wanted to use atomic weapons to bail out the fatal French siege at Dien Bien Phu, and Nixon actually proposed inserting American combat troops that same month if France fell.

Operation Vulture: Dulles' Plan to Save France

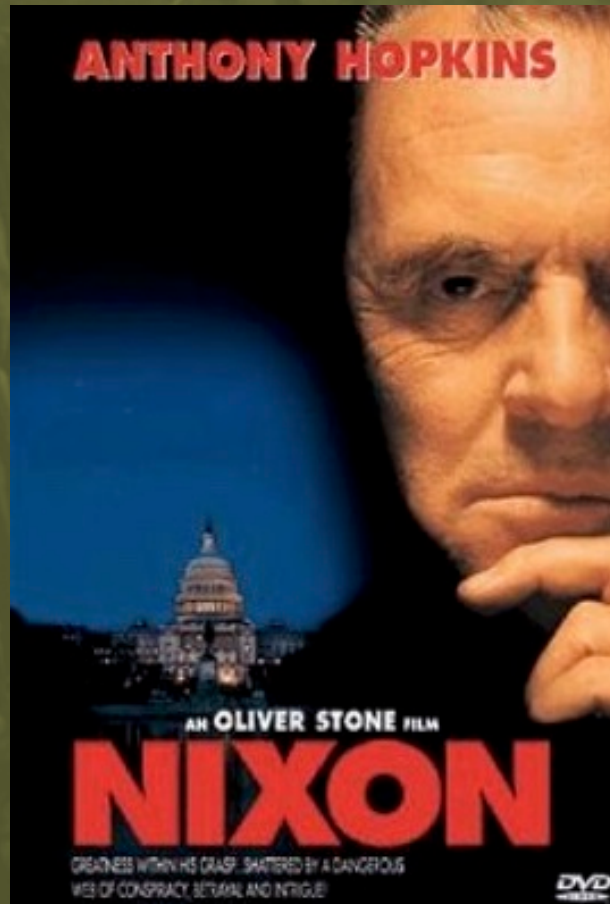


- ✓ 60 B-29's
- ✓ 150 jet fighters for cover against the Chinese
- ✓ 3 Convair B-36s to drop three atom bombs



In April 1954, Nixon said that if the French were defeated, the plight of the free world was desperate:

“In order to avoid it we must take the risk now by putting American boys in, I believe that the executive branch has to take the politically unpopular position of facing up to it and doing it, and I personally would support such a decision.”



When Oliver Stone started his film, only 3% of Nixon's audiotapes had been declassified, and only 15% of his presidential papers had been released.

But still, the *LA Times* got, of all people, Henry Kissinger to review the film.



'NIXON' THE FILM : Stone Leaves the Truth on Cutting-Room Floor

January 21, 1996 | Henry A. Kissinger | Henry A. Kissinger, former secretary of state, writes frequently for The Times

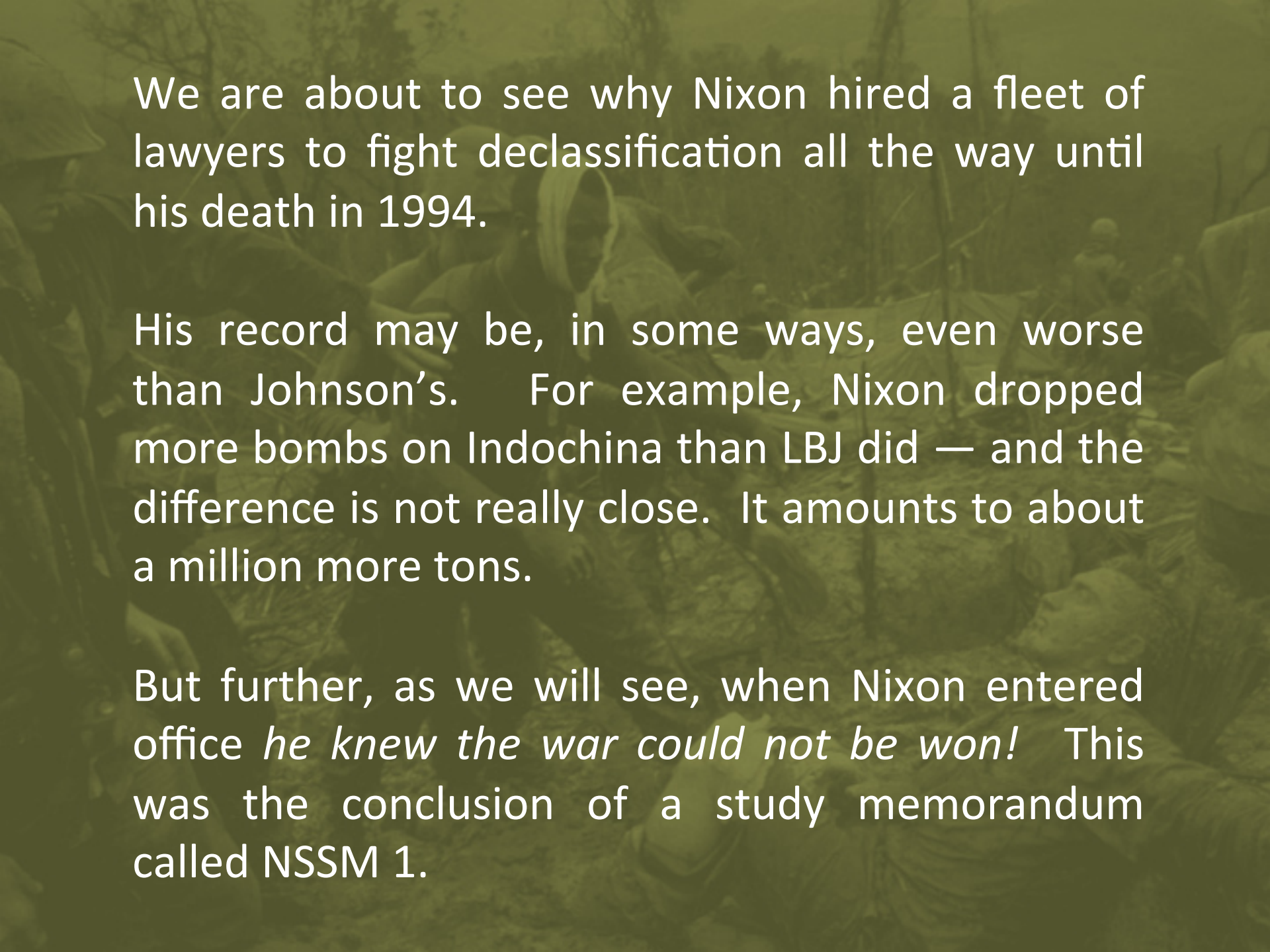


Los Angeles Times

NEW YORK — Oliver Stone's "Nixon" is disappointing and regrettable. The film is a disappointment because it distorts and misrepresents; and it's regrettable that a brilliant filmmaker failed to realize the compassionate portrait for which at least one side of him seemed to be striving. Stone is defeated by his inability to disenthral himself from the passions of his youth in the radical wing of the Vietnam protest movement. His characters repeat the familiar slogans but, lacking a context, they no longer elicit the same knee-jerk reactions.

In the film, Richard M. Nixon's policies are presented as the product of a disturbed personality--frequently inebriated and driven by a combination of inferiority complex and pressure from a shadowy conspiracy of Mafia, CIA, military and big-business figures. As a grotesque, the former president is deprived of the stature that would give his fall the tragic dimension Stone aims to convey.

Ironically, the truth would have offered a much better backdrop to Stone's intended tale of the fallen overachiever. Few presidents have agonized more deeply or meticulously over his decisions than did Nixon, at least in making foreign policy. Nixon's decision-making reflected a nearly obsessive reluctance to overrule subordinates to their faces. He preferred to hear disagreements one-to-one or, better yet, via memorandum. Nixon almost never conveyed his decisions orally to a group. If he rejected the views of Cabinet members or other senior associates, he would generally do so in writing or through emissaries.



We are about to see why Nixon hired a fleet of lawyers to fight declassification all the way until his death in 1994.

His record may be, in some ways, even worse than Johnson's. For example, Nixon dropped more bombs on Indochina than LBJ did — and the difference is not really close. It amounts to about a million more tons.

But further, as we will see, when Nixon entered office *he knew the war could not be won!* This was the conclusion of a study memorandum called NSSM 1.

1969 (after NSSM-1 was compiled):



[Nixon to Kissinger] “In Saigon, the tendency is to fight the war for victory. But you and I know it won’t happen, it is impossible. Even General Abrams agreed.”

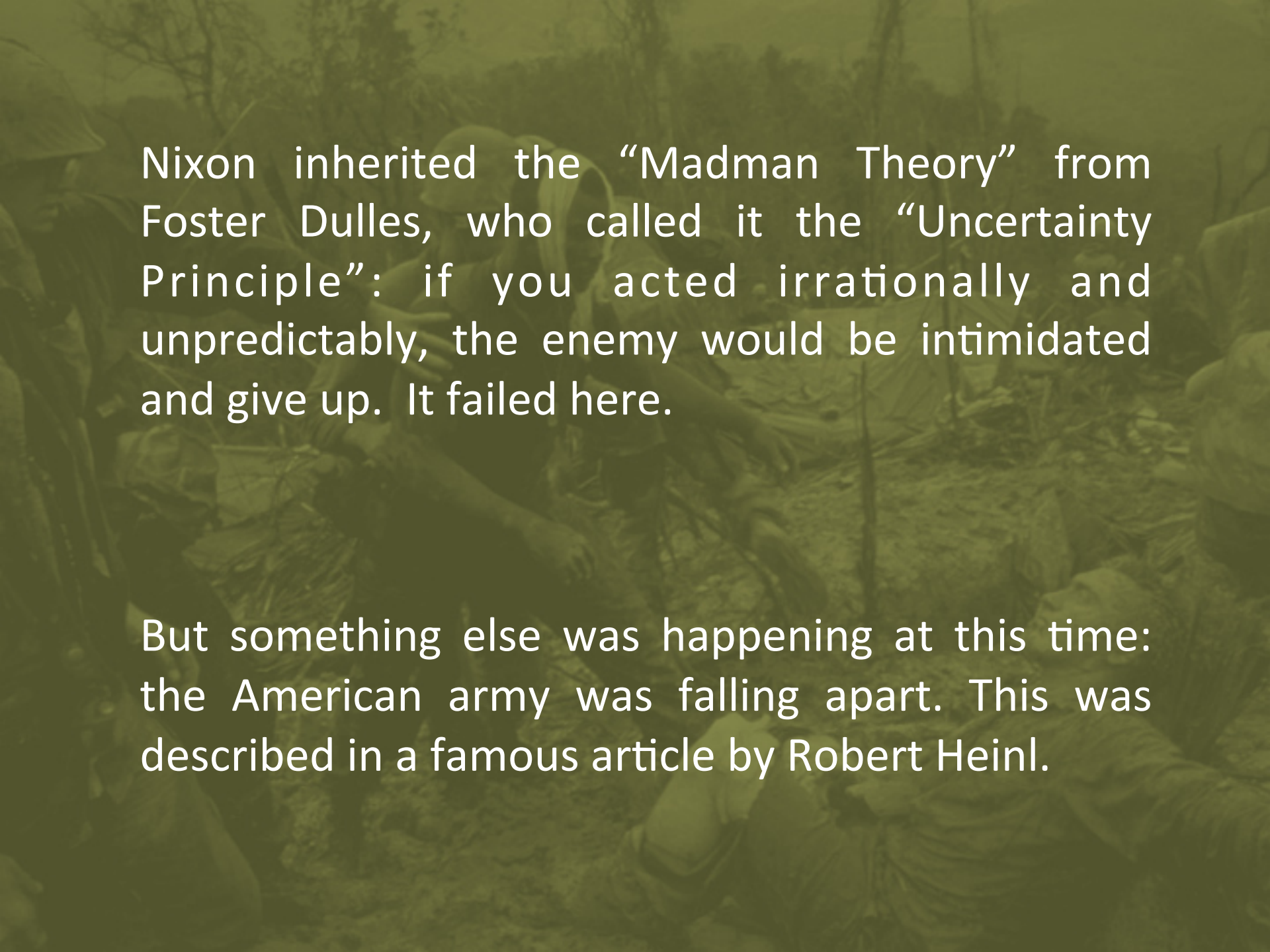
Yet, he still expands the war into the B-52 carpet bombings and the invasions of Laos and Cambodia, the latter causing the fall of Sihanouk and Lon Nol, and the rise to power of Pol Pot and the deaths of about a million people.



This was all part of the “Madman Theory.”



Kissinger: “When in doubt, we bomb Cambodia.”



Nixon inherited the “Madman Theory” from Foster Dulles, who called it the “Uncertainty Principle”: if you acted irrationally and unpredictably, the enemy would be intimidated and give up. It failed here.

But something else was happening at this time: the American army was falling apart. This was described in a famous article by Robert Heinl.



Col. Robert D Heinl

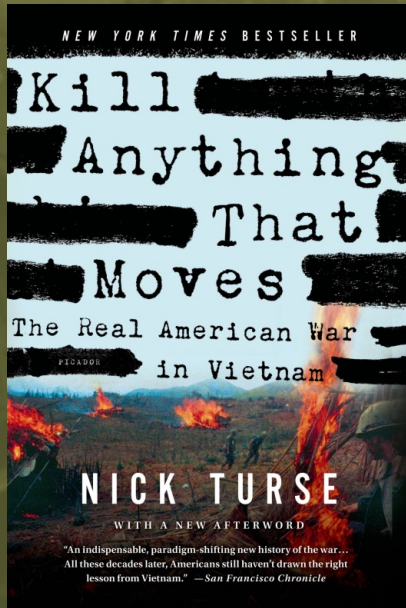


Fraggings:

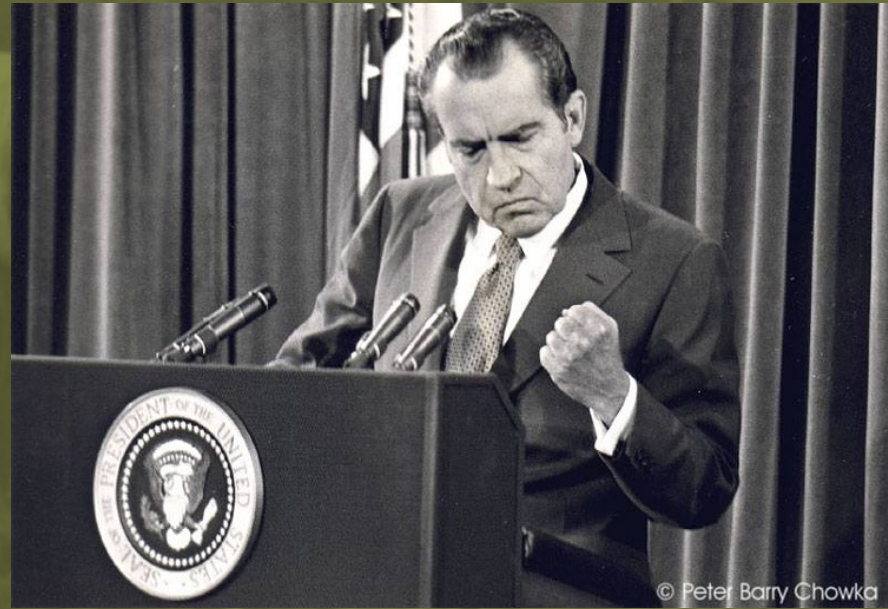
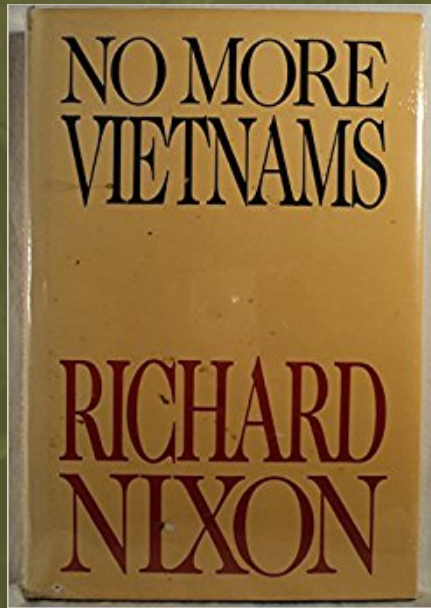
1969 = 96; 1970 = 209

1971 = 235 (end of year projection)

Some U.S. pilots refused to fly during the Christmas bombings.



Although My Lai was by far the largest single massacre, it was not an exception. Many smaller-scale atrocities were covered up and documents deep sixed.

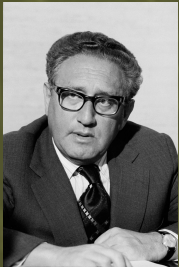


Contrary to what he says, Kissinger did consider the use of tactical atomic weapons for interdiction purposes, near the Chinese border.

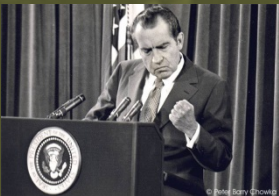
During Easter Campaign:



[Nixon] Should we take the dikes out now?



[Kissinger] That will drown about 200,000 people.



[Nixon] Well no, no I'd rather use a nuclear bomb. Have you got one ready?

1968:



[Nixon] “I’ve come to the conclusion that there’s no way to win the war. But we can’t say that of course. In fact, we have to say the opposite, just to keep some degree of bargaining leverage.”

The end game became the Decent Interval strategy, Vietnam can fall after the USA leaves. In his China briefing book, Kissinger wrote: “We want a decent interval. You have our assurances.”

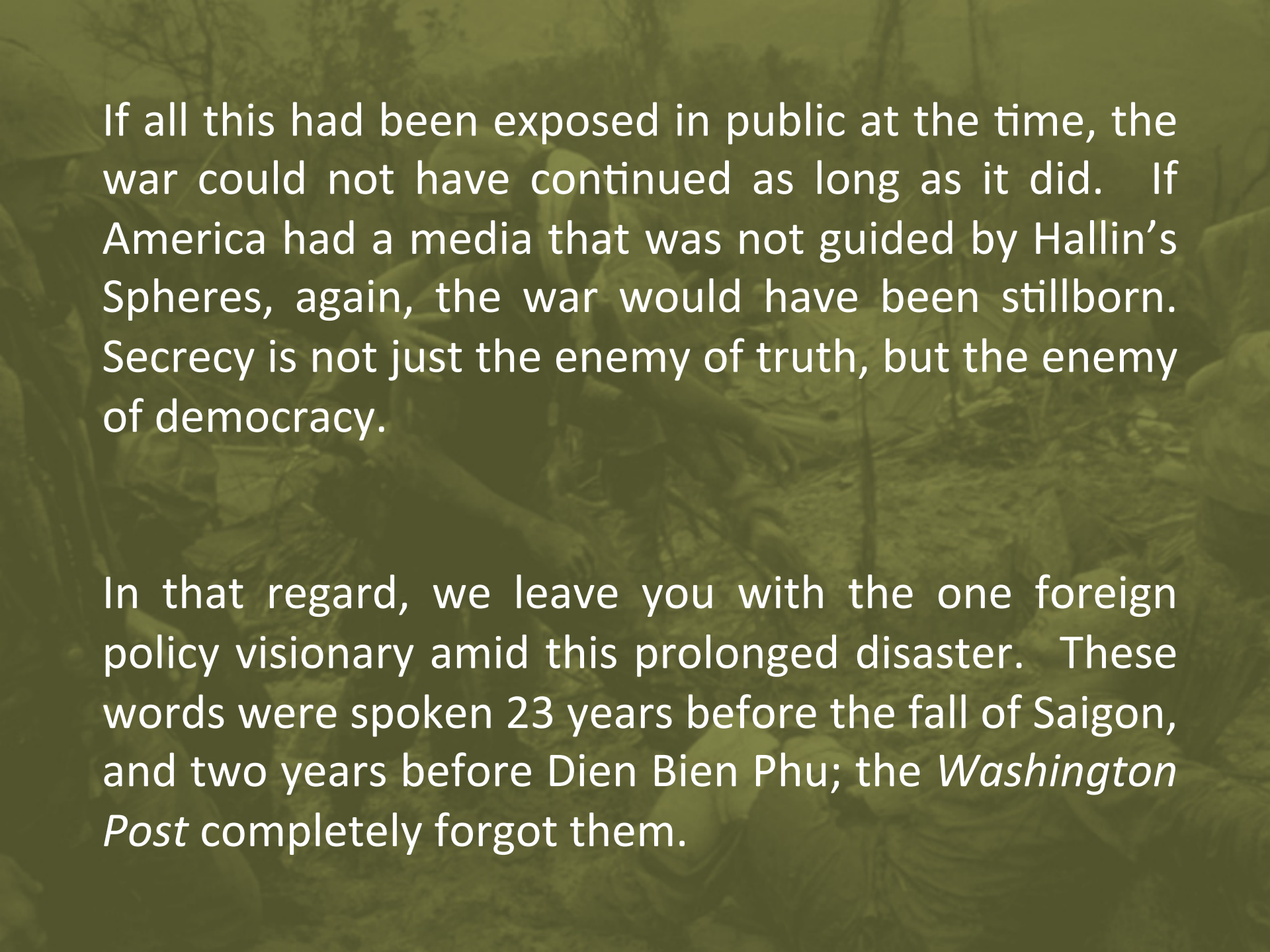
What was this decent interval really about then?



[Haldeman notes]
“... won’t be the 1st P to lose war ...”



Henry Kissinger called an old friend that day and said, “We should have never been there.”



If all this had been exposed in public at the time, the war could not have continued as long as it did. If America had a media that was not guided by Hallin's Spheres, again, the war would have been stillborn. Secrecy is not just the enemy of truth, but the enemy of democracy.

In that regard, we leave you with the one foreign policy visionary amid this prolonged disaster. These words were spoken 23 years before the fall of Saigon, and two years before Dien Bien Phu; the *Washington Post* completely forgot them.

“No amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, ‘an enemy of the people’ which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.”

Senator John F. Kennedy
(1952 speech)



Sources (and suggested reading)

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