

COVER SHEET

Centre Number: 8447

Student Number: 11431038

Title: Major Work Vietnam: A War of Words

Date: 3rd September 2001

QUESTION:

How did ^{the} American Government use print journalism to propagate the myth of American invincibility and incorruptibility during the early stages of the second Vietnam War?

When America entered the Vietnam War in 1965, they brought with them a vast media circus intent on transforming the battlefield into a compelling media event for American viewers. As the U.S. invasion mounted in scale and intensity, Indochina became inundated with war correspondents eager to immortalise the images of Vietnam through words. However, contrary to the usual image of the press operating cantankerously, obstinately, and ubiquitously in its search for truth, the print media became so closely wedded to U.S. Government goals that they never sought to learn the facts. The working title “Free Press” became an Orwellian phrase for “propagandists” when the press started to perceive the war via a series of cultural indifferences, dictated subtly in military and political doctrine. This critique reveals how the media was an expendable resource used to sustain, on an unconscious level, overt prejudice in their writing habits. Print journalists were superfluous to the American cause and many techniques were used by the U.S. military to ensure that potential harm was converted into international support and that an underlying elite consensus was sustained. When the stories started to deviate from the anticipated storyline and military events shattered the officially propagated myth of American moral incorruptibility, the Pentagon devised a system that ensured the truth was never revealed. Stories “legitimately went missing”, freelance journalists did not express horror and outrage that would have been manifested if others were the perpetrators and the United States the victim. Subtle linguistic techniques moulded stories into

advertisements for America. Journalists would swamp their readers with the confusing terminological gloss of euphemisms, acronyms, racially orientated tone, “unemotive” and clinical language, and carefully constructed word choice. If the Government's immediate aim was to eliminate a story that had the potential to damage their image, there would be numerous media ploys that would minimise the impact. One of the more manipulative was repeating what appeared to be the same story in the hope that the news organisations would scrap the surplus material. The military also devised their own language to disengage the interests of their readers, flooding the story with numerical and dehumanised language so that the story would be printed on the obscure back pages that no one reads. And if the American military were making a falsified report that had no substantial evidence to back it up, they would create “off-the-record” testimony from “unnamed highly informed military sources”. In our enlightened society we have diversified our needs to encompass intellectual stimulation. Our perpetual quest for communication and being a contemporary conversationalist has fuelled the opportunistic nature of mass media to infiltrate the populace with its stylised thoughts and doctrines.

Before the Pentagon “pulled the plug” on one of the most captivating series in the United State’s history, Vietnam had long been a journalist’s war. The American military hierarchy had developed a highly stylised journalistic system almost as proficient as their military campaign. This system for a long time sustained the perception that the war was a struggle between Communism and the Free World. The North Vietnamese were presented as agents of Moscow and Peking, whose primary means of gaining support was through terror and force, while America was portrayed as a gallant ally fighting to preserve liberty and justice in Asia. This “system” was a

silent code of ethics and its pre-eminent objective was to create incontrovertible details about the immediate progress of the war. This primarily encompassed relaying facts and figures on battles, mortality and casualty rates, artillery damage and more importantly, the enormous kill-ratio stacked heavily against the North Vietnamese and VietCong. There was a series of levels and offices that a story had to transpire before it became international news and this network previously referred to as “the system” basically filtered out the truth. Briefed by rehearsed generals and trained speakers, contract correspondents would exchange rudimentary questions before developing facts, figures and “highly informed military sources” into a legible piece of writing. These news reports were then telephoned into the central office at Saigon where the decision was made to either alter or reject the story. If the story successfully transcended those barriers untarnished, there was the overwhelming possibility that the Publishers in England, Australia or America would chose to publish someone else’s story. Military briefers dictated almost all reports that left Vietnam. No one would offer opposing views out of fear of being ostracised from the profession, or worse, been labelled a communist. And so the system ensured that contrary to the historical and military facts, the American war machine continued the process of re-evaluating the war, working and reworking it as some sort of metaphor for America’s search for national identity. The media’s pervasive, docile, and unthinking acceptance of a set of patriotic assumptions emphasises the inability of the public media to break away from the indoctrinated mould dictated by the Government. The “system” meant that to a substantial extent, the war was reported from Washington, and not from the eye witness testimony of the reporters. In 1970, when the process of elite defection was well under way, *Los Angeles Times* Washington correspondent, Jules Witcover, described the “system” during the earlier years:

“In coverage of the war, the press corps’ job narrowed down to three basic tasks - reporting what the Government said, finding out whether it was true, and assessing whether the policy enunciated worked. The group did a highly professional job on the first task. But it fell down on the second and third and there is strong evidence that the reason is too many reporters sought the answers in all three categories from the same basic source- the Government.”¹

This system is the essence of this critique. It explores its components, how it became a finely tuned governmentally manoeuvred machine, and how it prevented the truth from reaching the homes of ordinary citizens.

Prevalent in the writings of media advocates was the subconscious “Dawarnist” overtones that were dictated by the loyalty journalists felt towards their western, white origins. This intrinsic disposition meant U.S. intervention in 1965 enjoyed near-total editorial support. Although the “intervention” included the imprisonment of civilians in “strategic hamlets” and the exfoliation of the Vietnamese countryside, journalists continued to ignore the imperialist gains of the Western Anglo power. Their inherent patriotism or more realistically, their xenophobic traits, created a natural inclination within the journalistic sphere to conform to the perspective of official Washington sources, while instinctively categorising the Vietnamese Asians as subservient to the West. More importantly, journalists conformed to a political mindset that America was the “watch dog” of the free world, whose job it was to exterminate Communist

¹ Carter M. An Introduction to Mass Communications [Macmillan and Co Ltd, London, 1971] page 230

infestation. Only very rarely did U.S. reporters make any effort to see the war from the point of view of “the enemy” or to accompany the military forces of “the enemy” resisting the U.S. assault. In Indochina, it was the American invaders who were regarded as the victims of the “aggression” of the Vietnamese, and the war was reported from their point of view. Refugee testimony, which could have provided much insight into the nature of the war, was also regularly ignored. The enemy of the U.S. became the blatant enemy of the media, despite many of whom were stationed as free-lance reporters. Print journalists, who painted an intimidating picture of the North Vietnamese forces could not even refer to them by their own name: they were the “Viet Cong,” a derogatory term produced by U.S.-Saigon propaganda, not the National Liberation Front, a phrase “never used without quotation marks”. Despite the overwhelming evidence that the United States attacked Vietnam, the media continued to portray U.S. acts of terrorism and murderous aggression as the United States “defending South Vietnam”. Bernard Fall cited that the U.S. land invasion in 1965 culminated in the death of over 150,000 South Vietnamese, most of them falling “under the crushing weight of American armour, napalm jet bombers and finally vomiting gases.”² But, the perspective and tone, adopted by the media continued to dismiss the validity that America ever attacked South Vietnam and or the rest of Indochina. It is almost impossible to find even a single reference within the mainstream media to any such event, or any recognition that history could possibly be viewed from this perspective. This intriguing fact reflects the overwhelming dominance that the State propaganda system had, and its ability to capitalise upon the subconscious, yet undeniable racial superiority that is held by most subjects of the Western world, even for those who believed themselves to be taking an “adversarial

² Herman E.S. & Chomsky N. *Manufacturing Consent* [Australia, 1994, Vintage] pg 185

stance.” The inherent racially superior tone controlled not just the thoughts of the composers and the responders, but more importantly the feelings connected to their psyches. Depending on what tone was adopted the American military could dictate if its audience felt outraged or sympathetic, loyal or disgusted.

The American military couldn't control their reporters at gunpoint, but they did develop a subtle infrastructure that ensured most journalists formed a subconscious level of consensus. Consequently, State doctrine was never challenged by editors or columnists, as it never “crossed their mind” to view the war any differently. The liberal press showed particular enthusiasm for the American cause, and their news stories reinforced the preconceptions of the Administration. It was standard practice throughout the Indochinese war for journalists to report Washington pronouncements as fact, even in the extreme case when official statements were known to be false. This practice persisted through the period when the media had allegedly become “a notable new source of national power” threatening government authority. A typical case where this status was definitively attained was in March 1970 when the media reported a North Vietnamese invasion of Laos on the basis of a speech delivered by President Nixon. Nixon announced that it was “essential to expand the war into Laos because Vietnamese forces had risen from 50,000 to 80,000.”³ Even though both numbers were fraudulent and a more realistic approximation neared only 25,000 “enemy” troops, the presidential fabrication was reported as fact. Throughout the Vietnam War the only “dissension” or questioning of the official statements were based on U.S. military sources in the field, so that reporting and analysis remained well within the bounds set by U.S. power. This dependence upon official

³ Brasch N. *Communications in Australia Print Media* [Australia, Reed International Books Australia Pty Ltd, 2000], pg 147

announcements was created because, unlike photographers, being part of the action wasn't essential for print journalists, as they could base their stories on interviews held after an event, or on the frequent press conferences. Although print journalists *technically* had autonomy from the "system", most opted to accept the official sources of information and the news management techniques of the large American-media machine in Saigon, rather than unearthing their own story and getting killed in the battlefield. Those who did venture beyond the office walls and into combat took a gamble not only on their life but also, on the possibility of missing out on the big announcements and the story altogether. Having control of the official statements and therefor ninety-nine percent of the released stories, gave the U.S. military the opportunity to "wave their wand of manipulation." The announcers built the foundations of all stories, creating the facts of the event, adding appropriate unnamed military sources to verify their claims and relaying the endless fatality figures. The only duty left to the journalist was phoning through the official story. It was an overwhelming influence that had the ability to reach the subconscious writing habits of all journalists, "The system got inside you mind."⁴ The most popular technique used to usurp the instinctive writing patterns of journalists was repetition. By repeating the same "catch phrases" and terminology, the briefers would eventually compel all journalists to conform to their military and political prerogative. Hugh Lunn, a Reuter's Correspondent during Vietnam explains:

A spokesman might use the word "enemy" four times in one sentence. Although I knew I was supposed to be an independent journalist writing an independent coverage I sat there one night after a few months in Vietnam and found myself writing about

⁴ Lunn. *H Vietnam: A Reporter's War*

“the enemy” because it had been drummed into me at these press conferences. It was the same with the phrase “Viet Cong infested Jungle” which put the Viet Cong, subconsciously on par with cockroaches.”⁵

Controlling the subconscious writing habits of print journalists was an effective means of sustaining the image that America was the “super hero” and the “Viet Cong cockroaches” who were merely targets in the U.S. moral pilgrimage.

One of the main obstacles that the U.S. had to overcome was the conflicting interests of journalism and warfare. Being an objective body of truth about the world, the task of print journalism is to discover the events that occur and report them in prose as faithfully as possible. Whereas the objectives of winning a war entail maintaining troop and home-front morale, and keeping military strategies and failures secret. Paramount to the Pentagon’s regime was fulfilling the impenetrable image that they had drafted back in Washington; the Pentagon was not concerned with fulfilling Apollonian expectations of truth. The main incentive for having an army of journalists was to display to the international community how America was successfully defeating the crippling effects of Communism. However, the more entrenched America became, and obvious American defeat was imminent, the Pentagon realised that print journalists had the power to become “adversaries” to the cause. And so, the military chiefs and Government administrators endeavoured to keep the journalists from engaging their readers with the truth. In Keith Windshuttle’s journal, News as A Myth, he explains that journalists act in the direct interests of their owners.

⁵ Hugh Lunn- Vietnam: A Reporter’s War

“Journalists are mere hacks, churning out propaganda that suits the needs of their employers.” This is true in that journalists during the second Indo Chinese conflict were simply a medium through which the U.S. military could pass on messages to the international community. Nonetheless, journalists were destined at some stage to write what they saw, rather than what they heard, and when they did, it called for the impetus to “cancel” a story. The double-edged sword was that if they released the story as “the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth” they would be tarnishing the image that they had worked so hard to create, while revealing important strategic information to the enemy. On the same token, if they withheld information, they would be accused of “covering up” unscrupulous activity. If the Government wanted a story to disappear, or wanted to minimise the impact of the facts contained in the story, the Government would repeat what is seemingly the same story. This case of fact manipulation and falsification is outlined in the editorial work of Bruce Piggot, a Reuter’s reporter during the War. His observation report read:

Shau Valley, South Vietnam, Reuter:

“American helicopters were shot out of the sky like gas-filled balloons here today...” and he reported that forty-five helicopters had been shot down in the assault.”⁶

As the story reached Saigon, the last station before it hits the news agencies, the Military Assistance Command announced the embargos of the story, releasing, officially only fifteen of the downed helicopters. Everyone accepted this as an accreditation instruction, and the world was told that the 1st Air Cavalry lost fifteen helicopters in its assault. This “lie” was justified by the military as protecting the troops from an encroaching enemy eager to attack the vulnerabilities of the American

⁶ Lunn H. Vietnam: A Reporter’s War [

forces. To avoid scandalous “Cover Up” headlines, the Americans would release the eventual whole forty-five in instalments. After a 12 hour period the second lot of helicopters would be officially announced “down”, and the agencies would receive the message “Another fifteen helicopters have been shot down in the A Shau Valley.” The next day the final fifteen would be declared in an official statement. The desired result was usually achieved with international editors saying: “shit, we’ve got this bloody helicopters from the A Shau Valley again. We’ve had it three times this week.”⁷ It really was a brilliant mechanism employed whenever a story needed to disappear into the voluminous bins, newspaper offices kept for the huge number of stories they don’t have room to run.

Media conformism to stylistic writings was reinforced by the news’ organisations, which were ultimately the final filter that prevented the truth entering the world. The printing presses inevitably decided whether your story got printed, blended or completely abandoned. An example of the powerlessness of individual journalism is seen in Bruce Piggot’s efforts to defy journalistic ethics by making his own judgement on an official Saigon announcement. The story was in relation to the American Command’s ambition to end a “sitting duck” story that had mesmerised the headlines for a week. At a background press conference American Generals announced that: “the battle for Con Thein was over and the North Vietnamese were pulling away in small groups.”⁸ Despite the awareness amongst most journalists that this statement was a blatant lie, the “automated” correspondents filed the story even though the Generals could not be named and only “highly informed military sources” could be

⁷ H. Lunn- Vietnam: A Reporter’s War

⁸ *ibid*

quoted. After being threatened with his job, Piggot Reluctantly churned out an “in style” story, it read:

“The Battle for Con Thein is over and the North Vietnamese are pulling away in small groups, according to highly informed military sources here.”⁹

The story that he wrote based on witness certification and *named* “highly informed military sources” read quite differently:

“American marines huddled from North Vietnamese artillery in flooded bunkers here today, slogged through knee-deep mud, and came under 50-calibre machine-gun fire.

Meanwhile in Saigon, 400 miles to the south, American commanders announced, off the record that the battle for Con Thein was over.”

It was followed up with a quote from the Con Thein Commander:

“We are being hugged on three sides.”

And it was concluded with a quote from a nineteen year-old marine:

“Sure we’ve got them where we want them... shoot in any direction and you’ll get a gook.”¹⁰

The story that went out into the world was an exact replica of the former story. Inevitably this proves that it was impossible for the truth to reach the outside world. No matter how obvious the truth was to the journalist, the American off-the-record

⁹ Lunn H. Vietnam: A Reporter’s War [Ordry Press Corporation; Australia, 1989] page 252

¹⁰ Ibid page 160

ploy worked over and above an eyewitness report. When the sub-editor in London, America or Australia came to choose which story to run they considered that the real “news” of the day was, that the infamous battle of Con Thein was supposed to be over. After all that was the story everyone else had and news organisations hate to be alone on a major story!

According to the propaganda paradigm, journalists are mere mouthpieces through which the government speaks. Ideally they exercise no independent editorial judgement or action. The first half of this critique evaluated *how* and *why* the manipulation of the press was possible. The second part will evaluate the *linguistic* techniques used to ensure that the composer and responder were always subject to elite consensus. The assumption is that these techniques were only used when the government needed to conceal their failure in upholding their image of invincibility and incorruptibility.

1. An important technique was the elimination of all remnants of emotion from the language. It was anticipated that highly stylised and clinical language would be tedious to the responder, and hopefully they would opt to read a more provocative article. It was also a clever device for coaxing news organisations to print the story on the obscure back pages. The American briefers realised the importance of what words would become part of the Vietnam War vocabulary. As often as possible the government would “desensationalise” unfavourable news by substituting personalised descriptions with numerical equations and indecipherable jargon. For example, the addresses given at the Follies would be immersed in words, or acronyms, such as: ARVN, DMZ, GVN, JUSPAO, MACV, Medivac, Psywar, and WHAMO. This

ensured continuity in journalistic writings, as there was no room for reporters to extract individual imagery. Emotion was effectively “sucked” out of the language. A typical announcement began:

There was a major battle 80 klicks [Kilometres] northwest of Saigon and there were 45 enemy KIA [Killed in Action], 16 enemy WIA [Wounded in Action], 17 enemy KBA [Killed by Air], and 22 enemy WBLCs [Water Borne Logistics Craft] were sunk.

The use of "unemotive" language aimed to make the stories as uninteresting as possible, while simultaneously removing any sentimentality felt towards the death of so many people. The language perpetuated the dehumanised portrayal of the “enemy”, and left America morally intact. The media consequently observed and discussed atrocities blandly, not considering them as controversial or as raising any moral issue - in fact, not regarding them as atrocities at all. Of course the same standard was never pursued when the Americans fell subject to “barbarous acts of slaughter” and the same “desensationalisation” was not applied if others were the perpetrators and the United States the victims. The best example of the “system’s” penchant for stories in radio-TV style was when Jim Pringle went to the Mekong Delta, in a press party specially flown down to see a Viet Cong defeat. The American wire services sent out their story in the following detached format:

“One hundred and eighty-nine Viet Cong guerrillas have been killed in one of the biggest battles ever in the Mekong Delta. The battle erupted at dusk yesterday and

American gunships firing gatling guns at 6,000 rounds per minute were called in during fierce fighting.”¹¹

Jim Pringle did not conform to this expected style of reporting. Similar stories were almost unavoidable when covering a press conference but a naturally talented reporter instinctively found more inspirational means of reporting the event:

Viet Cong child soldiers lay like broken dolls along the banks of this canal today and an American Sergeant said:
“If they’re old enough to pull a trigger they’re old enough to die.”

Pringle’s version of course could never compete against the less provocative and “consensualised” version. By omitting emotive language the stories successfully detached the reader from any sympathy for the “enemy”. The paradox is, emotive language has always been viewed as a prerequisite for bias. Historians such as Keith Windshuttle outline that bias should be avoided and that facts and figures should be expressed in their raw form: “The names, numbers and expressions on the pages do not change, and no historian has the right to add any further commentary.” But, it is the unbiased and technical language in journalistic writings that rob historical events of their true meaning. Language guidelines effectively turned soldiers into numbers and a moral outcry into a war. As seen in the first example, no reader can derive any visual image from the clinical depictions given by indoctrinated journalists, which is why emotive language is such a key ingredient in developing a whole picture. Like photograph's clinical depictions only capture one moment. Emotive language and descriptive accounts animate the work, bringing alive the moment for the responder in the same sense as a film sequence. It takes and absorbs the feelings that were present

¹¹ Ibid page 200

at the moment allowing the reader to feel that it is a shared experience, while offering visual reconnaissance from several viewpoints. You can liken an emotive report to a film set. If you only have one still camera, you only see one person, caught indefinitely in one pose, during one moment. You can however, expand the experience by having various cameras, filming numerous actors, performing numerous actions, and capturing direct dialogue, in this way you will have a more complete picture. But, the "system" didn't allow for dimension, its manifestations of events were hollow glimpses of humanity. Emotive language transforms the "One-hundred and eighty-nine guerrillas" into human beings that the audience can see.

2. As Walter Lippmann claimed in the Manufacture of Consent: "Propaganda had already become a regular organ of the popular government," and the message of the Government is discretely relayed through the placement of words, tone, repetition, choices, emphases and omissions. These factors working in collusion can create a severe distortion of the truth. Hugh Lunn explains how the system not only infiltrated subconscious writing habits as discussed previously but also, manipulated linguistic techniques to convey certain messages:

"At the Follies and in the press releases and callouts the DMZ was always described as the "six mile strip of land, which divides North Vietnam from South Vietnam." And in every story I wrote, I typed as my thoughts raced ahead: 'The Demilitarised Zone which divides North Vietnam from South Vietnam' ... Until one day Dinh, my Vietnamese assistance pointed out: 'The Demilitarised

Zone not divide North Vietnam from South Vietnam- It
divide Vietnam.”¹²

The rearrangement of the words and the shift in emphasis changes the entire meaning of not just the sentence but the entire meaning of the war. The original usage depicts the ideal paradigm: America, South Vietnam’s saviour from the “red tidal wave” snowballing from the north. However, in the eyes of the Vietnamese, America was tearing apart their small Asiatic country right at its heart, turning Vietnamese against Vietnamese. The assumption that the Demilitarised Zone is a protective barrier for South Vietnam is made by the juxtaposition of the term “Demilitarised Zone” with the phrase “Which divides North Vietnam from South Vietnam”. Once this interpretation is “hammered” into the subconscious writings of journalists it guarantees that the same message will reach the international community. The simple rearrangement of the catch phrase into “the demilitarised Zone which divides Vietnam”, immediately derives negative connotations and exemplifies that America was the perpetrator during the Vietnam War.

3. The omission of the word “victim” when referring to the Vietnamese was an effective means of removing the U.S. military culpability. Reporters often did not conceal atrocities committed by the U.S. military forces; they simply did not perceive them as atrocities. Consequently there was little reaction when B-52 raids in “the populous [Mekong] delta” were reported in 1965, with unknown numbers of civilian casualties and hordes of refugees fleeing to government controlled hamlets “because they could no longer bear the continuous bombings.” However, the media portrayed them as grateful impoverished peasants that could now receive protection from the

¹² Ibid page 45

very same people from whom they were running. Like wise, victims fell under the category of “the unfortunate accidental loss of life incurred by the efforts of American military forces to help the South Vietnamese repel the incursion of North Vietnam and its’ partisans.” By constantly substituting a one-word description, “victim”, with an entire phrase, the Military command was always stating the “party line”. In this sense it is not a description of what was happening to Vietnamese peasants, it was an advertisement for American imperialism.

4. The war was founded on a series of euphemisms depicting Orwellian hypocrisy. The American troops carried the title “Free World Forces” like a badge of morality, despite the fact that they used military force in a foreign country before allowing democratic elections to take place. The American metaphor “Watch Dog” was a euphemism for “Armed forces”. The “watch dog” analogy depicted “Free world Forces”, protecting Vietnam from Communistic peril. American “defence” was a substitute for the “aggressive” slaughter of thousands of Vietnamese and rapid destruction of the Vietnamese countryside. In an army that was so obsessed with Acronyms as pointed out earlier, the full use of the term “Free World Forces” provides a stark contrast. The conscious choice to use it in its entirety would have been to prevent the loss of the propaganda value of the euphemism. Military briefers never used the word Americans when they talked about the war as a whole: they talked about the “Free World Forces,” hoping to get as many journalists as possible to integrate the phrase into their subconscious writings.

By 1975 the story of Vietnam had well and truly deviated from the anticipated story line. Military events shattered the officially propagated myth of American

invincibility and incorruptibility, and the American military command had no choice but to “pull the plug” on one of the most captivating series in U.S. history. The democratic postulate projected certain expectations of media independence in its commitment to discovering and reporting the truth. We presume that the media is an individual body that doesn’t reflect the world, as powerful groups’ desire it to be perceived. However, as this critique has proven, the “free press” during the earlier years of the war, was closely wedded with a smothering military command. It was extremely rare for news and commentary to find their way into the mass media if they failed to conform to the framework of established dogma. The level of control was remarkable. Never before had the “intelligentsia” of contemporary society been so deceived and manipulated. The assumption that *only* communist states have government-controlled propaganda machines is *only* assumed because democratic propaganda leads us to believe that this is so. Many may argue that the newspapers written during the Vietnam War weren’t products of propaganda. But anyone who bothers to take a closer look, rather than accepting “official” announcements will find that the foundations of print journalism comprise of carefully constructed falsifications, composed bias dictated by racial loyalty, and language manipulation. The newspapers that sat on our breakfast tables were awash in linguistic techniques that were so subtle that they are more sinister than “obvious” propaganda, as it removes our questioning nature. Vietnam was a war that could have just as easily been written from a cosy office in New York, but that the lies were more readily digested if the responders felt that they were reading accounts written by people who witnessed the events. In 1975, when the *entertainment* value of Vietnam no longer existed the Pentagon “pulled the plug”. Only now can we see Vietnam for what it

was, an advertisement for America, whoever died in the cross fire didn't matter as long as America's image wasn't tarnished!

COVER SHEET

Centre Number: 8447

Student Number: 11431038

Title: Reflection Statement: Vietnam: A War of Words

Date: 3rd September 2001

THE INTENT OF MY MAJOR WORK:

Title: Vietnam: A War of Words

I intend to present a critique that is extensive in its search for truth in a medium possessed by the political agendas of war. In accordance to the board of studies marking criteria my critical response is:

- An independent investigation into an aspect of language and,
- An independent investigation into the works of a particular historical period

Question:

How did the American Government use print journalism to propagate the myth of American invincibility and incorruptibility during the early stages of the Vietnam War?

Breakdown of the Question:

- What was the image that the American Government was trying to project?
- What methods were utilised by the United States Government to secure an elite consensus in newspaper writings during the early years of the conflict, making sure the truth never left the shores of Asia?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MY INTENTION AND MY

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

HOW WERE MY CONCEPTS REALISED?

Breakdown of How I'll answer the Question/ Synopsis:

Introduction:

- Give brief overview of how the Vietnam War was orientated towards print journalism
- Outline the misconceptions surrounding media objectivity, and the inseparable relationship between journalistic content and political and or military doctrine
- Explain why it was politically and militarily necessary for the press to be manipulated
- Outline the “system” that sustained intellectual consensus
- Outline the language techniques used to achieve this

First Paragraph:

- Explain the journalistic infrastructure that prevented the truth leaving Vietnam in its entirety
 - The dependence upon trained military briefers, for information on the progress of the war.
 - The pressure upon news organisations to print only what everyone else was printing
 - Explain how a substantial amount of the war was reported from Washington

Second Paragraph explains:

- How tone and perspective was influenced by the racial tendencies held by western writers
- How the briefers utilised this natural “Darwanist” instinct to perpetuate the “watch dog” myth

Third Paragraph:

- Explain how military briefers tapped into the subconscious writing habits of print journalist by repeating desired messages in the official announcements
- Explain that this was possible because the journalists depended greatly on the press conferences, and government bulletins

Fourth Paragraph:

- Explain that the prerogatives of the media and the military conflicted and so the government had to put in place numerous tactics to ensure that their interest were preserved
- This entailed the Military assistance command releasing stories in instalments, hoping to deceive the news organisations into thinking that they were processing the same story three times and therefore not printing all three instalments. Ultimately this meant that the magnitude of the American defeat would be minimised.

Fifth Paragraph explain:

- How journalistic conformism was reinforced by the news organisations
- How journalists who defied media ethics were ignored
- How the government manipulated the truth by using “highly informed military sources” to validate false proclamations at news briefs.

THE SECOND SECTION CONCENTRATES ON THE NUMEROUS LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES USED BY THE MILITARY COMMAND

Sixth Paragraph:

- “Desensationalising” news reports that were of a detrimental nature
- Explain how clinical language robbed the war of its true meaning

Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Paragraph

- Evaluate how the message of the government was discretely relayed through the placement of words, tone, repetition, choices, emphases, and omissions.

INTENDED AUDIENCE:

In my proposal entitled, Literature, the Modern Weapon of War, I intended my audience to be adult, intelligent and from a higher social class. However, I have since broadened my audience to a general constituent, for my intention is to reach those people who read the newspapers that I am evaluating. My critique is meant to be an education to those people, revealing to them the underbelly of a medium that posed as an ideal representation of the truth. Initially I predicted that my unfinished work would only be appreciated in Western society, I now believe that the development of “racial theories” has given my work a dimension that accommodates the collective thoughts of both sides of the world.

THE PURPOSE OF MY MAJOR WORK:

My purpose remains relatively the same as my initial proclamation back in January this year:

“My real motives lie within the development of my own literary theories, which I hope to uncover through investigating the psychological impact texts have on the composer and responder.”

My prerogatives have naturally evolved to suit what I have found in my independent investigations. As Keith Windshuttle explains: “An historical explanation is an inductive argument constructed out of evidence.” If I were to select information to construct my own argument I would be just as hypocritical as the political leaders that I have criticised in my major work. For this reason I have encountered numerous struggles. The most prominent was:

- Knowing when to stop researching and start writing. Initially I started to write a “shell essay”, where I constructed my personal arguments and then proceed to find information to corroborate them. However historical evidence doesn’t like to be confined to a neat package, and for this reason I found progress slow.

My final purpose is to examine the qualities of newspaper writings during the Vietnam War. Evaluating the pliability of the medium, and how it was used as a regular organ of the popular government to manipulate and propagate the American myth of invincibility and incorruptibility.

Ultimately, I want my critique to be uncompromising. I do not want to create a product that sits on the fence. I want to grab the attention of the reader by being extreme in my views, while using coherent arguments to validate my claims.

STRUCTURE:

Archetypal critical responses are structured in the same format as an essay. I have decided to conform to this paradigm in the first section but opted to modify the format for the final section. My structure follows a similar line to J.B Bury's Overture, where he opts for essay style paragraphs when explaining the background to his piece, and then numbers his points for the final section. I've chosen to use this method for a practical reason. It clearly distinguishes the final points, and it provides the responder with a psychological break.

Personal struggles in creating a critique:

A problem that has arisen from writing a critique is the tendency to write "over the heads" of the audience. I have to remember that although I have read all the research the responder hasn't, and I will bore and confuse even the most intelligent reader if I don't explain myself thoroughly and provide relative examples. I cannot present complex ideas in a complex format, and I must restrain myself from becoming absolved in the expectation of sounding "academic".

I found that the dictionary was not very accommodating when I wanted to verbalise certain issues, so I have modified the language in certain areas. This is recognised by the use of "inverted commas."

Not knowing where your research will take you is a restriction inherent in writing a critique as a posed to writing a creative piece. With a creative piece you know from the outset what the basic plot will be and what types of characterisations would best suit your ideas. In contrast a critique does not formulate results for a long time. The initial stages of creating the major work are consumed with research, which is

psychologically disheartening because you have done so much work with little productivity to show for it.

As my strength lays in public speaking and not critical writing, I have tried to overcome poor sentence structure by verbalising my ideas as much as possible to my peers.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTS

Why did I choose the context of the Vietnam War to base my investigation?

The Vietnam War is the perfect historical period to analyse literature because it witnessed the emergence of a different war-front, a war of words as well as bullets. Vietnam entered the homes of ordinary citizens' via media coverage, becoming a war that questioned the values and morality of a whole society. Finding out what was happening became an international obsession, which sparked journalistic attention from all corners of the globe. Journalists were an integral part of a team sent to Indochina to promote America.

LINKS TO COURSE WORK:

- CULTURAL CONTEXT: identifying values that stylise a particular text.
 - This relates to the role that racial tensions had during this period and the inherent belief that White Europeans were the superior race.
 - I will explain how military indoctrinators capitalised on racial inclinations to formulate tone.

- In addition I will explore how the political climate created by war contributed to the distortion of truth. For example news reports could not reveal certain military secrets, and
- During this time America was seen as the new “Super Power” because of their decisiveness during World War Two, journalistic writings thus had to project this image.

➤ THE MODULE POWER PLAY AND GEORGE ORWELL’S NOVEL 1984:
 pointing to the massive amounts of propaganda spewed by the government and institutions around the world, observers have called our era the age of Orwell. As early as World War 1, American historians offered themselves to President Woodrow Wilson to carry out a task they called “historical engineering”, by which they meant designing the facts of history so that they would serve state policy. In the instance of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government wanted to silence opposition to the war. In 1921, Walter Lippman said that the art of democracy requires the “manufacture of consent.” This phrase is an Orwellian euphemism for thought control. The idea is that in a state such as the U.S. where the government can’t control the people by force, it has to control what they think.

In totalitarian societies where there’s a Ministry of Truth, propaganda doesn’t really try to control your thoughts. It just gives you the party line. Democratic societies can’t work like that, because the State is much more limited in its capacity to control behaviour by force. Since the voice of the people is allowed to speak out, those in power have to control what it says. One way to achieve this is to create political debate that appears to embrace many opinions, but actually stays

within very narrow margins. The Vietnam War is a classic example of America's propaganda system. Both the Hawks and the Doves, though appearing to present two opposing views made the assumption that America had the right to carry out aggression in North Vietnam. Doves and Hawks alike refused to admit that aggression was taking place. Both sides substitute the term "aggression" for "defence" in the standard Orwellian manner.

TECHNIQUES THAT HAVE HELPED DEVELOP MY MAJOR

WORK:

- Brain storms: help to sort out problems by making sure that I don't overlook all possibilities
- Elimination Process: I weigh up the pros and cons of the ideas brought up in the brainstorm
- Shell Essays: motivate me to start working and stop researching
- Discussing My Major Work: provides fresh ideas and interpretations and also provides encouragement
- Checklists: make sure I apply the same methods to different texts, and remember to ask certain questions
- Photocopying resources relevant to my major work, highlighting the arguments I want to incorporate, and pasting it into my journal so I don't lose the information.
- Using the Internet as a fast way to pinpoint different resources and essays.

COVER SHEET

CENTRE NUMBER: 8447

STUDENT NUMBER: 11431038

TITLE: Bibliography

DATE: 3rd September 2001

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- Cater M.D. [1971]; An Introduction to Mass Communications- Problems in Press and Broadcasting; Macmillan and Co Ltd, London
- Chomsky. N. [1998]; Propaganda, American Style; Diamond Publishers, England.
 - Is a analysis of American propaganda and the psychological manipulation employed by the government to subdue the masses
 - Gives an insightful overview of the connection between propaganda during the Vietnam War and the class text nineteen eighty-four, by George Orwell.
- Herman E. S. & Chomsky N. [1994]; Manufacturing Consent- The Political Economy of the Mass Media; Vintage, Australia
- Karnow S.; 1986]; Vietnam a History the First Complete Account of the Vietnam War; Penguin Books Ltd; England
 - A concise overview of the events and political manoeuvrings during the Vietnam War.
- Koch C.J. [1998]; Highways to a War; Random House Australia; Australia
- Lunn H. [1989]; Vietnam A Reporter's War; Ordry Press Corporation; Australia
 - This has been the most integral text for the development of my essay.

- Hugh Lunn revealed in this autobiography/ novel the system installed in Vietnam, the techniques used by briefers and journalists, while providing numerous newspaper articles from the period itself.
 - Only after I finished reading the book, did I start to formulate arguments.
 - I've taken information from the book and then investigated its reliability, and he has worked out to be a very reliable source
- Mc Nab C. and Wiest A. [2000]; The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War; Amber Books Ltd; America.
 - National Geographic [June 1987]; The Patowmack Canal; [Volume 171, Number 6];
 - National Geographic. [May 1985]; Vietnam Memorial; [Volume 167, Number 5]
 - Sale D.; [1992]; The Vietnam War [The Herald in the Classroom The Sydney Morning Herald]; Sydney Morning Herald; Australia
 - Provided relevant articles that were produced during the Vietnam War. I've assessed the different language techniques used, that are my own analysis and not some one else's
 - Windschuttle K; [1988]; The Media; Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Australia

MOVIES AND DOCUMETARIES:

- Directed by Coppola F.F.; [1976]; Apocalypse Now

- Directed by Finn H.; [2000]; Vietnam the thousand Day War- documentary-; Webster Films Corp; Australia Melbourne.
- Directed by Stone O.; [1986]; Platoon.
- Directed by Stone O.; [1996]; Heaven and Earth.
- Directed by Wincer S.; [July 28, 1995]; Operation Dumbo Drop; Walt Disney Productions in association with Poly Gram Filmed Entertainment.

WEBSITES:

- <http://chromsky.arts.adelaide.edu.au/person/dhart/film>
- <http://film.tierranet.com/films/a.now/>
- www.marlboro.edu/~afa/movies/apoc.html
- <http://movieweb.com/movie/dumbodrop/>
- <http://slate.msn.com/BigPicture/96-11-21>
- <http://us.imdb.com/plot?0114048>; written by Jeff Cross [1998]
- <http://www.vinsight.org/1998news/0716b.htm>

- <http://www.vwam.com/vets/progan.html>

➤ News reels from the state library