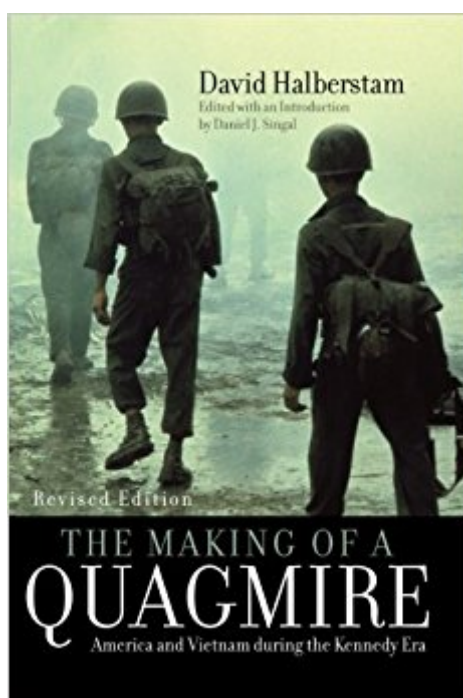


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# The Making Of A Quagmire: America And Vietnam During The Kennedy Era



## Synopsis

Pulitzer-prize winning author David Halberstam's eyewitness account provides a riveting narrative of how the United States created a major foreign policy disaster for itself in a faraway land it knew little about. In the introduction to this edition, historian Daniel J. Singal supplies crucial background information that was unavailable in the mid-1960s when the book was written. With its numerous firsthand recollections of life in the war zone, *The Making of a Quagmire* penetrates to the essence of what went wrong in Vietnam. Although its focus is the Kennedy era, its analysis of the blunders and misconceptions of American military and political leaders holds true for the entire war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For all the legions of books published on the Vietnam War, none surpasses one of the earliest and most prescient—David Halberstam's *The Making of a Quagmire*. Halberstam's shrewd observations of the complexities of Vietnamese politics and the obstacles the U.S. faced early in achieving its goals deeply inform the entire book. A brilliant study that has lost none of its power despite the history that unfolded after its publication, Halberstam's book deserves to be read again and again. (Ellen Fitzpatrick, Carpenter Professor of History, University of New Hampshire) Few journalists did more to educate Americans about the harsh realities of the Vietnam war than David Halberstam. *The Making of a Quagmire* offers numerous insights into the conflict between the American press and the U.S. government that began in those years and ultimately played a major role in the war. The book is a valuable introduction to Vietnam in the era of John F. Kennedy and Ngo Dinh Diem. (George C. Herring, University of Kentucky) As it did in 1965, Halberstam's book will

provoke vigorous discussion. Readers will marvel at how the United States allowed itself to be so misled in South Vietnam and will use the book to make connections to more recent events in the Middle East. (Robert Dallek) Halberstam's wartime work will last not just because of its quality and its importance but because it established a new mode of journalism, one with which Americans are now so familiar that it's difficult to remember that someone had to invent it. (George Packer *The New Yorker*)

David Halberstam (1934–2007) was the author of 20 books, the last 14 of which have been national best-sellers. His most recent book, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, is about the Chinese entry into the Korean War. He was the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his reporting in Vietnam and was a member of the elective Society of American Historians.

Valuable first-hand account from a man on the ground- assisted greatly by footnotes and editorial input correcting and explain certain factual matters that were not know to the author at the time. Essential reading for any student to of post-war History. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history or policy analysis- nor could it be given that I was written before the Vietnam "war" really took off- but for the most part it is eerily prescient. Fuller histories can be found elsewhere- but Halberstam had direct access to most of the players as the situation developed, and remains pre-eminent among correspondent/historians in injecting the narrative with a sense of life, tensions anxiety and drama. Halberstam lived among it and even though we now know how it all turned out, his increasing sense of apprehension and foreboding brings great narrative tension to what otherwise might be a dry recitation of acts, names and figures.

For quite a few years now the history of the Vietnam War has given us much to dissect and investigate as to American involvement in a highly controversial war. The longer one continues further into the future the more has been written and discovered as to the polemic mistakes as well as the government cover up as to what was really transpiring in Vietnam. What was indeed the true intelligence? In reality during the whole reporting of the Vietnam War we had young Turks seeking the truth and discovered that our government and the South Vietnamese government were in fact drowning in lies. They were perpetrating a hoax to the American public. This book, *The Making Of A Quagmire* is an edited version of the original publication. As explained in the forward many chapters were dropped because in retrospect they are irrelevant. What remains is truly viable analyses of what was happening prior to American combat troops were activated into the maelstrom.

Halberstam was a man who went directly into the field with the South Vietnamese troops and American advisors. He saw first-hand the military conundrum that was the ARVN not doing the job in the delta area. Along the way Halberstam made friends with Neil Sheehan who collaborated in developing the key stories about what truly was happening in Diem's South Vietnam. In fact both Halberstam and Sheehan made the establishment of the South Vietnamese government and the military and governmental personnel of the United States very uncomfortable. Halberstam and Sheehan were under covering lies and corruption and a war that they saw with their own eyes as a lost cause. Keep in mind they didn't want it to be a lost cause. But there it was, their eyes saw the truth and they were indeed shocked and dismayed at what they saw. What was compelling to this reader is what Halberstam brings forth in straight no nonsense writing that things transpiring in South Vietnam are not what they seem to be. His writing would eventually bring him a Pulitzer Prize. It is well deserved as he was not shy in relating the truth to his readers. In this book we see the seeds of mistrust from the fourth estate and in retrospect it is a healthy mistrust. Too bad the powers to be did not listen to the truth, maybe the ensuing debacle may never have happened. This book is an eye-opener because it shows to one and all that these young Turks were dead on in their analysis of what was transpiring before our combat troops were committed. In fact once reading this in the context that it was written in 1962-63, I sit here stunned. The young Turks had it right! Nobody in authority believed what they said. Over 58,000 KIA later and we found out that the whole framework was based on nothing but mistrust and lies!!

Halberstam was in South Vietnam from the early sixties through the fall of Diem's Government in 1963 and into 1964. He returned in 1967 and adds an epilogue. His story is told from the none partisan eye of a reporter. Vietnam is an enigma to the Western eye. We can't get into the minds of the Vietnamese no matter how hard we try. The country is majority peasant farmers with strong ties to their ancestry and, their common focus, is feeding their families and tilling the same land their ancestors did. Halberstam explains with great clarity the tumultuous early 60's in Saigon where ruled an almost hermit like reluctant mandarin president Diem. Diem, quiet, secluded and isolated was, in essence, a puppet of his narcissistic, sociopath brother Nhu and his wife Madame Nhu. Having given himself almost total power over the Government, Nhu, and his outspoken wife, ran roughshod over the populace in order to feed their voracious appetite for personal wealth and prestige. Also, despite receiving millions in U.S. aid, the Nhu's and Diem denounced and blamed America at any opportunity for their own failings knowing that America was too entrenched in Vietnam to cut aid and withdraw. Quagmire is the perfect word to describe the situation. Halberstam went out on patrol with

the ARVN mainly in the Mekong Delta. Realistic Vietnamese Generals reported to Halberstam that conservatively, the Southern Government maybe held 10 - 20% of the region and, the remainder were under Vietcong rule. The Saigon government wouldn't hear any of this and constantly reported to Washington that their policies were working and the South was winning the war. One infamous policy of Nhu's was the strategic hamlet program whereby, the farmers and their families were moved from their ancestral lands to fortified villages. This again proves the disconnect between the Saigon Government and its people. The program was supposedly for the betterment and safety of the people as opposed to the the real reasons, power of and control. Halberstam's writing style is very objective and he explains, with just the right amount of detail, the run up to the most defining events of the early 60's Vietnam that eventually toppled the Diem Government. Each of the chapters is broken into clearly marked sections enabling you to put the book down and pick it up again without having to read back a few lines. There is a forward by Daniel J. Singal that somewhat summarizes the book and adds insight, though not too much, from a hindsight perspective. This version has also been edited and condensed to appeal to the more contemporary reader. It seems Halberstam was somewhat prophetic in his writings insomuch as, we (The USA), were there in conflict not only with the communist North but also with the majority of the people we were fighting for. Ours was a cold war logic which mattered very little to the population we were supposedly protecting. This is fascinating stuff for me and feeds my thirst for Vietnam material post 1957 through 1965. Well worth the money and well worth the time.

A wonderful examination of pre-Vietnam historical events. Mr. Halberstam looks not only at the US government and its involvements, but also the French and the effects on Vietnam after WWII. All these events were noticed and acted upon, the results for Vietnamese independence should have been won decades sooner without the loss of so many lives, Vietnamese, French and US. (not to mention the untold billions of taxpayer money) A remarkable read. I highly recommend it.

It's a great book. Along with "A Bright Shining Lie, the John Paul Vann story," the true facts are revealed. Being a Vietnam veteran myself, I saw early on during my tour that the Vietnamese wanted to be governed by Vietnamese. No Chinese, Japanese, French, or Americans are invited to intervene. David Halberstam had the insight and foresight to deduce this. A quagmire indeed!

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