

ammunition supply, both in quantity and type, was also an issue, as was the problem of resupplying from the stockpile at Kham Duc.

The employment of artillery was Lt. Col. Daniel Schungel's idea. As I Corps' senior Special Forces officer, Schungel had a contentious relationship with the Marine Corps, which he blamed for the loss of the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei on 7 February 1968. According to the author, "He allegedly displayed his displeasure in a Machiavellian manner by requesting that two Marine howitzers be placed at Ngok Tavak to support a Special Forces reconnaissance force that was located there. This, so it was said, was to ensure that the Marines would not leave him in the lurch again if his camps were attacked" (pp. 19–20).

Australian Capt. Peter Ray, another Mike Force commander, had this to say:

The I Corps Mike Force companies were being sent off on what were at times quite unrealistic tasks given their level of training and their numbers. Furthermore, Lt Col Schungel [senior SF officer, I Corps] committed the Mike Force elements to operations, which were unsound, with an inadequate level of support, even down to insufficient radios for the basic nets. He was undoubtedly a most courageous man who believed in leading from the very front, but I believe he was tactically naïve [p. 17].

Maj. Dang Ngoc Mai's battalion, approximately three hundred fifty men strong, began its assault shortly after 0300 on 10 May. Sappers created a breach that flamethrower teams exploited. The attackers penetrated the eastern portion of the position, quickly routing the CIDG, which included many traitors who joined the attack. Major Mai was wounded within yards of Captain White's command post; in the chaos, the Marine artillerymen, fighting as infantry in isolated pockets and being supported by an AC-47D Spooky gunship, put up a resistance effective enough to prevent the enemy from overrunning the entire position. Come morning, the 40th Battalion

was ordered to withdraw and set an ambush for American forces sent to reinforce Kham Duc, while local Viet Cong secured Ngok Tavak. This enabled the defenders to retake captured positions and evacuate the wounded by helicopter. Captain White decided to evacuate, leaving the dead behind. Air strikes covered the withdrawal, which concluded with a helicopter lift to Kham Duc, also under attack and subsequently evacuated on 12 May.

In his analysis of the battle, Davies determines that the North Vietnamese attack was unnecessary because Ngok Tavak was already "isolated by a tactically silly plan by the allied force" (p. 121). He concludes,

In the end, a tactical advantage was handed to the attacking battalion via the sum of many errors committed by the allied force. That a number of the defenders managed to escape was through the steadfastness of a few Marines who broke the momentum of the assault, and the quick arrival of Spooky and other attack aircraft. Captain John White's disobedience and tactical adroitness in sidestepping a waiting ambush on the road to Kham Duc, coupled with the courage of some Marine helicopter pilots who flew the rescue flights, was their final saving grace [p. 123].

The second part of the book describes the tortuous process families and veterans underwent to locate and properly bury the remains of servicemen left behind at Ngok Tavak. Closure finally came on 7 October 2005, when American flags were presented to the families of eleven marines and one soldier at a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. Of particular relevance is retired North Vietnamese Maj. Gen. Phan Than Du's comment to American veterans visiting Ngok Tavak and Kham Duc in 1995: "There were many young American kids of the 196th Brigade who were very lucky at that time, but for us we were very sad because we lost the opportunity to destroy them" (p. 187).

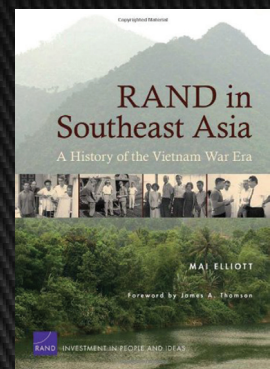
Well written and thoroughly researched, *The Battle at Ngok Tavak* will interest students of tactics, the Vietnam

War, and the impact of war on veterans and their families. It also serves as a cautionary tale, cutting through Special Forces mythology to illustrate the dangers of reliance on small numbers of elite soldiers, indigenous forces, supporting arms, and airpower when facing a determined enemy with large numbers of disciplined troops. One might also conclude that, while Captain White may not have wanted artillery, he did get what he needed—a platoon of marines.

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RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era



By Mai Elliott
RAND Corporation, 2010
Pp. xxii, 672. \$35

Review by Nathaniel L. Moir

RAND in Southeast Asia provides a firsthand perspective of this important research organization and its work as a

proponent of the Vietnam War. During the conflict, it was also embroiled in controversy due to research analyst Daniel Ellsberg's unauthorized release of the *Pentagon Papers*. As a balanced history of the institution's research on Vietnam, Mai Elliott's undertaking investigates and reveals a range of distinct and conflicting viewpoints, such as Ellsberg's, among RAND's analysts. As a result, *RAND in Southeast Asia* coalesces into a complex and downright fascinating account that is well worth the reader's time.

Divided into eleven chapters, the book describes how RAND was initially and substantially funded by the Air Force to improve its operations and maximize efficiency as a dynamic branch of the military. As the think-tank grew, it also contributed a wide range of research to numerous fields of study that included the social sciences, operations evaluation, and economics. Although RAND completed predominantly scientific analyses, an important examination conducted early in the war focused on the Viet Cong and National Liberation Front's organizational structure and operations.

This investigation, the "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale" research project, was initiated in 1964 and was originally led by RAND researchers John Donnell and Joseph Zasloff. As an important, early, and long-held research effort for RAND, the undertaking also usefully acts as a central narrative in Elliott's work.

As RAND's largest research study on the growing war in Vietnam, this specific project consisted of interviews with Viet Cong and, to a lesser extent, North Vietnamese soldiers who were captured or defected to the South Vietnamese government. From the start, Donnell's and Zasloff's research was received with varying degrees of ambivalence by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their respective services. Although the study succeeded in supplying cultural intelligence regarding the enemy, there were criticisms within the Department of Defense that "the report was not actionable, and did not provide guidance on ways to hurt the Viet Cong" (p. 89).

Although the project was intelligence-driven, it was not tactical intel-

ligence *per se*, or intelligence to find, fix, and destroy the enemy. Rather, the project's goal was to furnish greater understanding of the political rationale for why the Viet Cong were successfully thwarting both the South Vietnamese government and early American advisory efforts in a manner similar to how the Viet Minh overcame the French in the 1950s. Unfortunately, despite calls for change by individuals such as Bernard Fall, the Republic of Vietnam's political plight and inability to implement political reform were superseded by military efforts, especially during the MACV commanding tenures of General Harkins (1962–1964) and General Westmoreland (1964–1968).

In late 1964, Leon Goure took the "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale" project in a different direction that was more in line with what the Air Force sought. In this phase of the study, RAND focused on psychological effects of weapons and military operations, particularly those systems used by the Air Force to support ground troops, and how these assets affected Viet Cong motivation. No doubt, the appearance of an AC-47 gunship on the horizon or the oncoming rumble of an imminent B-52 Stratofortress Arc Light mission must have been paralyzing for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces. The Air Force, therefore, sought to more accurately understand how such air operations could contribute to the overall war effort for purely military-related outcomes. As time and hindsight would later reveal, these findings would prove irrelevant politically except for the harm done to the United States' position as the air war became increasingly controversial at home and abroad.

Unfortunately, the study, as led by Goure, manipulated its findings by cherry-picking Viet Cong responses. Such Viet Cong perspectives, critics alleged, were primarily single sources that validated the Air Force's vision and rationale for air operations. Critics maintained that not only was the Air Force not provided with empirically accurate data by RAND but, perhaps more troubling, that the Air Force did not diligently seek the full story of its air operations' impact

upon the Vietnamese people and their country. Understandably, this particular project and the motivations behind it became controversial within RAND itself.

Several RAND studies provided the Air Force with evidence—through different research efforts not related to Goure's project—that its air operations were counterproductive and led to civilian casualties and other unwarranted destruction through poor targeting and excessive bombing. Elliott's evidence is clear that these RAND analysts were ignored because their work did not match what military and civilian leaders expected or wanted to hear. The problem of successive administrations ignoring RAND analysts' efforts, particularly Daniel Ellsberg's and Anthony Russo's, would later have severe implications for both RAND and, indirectly, the Nixon administration.

Before Elliott's chapter on the *Pentagon Papers*, pacification and RAND's contribution to General Abrams' "one war" effort is addressed. Due to CORDS director Robert Komer's close and direct affiliation with RAND, the organization began to focus on fewer topics and to emphasize political considerations versus technical studies for the military. In short, pacification began to gain in prominence as a research focus. Notable efforts on this subject included projects by individuals such as David Elliott and joint studies by Bing West and Charlie Benoit.

Although many RAND analysts had previous military experience—including Daniel Ellsberg, a former Marine officer—the author recounts how controversy and personal and moral conflicts often complicated research for RAND staff. In a manner similar to more recent controversies surrounding the employment of social scientists in Iraq and Afghanistan through the Human Terrain Team effort, this contentious issue greatly affected RAND and it would become painfully clear with the publication of the *Pentagon Papers*.

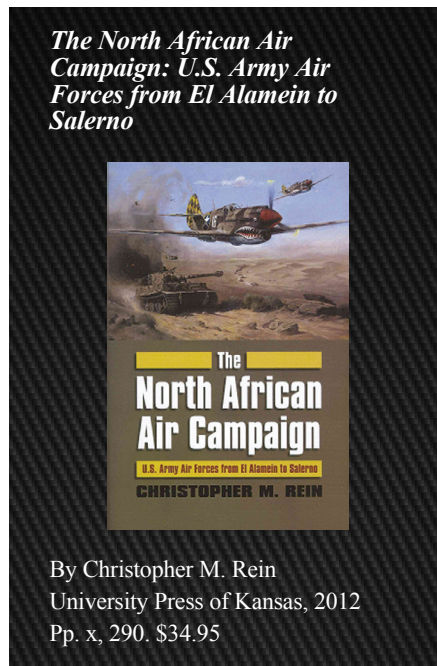
This major event is the focus of a pivotal chapter of the book. Initially, a great number of researchers, among them

Anthony Russo and Daniel Ellsberg, were supportive of American efforts in Vietnam. The ground truth they gained while in Vietnam, however, along with consistent dismissal of research that conflicted with the U.S. military's point of view, contributed especially to Ellsberg's controversial decision to leak thousands of classified documents.

Elliott pulls no punches on this subject and her candor throughout the book is an important reason why *RAND in Southeast Asia* is a valuable work for students of the war. Another strength of the volume is the inclusion of RAND researchers' personal stories and how they came to work for RAND in Vietnam. As a staff member and wife to RAND analyst David Elliott, the author writes well and with the authority of firsthand experience. Numerous anecdotes, both humorous and tragic, are woven into her historical account in a manner that adds depth to RAND's involvement in the war and its research on the conflict.

Although *RAND in Southeast Asia* weighs over five pounds and is a lengthy 626 pages, it is a highly rewarding investment. Each chapter is detailed and complex but also interesting and stylistically easy to follow. As a result, Mai Elliott's work deserves the attention of students and scholars alike and should be regarded as the definitive history of this intriguing organization during the Vietnam War.

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Review by Mark J. Reardon

Lt. Col. Christopher M. Rein, a member of the Air Force Academy faculty, has produced a crisply written and long overdue reappraisal of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) during the North African Campaign in World War II. The author explains his choice of that particular offensive by stating that it offers a logical starting point for examining alternative means of employing airpower in future conflicts. Rather than examine the late World War II, Gulf war, or IRAQI FREEDOM scenarios, all of which featured friendly air forces possessing overwhelming numerical, logistical, and technological superiority, Rein suggests that the current Air Force leadership would be better served by a historical case study involving technological parity, major logistical shortfalls, limited aircraft availability, and competing theater requirements.

According to the author, the North African Campaign of 1942–1943 offers a useful example of how the USAAF prevailed over a peer competitor during uncertain times. Indeed, the overall strategic situation at the onset of the offensive appeared suitably bleak as British control of the Middle East seemed in doubt after German and Italian ground forces succeeded in advancing within striking distance of Cairo in June 1942. However, in less than a year enemy forces threatening the Suez Canal had

been forced to retreat into Tunisia, where more than 250,000 Italian and German troops entered captivity in May 1943. Over the period separating nadir and triumph, the Axis powers lost thousands of tanks and artillery pieces, hundreds of ships, and thousands of aircraft in a vain effort to maintain their foothold in Africa. Given that the USAAF played a major part in bringing about that change in strategic fortune, Rein contends that the North African Campaign of 1942–1943 provides current Air Force leaders with a far more realistic future operational blueprint than more recent conflicts.

The author sets the foundation for his thesis by examining post-World War II Navy and Army historical accounts portraying American airmen as universally eschewing close air support in favor of strategic bombing. By demonstrating that the USAAF possessed the doctrine, aircraft, and pilots capable of achieving success in its opening campaign against Adolf Hitler's vaunted *Luftwaffe*, Rein offers an effective counter to the notion that the U.S. Army Air Forces neglected its responsibility to support ground forces during the interwar years. At the same time, the author points out that several prominent USAAF leaders remained fixated on the panacea of strategic bombardment, a viewpoint that threatened to undermine air-ground relations following the enemy defeat in Tunisia.

In a chapter entitled "Learning with the British," Rein studies how the Royal Air Force influenced the USAAF in the opening phase of the American involvement in the Middle East. Early American observers had noted that the British lacked heavy bombers in the Mediterranean theater because the Royal Air Force (RAF) refused to divert them from the ongoing nocturnal aerial offensive against Germany. As a result, a provisional detachment of American B-24 four-engine heavy bombers originally tabbed for duty in China found itself diverted to Palestine in early 1942. It was followed by a mixed bombardment group consisting of both B-24s and B-17s, along with a medium bomber group equipped with twin-engine B-25 Mitchells and a fighter group with Curtiss P-40 Warhawks, all