

0. LESSONS NOT LEARNED - Story Preface

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Saigon Blasts Kill Three, Injure 35

LONDON, January 9. Earlier today the Vietnam (A.A.P.) — Two 1000 plus-pound, time bombs set by Viet-Com in the heart of Saigon, killed three and injured 35 people. The blasts were the biggest in Saigon since the Viet-Com rebellion in 1950. They occurred in two cases: one outside the Opera House and the other outside the Green Hall. They wrecked a dozen parked cars, shattered windows and stunned many people in the streets.

This article—from the *Sydney Morning Herald*—describes a time-bomb blast which occurred in Saigon on the 9th of January, 1952. Image and article online via Flickr; License: [CC BY-NC 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/)

While the French were trying to get out of Vietnam for good, Americans were serving as their advisors.

There weren't many at first—perhaps a few hundred. But those advisors, even in the early days of the Kennedy Administration, were not permitted to defend themselves when they were fired-upon. And, as discussed in Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American*, they conducted covert operations even in the 1950s.

Greene spent some time in Vietnam. Scholars think his character "Thomas Fowler," a crusty reporter for the *London Times*, is likely based on the author himself.

There is little doubt whom Greene used as a model when he invented the American "Alden Pyle." It was Edward Lansdale, about whom Greene frequently made harsh comments. (Lansdale, it is said, returned those "compliments.")

The Quiet American begins as French involvement in Vietnam is ending. Fowler, who cares more about opium than he does the political climate, does not want to get involved. Pyle, a young American with good intentions, does his best to stir things up.

Pyle is a nominal pharmaceuticals distributor, but that's just his cover. His real job, as a CIA operative, is to help create an indigenous South Vietnamese "Third Force" which can overthrow the growing power of the Communist Viet Minh. Pyle (like Lansdale) helps the real-life General Trinh Minh Thê' emerge as an alternative Vietnamese leader.

After time bombs caused violent deaths in a Saigon market on the 9th of January, 1952, the General claimed responsibility. (The story wasn't reported that way in the American press, however. The *New York Times'* headline blamed the communists: "Reds' Time Bombs Rip Saigon Center.") Three years later, in 1955, Thê' also died violently.

America, at least initially, then supported Ngo Dinh Diem—the man the U.S. wanted to replace the French-backed Vietnamese emperor, Bao Dai. Diem, who became the leader of South Vietnam (in 1955) but fell out of favor with the Kennedy Administration, was assassinated in 1963.

Using the British experience in Burma as his model, Greene's book (first published in 1955) included uncanny predictions about American involvement in Vietnam. Those observations, spoken by the character of Thomas Fowler, created a furor at the time and since.

It was likely, mused Fowler, that the United States (akin to the United Kingdom) would grow tired of its involvement. If that happened, the Americans (like the Brits) would leave the indigenous people to fight on their own.

And ... were that to happen ... where would it lead, according to Fowler? To slaughter of the indigenous people by their enemy.

To put those concerns into numbers, what did the "First Indochina War" (France in Vietnam) cost, in terms of estimated human lives?

- French forces: 75,581 dead; 64,127 wounded; 40,000 captured
- Communist Viet Minh, Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak forces: 300,000+ dead; 500,000+ wounded; 100,000+ captured
- Civilians: Over 150,000 civilians killed

Yet ... the lessons were not learned.

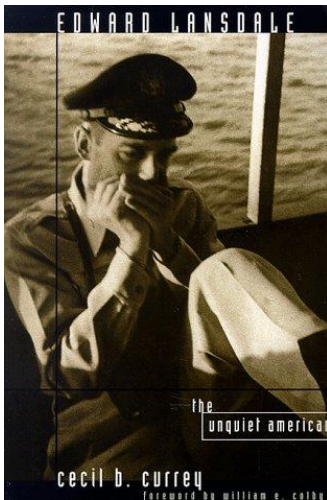
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Media Stream



Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American - by Cecil B. Currey

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

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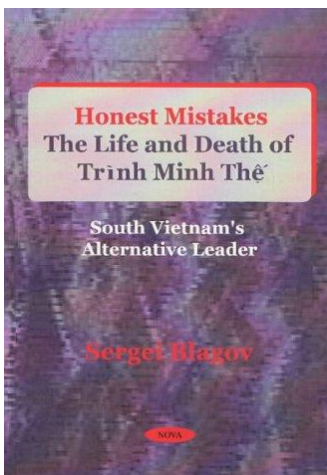


Edward Lansdale

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Honest Mistakes: The Life and Death of Trinh Minh The'

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Ngo Dinh Diem with President Eisenhower

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Bao Dai

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