

0. THE VERDICT OF HISTORY - Story Preface

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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, in Washington, D.C., is nearly 500 feet long. It takes-up that much space because of all the names on the wall. The names—58,195 of them—reflect those Americans “declared dead” or “missing in action” who served their country during the Vietnam War. Photo by Eric Lamar.

Senator J. William Fulbright, the long-standing Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, ultimately held hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident. In his 1989 book, *The Price of Empire*, he accuses the Johnson Administration of misrepresenting actual events.

*Only when we began those later hearings on the Tonkin Gulf did it really begin to dawn on me that we had been deceived. In the beginning--before Vietnam, that is--it never occurred to me that presidents and their secretaries of state and defense would deceive a Senate committee.*

Senator Fulbright draws a sobering conclusion from the hearings he conducted:

*I thought you could trust them to tell you the truth, even if they did not tell you everything. But I was naive, and the misrepresentation of the Tonkin Gulf affair was very effective in deceiving the Foreign Relations Committee and the country, and me, because we didn't believe it possible that we could be so completely misled.*

Robert McNamara never really apologized for misleading and/or deceiving the American people. We can gain an insight into his thinking with his own words:

*I learned early on never answer the question that is asked of you. Answer the question that you wish had been asked of you. And quite frankly, I follow that rule. It's a very good rule. (See *The Fog of War: Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, by James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang, at page 191.)*

Many more people were misled—not to mention all those who were killed or injured—before the war was finally over. One of those who died left behind these words:

*If you are able, save for them a place inside of you and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go.*

*Be not ashamed to say you loved them, though you may or may not have always. Take what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own.*

*And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind. (Major Michael Davis O'Donnell; 1 January 1970; Dak To, Vietnam; Listed as KIA—Killed in Action—February 7, 1978.)*

Nine-year-old Kim Phuc, whose village was bombed in 1972 by a South Vietnamese pilot with bad information, pierced the hearts of people around the world when they saw her terror-filled face and her napalm-burned body. (She is still alive today and is living in Canada.)

Many other “bright shining lies” were revealed during, and after, the Viet Nam war. In the wake of those lies, President Richard Nixon resigned and America's soul was shaken to the core.

But looking back on those turbulent times, and the firestorm the Pentagon Papers generated, one needs to recall another fact. Thirteen days after the story made the papers, North Vietnam put peace discussions with

Kissinger on hold.

Some historians believe the release of the Pentagon Papers could not have come at a worse time. The verdict of history, thus, may also be that war in Vietnam continued another 18 months because of it.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-VERDICT-OF-HISTORY-Pentagon-Papers>

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-VERDICT-OF-HISTORY-Pentagon-Papers>