

“Sometimes it takes a near-death
experience to change bad
behavior.”

by Jeffrey Race

Presented at the Marine Corps University

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LESSONS OF VIETNAM -- FOR COIN -- FOR AMERICA -- FOR YOU

What we'll do:

- * Move from the specific to the general
- * Move from the historic past to your future in the military
- * This Powerpoint file is on my website so you don't have to copy

What I hope to explain:

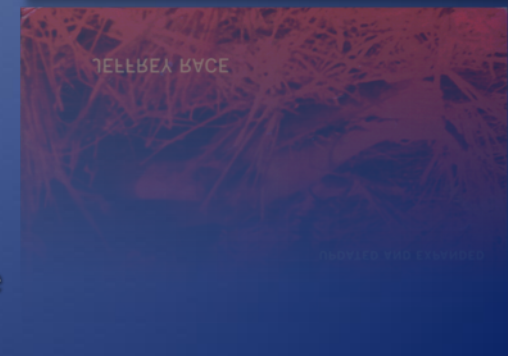
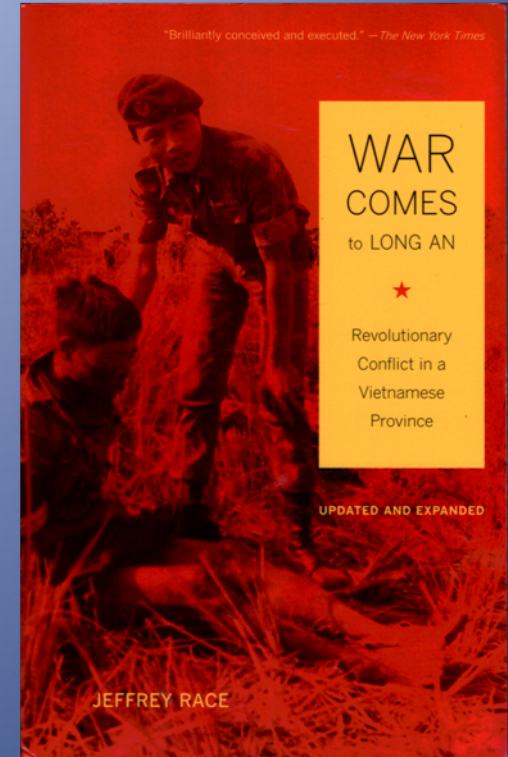
- * Why I wrote War Comes to Long An
- * Some important technical discoveries
- * Larger policy and professional issues
- * Issues for your career development

The payload:

- * Despite our military's learning COIN, grave losses continue
- * These losses self-inflicted
- * They result from failure to apply basic knowledge of human behavior

In ninety minutes you should

- * Understand why things keep going off the rails
- * Understand how to deal with this while maintaining your equanimity
- * Know the resources to understand why the world is sometimes so bizarre



SOME TECHNICAL MILITARY ISSUES

Tolstoy poses the problem "Napoleon commanded an army to be raised"

Same question as "Why did the United States lose the Vietnam War?"

Power Tools to Analyse Civil Conflict

Group 1: Concept of Security [*pg 146*]

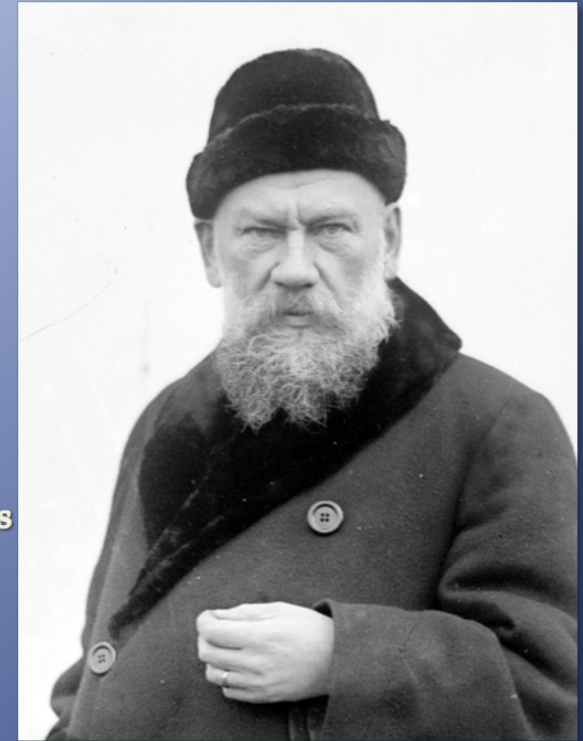
- * Conventional (tactical): concentrate forces to prevent physical movement
- * Civil conflict (strategic): sympathetic environment
- * Mis-applying security concept produces crisis of demand for military forces
- * With crude use of violence, it produces *death spiral*
- * Critical difference between conventional and unconventional warfare

Group 2: Strategy

- * Reinforcement strategy: externally augment existing forces
- * Preemptive strategy: motivate to shift the balance of social forces

Group 3: Concept of Force (it can't be created by coercion)

- * What is a force?
- * Balance of forces
- * Motivating factors: contingent incentives and a social strategy
- * Emergent structure
- * Cross-over point and death spiral



IF ONLY THE TSAR KNEW!

Golly, this counterinsurgency stuff is really simple!

- * So clear that I thought "Vietnam" could never recur
- * Neither did the US Army
- * Answer is trivial -- Motivation!

Then a surprising thing happened

- * We keep having these disastrous foreign interventions
- * Look back to figure out why

Turns out the Tsar knows but has other priorities

- * No quantity of expert studies prevents disaster
- * *NOT* just a problem of formation of strategy or policy
- * Currently experiencing comparable disaster in economy
- * A property of humans functioning in big organizations
- * Nothing wrong with the individuals; they're just like us

NOT "inexplicable" -- it's the pathology of decision-making

- * "Has Jeff Race ever been to Long An" -- Komer
- * There is *ALWAYS* a logic
- * Always because decisionmakers try to gain benefit or avoid inconvenience

Resources: See "Inside Job"; read McMaster, McNamara, Bundy



POWER TOOLS: HOW NOT TO BE A BLUNDERER

A positivistic understanding of the world

- Everything is part of a cause-effect-cause-effect chain
- Model each piece of reality as a 'black box' with I/O links
- All values have metrics and expected ranges
- Values revert toward the mean.

Most human behavior is formed non-rationally

- Cognitive dissonance
- Bureaucratic competition
- Personal likes/dislikes
- Powerful desire for approval

How to deal with “designed to fail”

- Understand yourself to understand others
- Understand the rational model
- "Human terrain analysis" of the friendlies (the irrational model)
- Take small hits to win big victories
- Look for over-determined situations (some problems/no solution)
- Plan for self-limiting processes
- Acceptance with equanimity

Always ask the key question [why would X cooperate with me?]



TIPS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR INSIGHT

Permanent War means plenty of Vietnam-like problems

Personal lessons from writing *War Comes to Long An*

- * Read the Introduction
- * Empathy not animus
- * Understand others' motivations
- * Remain at an emotional distance (important in war!)
- * Equanimity



Practical lessons from writing *War Comes to Long An*

- * The importance of language competence
- * Get the evidence!
- * Look for the bigger picture
- * Openness to experience vs living in the bubble
- * Everything is comprehensible; understand from the other's viewpoint

Wrapping up

- * You've failed if you must use violence
- * Difficult for us in this age since military are supposed to be experts in use of violence
- * Be more than that: experts in when not to use violence

ANNOTATED RESOURCES

How the world "works"

Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966

The evolution of society with changes in technology since primitive times; why things are as they are everywhere in the world especially in the countries where the U.S. military tends to be sent. Detailed, profound and specialized but spend an hour on it to get the main points.

How organizations "work"

Charles Lindblom "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review*, (Spring 1959), Volume 19, pages 74-88.

Why an organizational decision may be "good" while being "good for nothing." Distinguishes "Rational-comprehensive" vs "Successive Limited Approximations" decision methods. See page 236 of *War Comes to Long An* for a life-and-death example.

Why hardly anything succeeds

Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing That Federal Programs Work at All*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984

Barbara W. Tuchman, *The March of Folly*, New York: Random House, 1984

However as one reviewer noted, it was not a "march of folly" but a "march of fools." How not to be a fool? Read what's on this page.

Joseph T. Hallinan, "The Young and the Perceptive," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2011, downloadable at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/opinion/06hallinan.html>

"Look at the world with new unblinking eyes"

Vietnam: engineered to fail

Bob Woodward and Gordon M. Goldstein, "The Anguish of Decision," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2009, downloadable at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/10/17/ST2009101701497.html?sid=ST2009101701497>

Interviews with McNamara and Bundy; all the RAND studies in the world would have done no good: "Bundy also described how Johnson's short-term political concerns trumped grand strategy in Vietnam."

ANNOTATED RESOURCES (CONT.)

H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

The influence of institutional and personal rivalries.

Thomas L. Ahern, Jr, *The Way We Do Things: Black Entry Operations into North Vietnam, CIA and the Generals: Covert Support to Military Government in South Vietnam*, and *CIA and Rural Pacification in Vietnam*, all three downloadable at <http://today.ttu.edu/2009/03/cia-releases-documents-of-vietnam-war-era-intelligence/>.

Making it up as you go along the way to war.

Jeffrey Race, "War Comes to Long An: Back Story to the Writing of a Military Classic" downloadable at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/340-race.pdf>

Have a laugh: "DOD will not pay to be told such a thing"

Michael Montesano, "War Comes to Long An, Its Origins and Legacies: An Interview with Jeffrey Race," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Volume 6 Number 1 (March 2011) downloadable at <http://www.jeffreyrace.com>

Secrets of how to write a book like *War Comes to Long An*

Corruption

Jeffrey Race, "Restructuring, Renorming, Rethinking," downloadable at <http://www.nacc.go.th/images/journal/jeffrey.pdf>.

Why Americans, off-scale by world standards, misunderstand the simplest and most important fact about corruption.

The fix: What Americans would do should they wish to prevent more catastrophes

Jeffrey Race, "The Uses of History or, How Do We Escape Sturgeon's Law?" downloadable at <http://www.camblab.com/misc/ttu09.pdf>

This file appears at

<http://www.jeffreyrace.com>

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