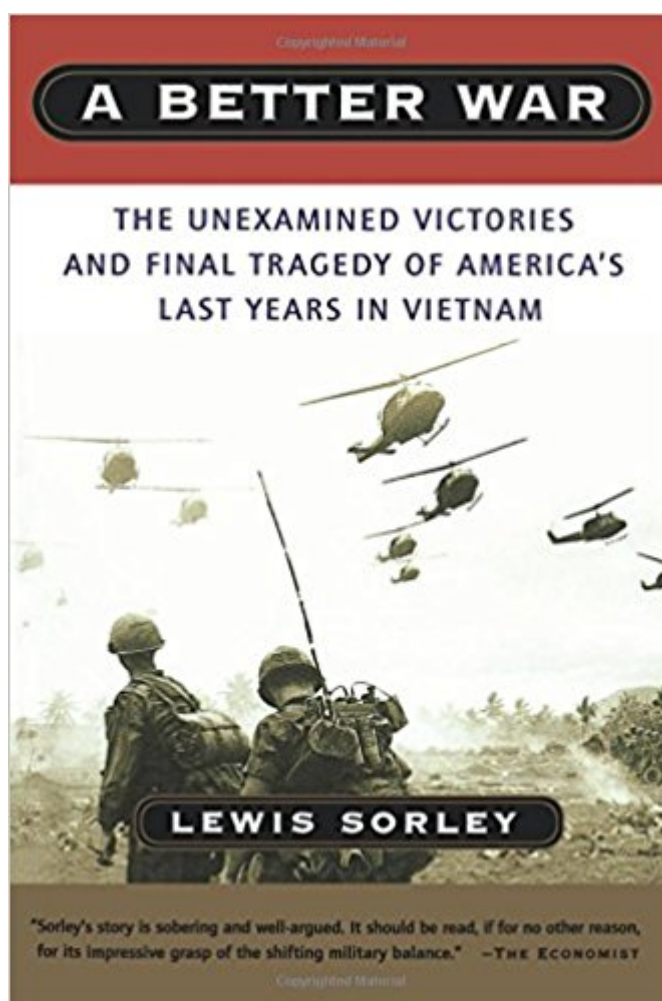


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A Better War: The Unexamined Victories And Final Tragedy Of America's Last Years In Vietnam



Synopsis

Neglected by scholars and journalists alike, the years of conflict in Vietnam from 1968 to 1975 offer surprises not only about how the war was fought, but about what was achieved. Drawing on authoritative materials not previously available, including thousands of hours of tape-recorded allied councils of war, award-winning military historian Lewis Sorley has given us what has long been needed—an insightful, factual, and superbly documented history of these important years. Among his findings is that the war was being won on the ground even as it was being lost at the peace table and in the U.S. Congress. The story is a great human drama of purposeful and principled service in the face of an agonizing succession of lost opportunities, told with uncommon understanding and compassion. Sorley documents the dramatic differences in conception, conduct, and—at least for a time—results between the early and the later war. Meticulously researched and movingly told, *A Better War* is sure to stimulate controversy as it sheds brilliant new light on the war in Vietnam.

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Customer Reviews

Product Description Neglected by scholars and journalists alike, the years of conflict in Vietnam from 1968 to 1975 offer surprises not only about how the war was fought, but about what was achieved. Drawing from thousands of hours of previously unavailable (and still classified) tape-recorded meetings between the highest levels of the American military command in Vietnam, *A Better War* is an insightful, factual, and superbly documented history of these final years. Through his exclusive access to authoritative materials, award-winning historian Lewis Sorley highlights the

dramatic differences in conception, conduct, and--at least for a time--results between the early and later years of the war. Among his most important findings is that while the war was being lost at the peace table and in the U.S. Congress, the soldiers were winning on the ground. Meticulously researched and movingly told, *A Better War* sheds new light on the Vietnam War. Exclusive Essay: "New Vietnam War History" by Lewis Sorley, Author of *A Better War*

For a long time most people thought the long years of American involvement in the Vietnam War were just more of the same--with a bad ending. Now we know that during the latter years, when General Creighton Abrams commanded U.S. forces, almost everything changed, and for the better. Abrams understood the nature of the war and devised a more availing approach to the conduct of it. Building up South Vietnam's own armed forces got high priority, whereas before they had been neglected and allowed to go into combat outgunned by the enemy. The covert infrastructure which through terror and coercion kept South Vietnam's rural population under domination was painstakingly rooted out, not ignored as earlier. And combat operations were greatly improved, concentrating on large numbers of patrols and ambushes designed to provide security for the people rather than cumbersome large-unit sweeps through the deep jungle. Some commentators have called the description of these changes "revisionist" history, but actually it is new history. Virtually all the better-known earlier books about the war concentrated heavily on the early years, leaving the later period grossly neglected. New insight came importantly from a collection of hundreds of tape recordings of briefings and staff meetings in General Abrams's headquarters during the four years he commanded in Vietnam. They are filled with human drama, professional debate, successes and frustrations, and ultimately a hard-won triumph, told in the voices of Abrams and his senior associates; such visiting officials as the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and a succession of often brilliant briefing officers. Later, of course, what they had won was thrown away by the United States Congress, but the story of their better war is still a dramatic testament to courage, integrity, devotion, and professional competence.--Lewis Sorley

Using a host of oral interviews, 455 tape recordings made in Vietnam during the years 1968-1972 and numerous other sources, military historian Sorley has produced a first-rate challenge to the conventional wisdom about American military performance in Vietnam. Essentially, this is a close examination of the years during which General Creighton Abrams was in command, having succeeded William Westmoreland. Sorley contends that Abrams completely transformed the war effort and in the process won the war on the battlefield. The North Vietnamese 1968 Tet offensive was bloodily repulsed, he explains, as was a similar offensive in 1969. Together, the 1970 American

incursion into Cambodia and a 1971 Laotian operation succeeded in reducing enemy combat effectiveness. Renewed American bombing of the North and Abrams's use of air power to assist ground operations further reduced Hanoi's ability to wage war. Sorley argues that the combination of anti-war protests in America and a complete misunderstanding of the actual combat situation by the diplomats negotiating the 1973 Paris accords wasted American military victories. In spite of drug use and other problems, Sorley maintains, the army in Vietnam performed capably and efficiently, but in vain, for South Vietnam was sold out by the 1973 cease-fire, America's pullout and the failure of Congress to provide further military assistance to the South. Sure to provoke both passionate and reasoned objection, Sorley's book is as important a reexamination of the operational course of the war as Robert McNamara's *In Retrospect* is of the conflict's moral and political history. Maps and photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very well-researched and written story of the war from mid-1968 to the end. Lesson: do not let politicians run wars. They will screw it up. In this case, both Westmoreland and Abrams wanted to invade Laos and Cambodia to shut down the Ho Chi Minh trail, but the politicians would not let them until it was too late (1970 and 1971). By then, the politicians had de-funded the war and the troop drawdowns were fully underway. Even after giving them permission to go into Laos and Cambodia, the politicians publicly announced limits on the campaigns! Nothing like telling your enemy exactly what you are going to do! Even though I have read much about the war, I did not have a good understanding of the difference in how the war was run between Westmoreland and Abrams. The book makes this clear and makes a good case that Abrams should have been running the war two years earlier.

I would say it is a "must read" for any Vietnam veteran, as it describes in well documented detail how the US forces in Vietnam were essentially blocked from victory in a winnable conflict by successive inept leadership, largely, but not entirely, at the national level. It clears up many of the questions that arose in my mind in the years following the conflict, as it should for any other downtrodden and unappreciated veteran of the Vietnam War. Robert E. Blake LTC, USA (ret)

An important and instructive account of the Vietnam War. Even 40 years after the fact the Vietnam War is viewed with rose colored glasses. A whole class of American intellectuals want to believe that America lost that war. Simplisms abound. Sorley sets the record straight. We withdrew and

allowed what happened to unfold. The US military was never as incompetent as America wants to believe. The waste was unconscionable. And countless tens of thousands suffered for an intellectual vanity.

As a Vietnam combat veteran I arrived under General Abrams in MACV it was my privilege to be part of such noble and courageous purpose to bring freedom and democracy to South Vietnam. One thing I learned from this book is how thoroughly devastating the air campaign that was Linebacker I and II was to the enemy. We had won the battle but lost the war not because of the brave American and South Vietnam soldiers but self-serving modifications of President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger.

A realistic point-of-view of how the Vietnam war was managed. With the press writing that the war was lost due to the 68 Tet offensive (which most military specialists say is absolutely not true) this book agrees with many other writings that the war was taken out of professional military and second-guessed by political civilians to become the disaster that resulted. History seems to be repeating itself in Iraq and Afghanistan, very sad.

Really tells the truth of the Vietnam conflict and how Jerry Ford let thousands die not wanting to put any decisions on his shoulders. If you were there this is a must, not like all the BS books and movies.

Lewis Sorley is one of the great 20th century historians. A Vietnam War must read book.

The Seventies of the Vietnam War are not likely to be told, as the failure became more and more obvious. Still Abrams managed to adapt the military need to the political situation which had changed. A long-awaited insight in Abrams' achievements

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