

“What if a lot of what you think you know about the ‘Viet Nam War’ turns out to be wrong?”

Vietnam Veterans in particular do not necessarily know the facts. They can't defend themselves against the more emotive accusations coming at them from misinformed former protesters, left-wing media & academics and uncaring public perceptions. This may well explain the higher-than-average rate of Viet Vet suicides, which statistic seems to be replicating itself among Vets of more recent deployments.

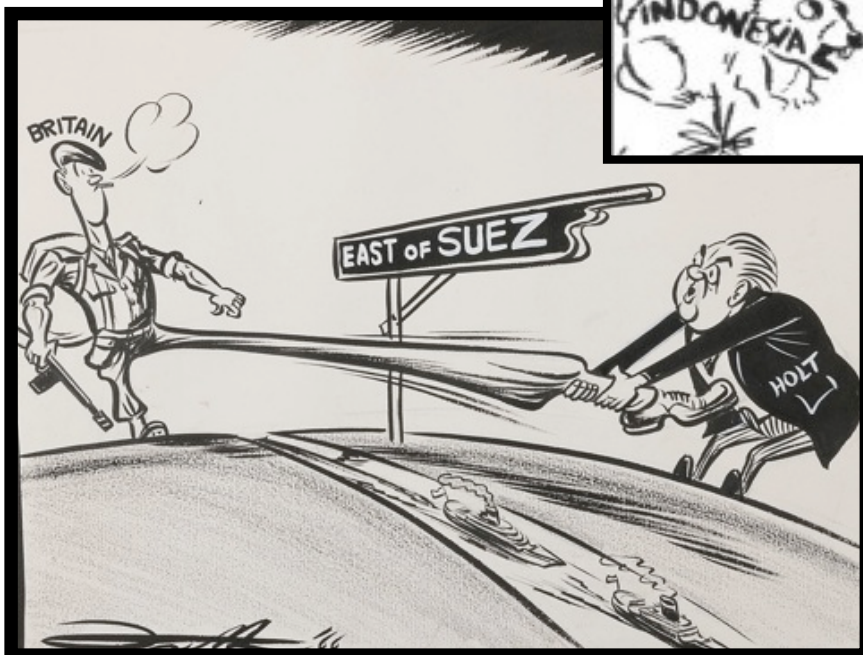
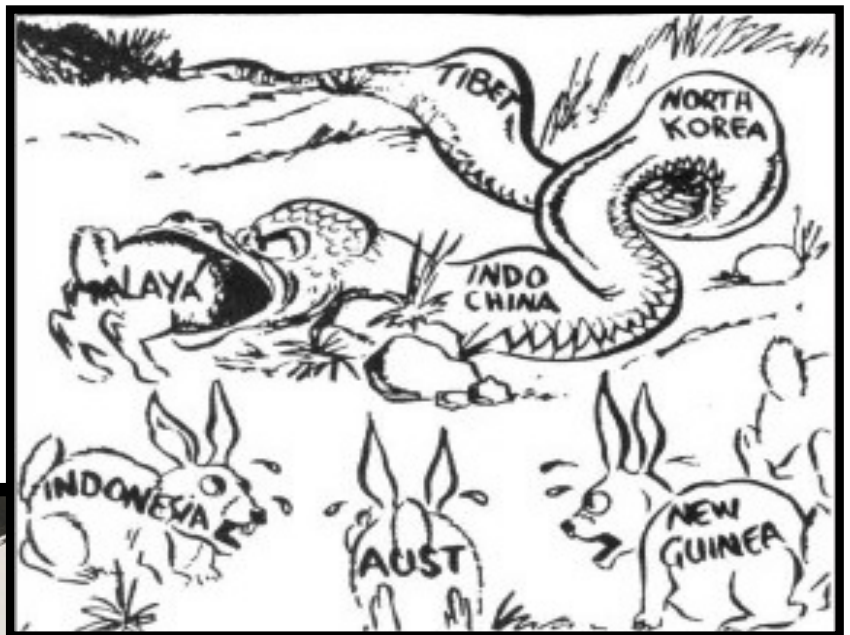
Central to this presentation is the necessity to place the Viet Nam War in context and not to try to explain it in isolation. I'll only mention five key contexts:

THE COLD WAR – raging around the world, with armoured divisions facing each other across the Rhine, McCarthyism, brinkmanship, tension everywhere – eg, Cuba.

COLONIAL INDEPENDENCE – since WW2, former colonies gaining independence, the majority becoming Socialist or having strong Socialist oppositions already in place.

THE DOMINO THEORY – somewhat arising from colonial independence – the tendency of stronger neighbours to subsume weaker neighbours in sequence. In S E Asia, Red China banished the Nationalists to Formosa (Taiwan), absorbed Tibet, assisted North Korea invade South Korea, sent terrorists into Malaya, supported Indonesia in Borneo and supported Ho Chi Minh to defeat the French...

WITHDRAWAL OF UK EAST OF SUEZ – Macmillan's 'Winds of Change' speech created a power vacuum in S E Asia, being filled by both USA and Red China.



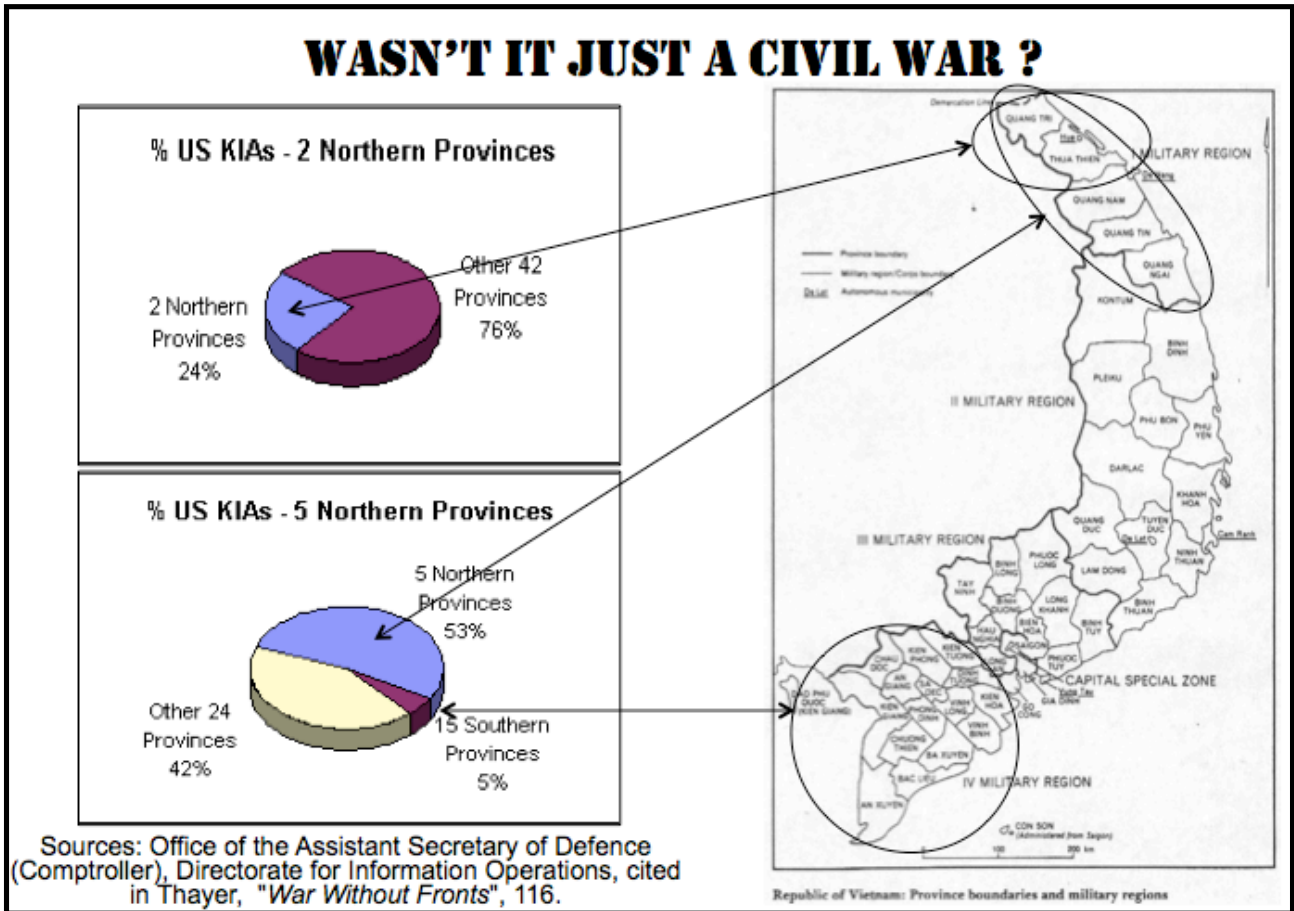
SUKARNO RATTLING THE SABRE – Indonesia with 100,000 Infantry troops threatening its neighbours, particularly Australia (2500 Infantry) & Dutch New Guinea.

This is why we introduced our National Service scheme (not for Viet Nam).

And so – let’s look at Australia’s TRUE involvement in Viet Nam by demolishing the common criticisms of the average protester:

“We shouldn’t be there – it’s a civil war...”

There were 44 provinces in South Viet Nam (SVN). If it was a civil war, you’d expect violence to be evenly distributed across the whole country. In fact, after the war the statistics showed that the two provinces at the north, closest to NVN, accounted for 24% of the American War dead. The five provinces closest to NVN accounted for 53% of the American War dead while the 15 provinces furthest away accounted for 5%. Does this really look like a ‘civil war’?



“We have no right to be fighting in Viet Nam...”

Australia (and NZ) had a Pact with the USA since 1951 – ANZUS – which specifically concerned security in the Pacific.

Australia was also a signatory to SEATO in 1954 – the time of the Geneva Accords - which included a mutual defence provision guided by the aim of the Pact “to prevent Communism from gaining ground in S E Asia”.

Being already under threat from Socialist Indonesia and using the principle of ‘the friend of my enemy is my enemy’, any other Socialist regime was a potential enemy.

The principle of ‘forward defence’ suggested that conflict as far away from ‘home’ was better than waiting for conflict on home soil. We had advanced to meet the Japanese in New Guinea in WW2 rather than fight in the suburbs of Townsville – same principle.

Okay – so we’ve committed to fighting in Viet Nam.

“Well, we’re just token support – the USA cotton-wool-ed us...”

As said previously, SVN had 44 Provinces. Of these, 42 were at least nominally under SVN control. One exception was the southern-most province in the Mekong Delta, owned by the NVA to secure rice for their supply line. The other one was Phuoc Tuy, which was strategically vital to cut supplies to Saigon by cutting off Vung Tau port.

When Australia doubled their contribution to the war from 1 Bn plus support to two Bns plus support, we asked for a province of our own. We were given the strategically vital and enemy controlled Phuoc Tuy. Does that sound like a cotton wool bundle?

“Yeah, but even after 6 years of occupation, the VC were still there...”

Our operational aim was to end the NVA control of the province – not to eliminate the VC infrastructure. We then became responsible for the ‘bush’. The VC were in the towns and villages, and these were the responsibility of the Army of the Republic of (South) Viet Nam (ARVN). The ANZACs operated only outside the towns and villages except when assisting ARVN cordon-and-search operations.

This was a failing in the ANZAC strategy of Counter Revolutionary Warfare and has been the evident failure point in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since.

“If sent to fight the NVA, why so few battles with them in the 6 years...”

That’s because the first battle was the decisive battle. When the ANZACs arrived, the NVA determined to destroy their base before it could be developed into formidable defensive position. A mere three months after the base was first declared in mid-May 1966, the NVA gathered some 2500 soldiers to eliminate it in mid-August 1966.

The result of this planned NVA attack was the Battle of Long Tan where an Infantry Company of 108 ANZACs met the advancing enemy in an open rubber plantation. The ensuing battle lasted 3.5 hours. The ANZACs were well supported by ANZAC and US artillery, an RAAF ammo resupply, a USAF airstrike and of course, sheer Infantry skill and guts. APCs rushing to the battlefield with more Infantry aboard also encountered enemy forces a kilometer away and again half a kilometer away but arrived at dusk as the main enemy formations had begun to disengage.

The outcome was that virtually a full NVA Regiment (275 Regt) had been destroyed and the ANZAC base remained intact. The NVA never again operated at will in Phuoc Tuy province. ANZAC forces only ever again fought against the NVA when we met them at the extreme edges of the province (Courtenay Plantation, Nui May Tao...), or when the NVA came into the province to do another task (Tet 68...) or when we met them outside the province (Coral, Balmoral...). The Battle of Log Tan effectively fulfilled the strategic aims of the Australian forces in August 1966.

Thereafter, the province was not under NVA control, the critically strategic port at Vung Tau was re-opened, cargo convoys drove through the province to Saigon unmolested, unarmed vehicles drove the main roads of Phuoc Tuy safely and ANZAC forces began to operate outside the province borders.

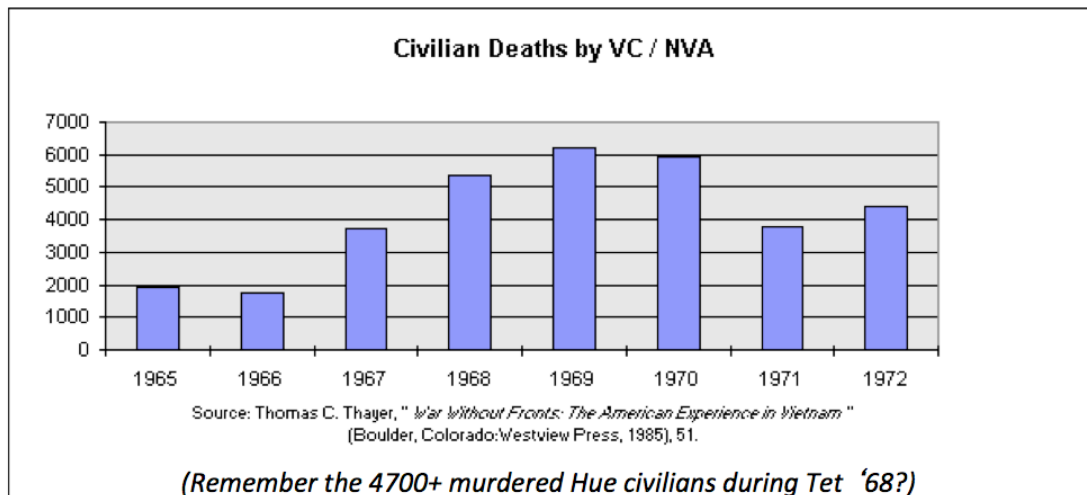
“...but the Allies deliberately targeted civilians...?”

On the Allied side there were very few cases of deliberate targeting of civilians. Indeed, only one is recorded – the massacre at My Lai. Can you name one other case...?

On the other hand, it is well recorded that the NVA and VC murdered civilians all through the war, from 2000 a year in 1965 to over 6000 a year in 1969. And remember Hue? 4700 civilians executed as the NVA pulled out of Hue after Tet '68.

AMERICAN ATROCITIES ?

Hardly a war history is published that doesn't recount **My Lai**.
Yes - it was wrong. Yes - it was inexcusable. But No - it wasn't typical.
Estimates vary on the My Lai numbers but the highest estimate is 504.
There is NO other similar event recorded in the whole of the Allied war.



“What about the bombing of civilians in the North...?”

Let us ask a question: if the Allies were targeting civilians in their Hanoi bombing offensives, why did they not just breach the dykes that protect Hanoi from the Red River? A single breach of the dyke would have flooded the greater part of Hanoi – hundreds of thousands dead, both military and political leadership drowned, war over.

“Well, anyway, you lost the war...”

Who won WW1 – the Germans or the Allies?

Neither. WW1 was stopped by an “Armistice” signed on 11 Nov 1918. They simply agreed to stop fighting. The Allies are deemed to have won because they dragged the Germans to the armistice. The same thing happened with the Second IndoChina War – the Paris Peace Accords was an Armistice. It was set up before the end of 1972 and signed in January 1973. By the middle of 1973, all foreign troops were out of South Viet Nam except that the NVA could remain in the places they then occupied.

Yet the Allies, despite dragging NVN kicking and screaming to Paris, are not credited with the win. Please explain...?

The Australian Governor-General, Sir Paul Hasluck, announced in Parliament on 11 January 1973 that the fighting had ended in Viet Nam. The war was over. We left.

The Third IndoChina War started more than 27 months later. (How long ago is 27 months? It's 27 months since Robin Williams died; 26 months since the Scottish Referendum; 24 months since Phil Hughes died...).



How long do we need between two events before we can really separate them...?

Australia was not involved in this new war – in fact, Australia had an embassy in Hanoi at the time. It is an easily correctible lie that Australia or the USA were involved in the defence of Saigon.

The sooner the Viet Vets know the simple truths, the sooner they might be encouraged to come to terms with what they were actually involved in, recognize the errors applied to them by protesters, left wing media, some politicians, many RSLs of the 70s and 80s and the general public, and the sooner they can shed the false guilt they have been directed to bear by those who should know better...

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DR Sabben". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

There are so many other matters I could explain as errors in perception or fact, or just deliberate lies...

- ...the circumstances of General Loan shooting a spy on a Saigon street...
- ...the case of the shootings at Kent State University in Ohio in 1970...
- ...the fact that for all their protests, the protesters had no solutions to offer...
- ... the (North) Vietnamese claim of an American "invasion"...
- ...the claim that the war was for the "reunification" of Viet Nam...
- ...the truth of the often-quoted "grasshopper versus elephant" propaganda...

Each of these is false, easily demonstrated by the facts. The question must remain – why are these untruths permitted to remain on the public record unchallenged?