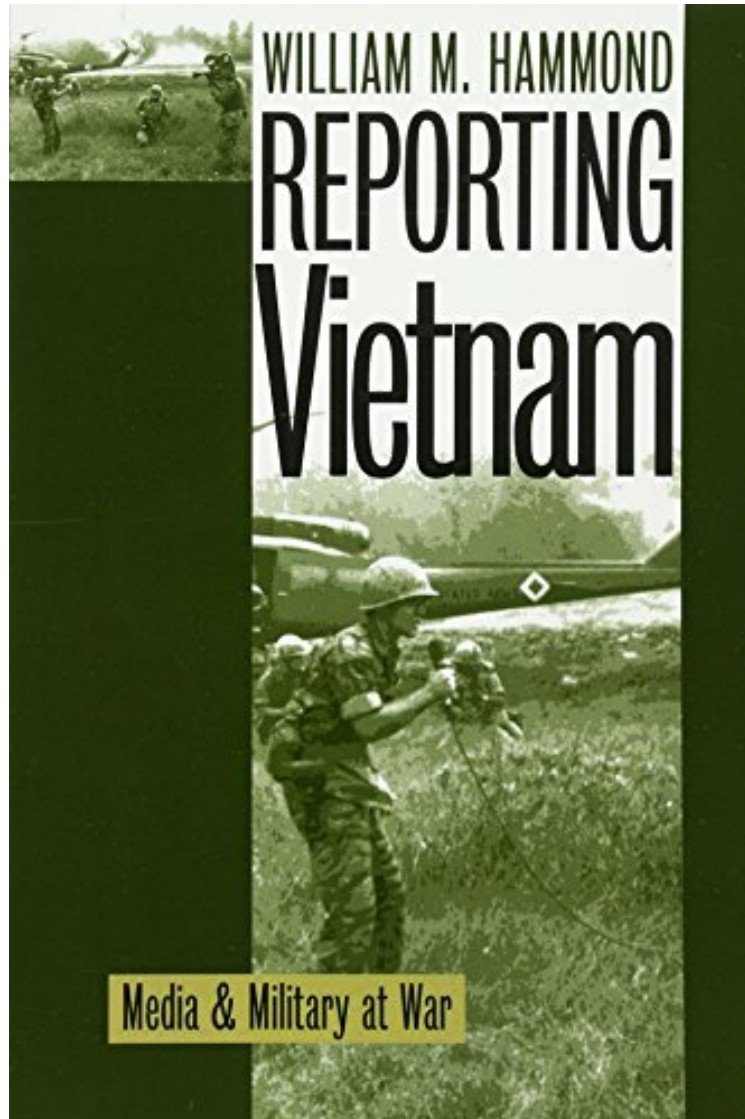


(Get free) Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War

Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War

William M. Hammond

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William M. Hammond : Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Essential to a Better Understanding of the Vietnam WarBy Frank BellizziWilliam Hammond's book Reporting Vietnam is a "description of official efforts to manage the U.S. government's relations with the news media during the war." It is also "a synthesis and refinement" of two volumes on the subject previously published by the author, and totaling more than one thousand pages. The two earlier works dealt with the military and media in South Vietnam in the years 1962-68 and 1968-73. "This smaller work is for [a] broader

audience. It contains all of the substance of its predecessors, less the dense background detail" (ix-x). As his method of investigation, Hammond chose to read U.S. government files for the relevant years. He chose that particular archive because he was not necessarily interested in any and all news reports, but especially those that "drew the attention of officials in the United States and South Vietnam, especially when they conflicted with the official line on an event." Because he wanted to identify the points of friction between the military and the media, news reports that government officials thought were worthy of note became "the points of departure" for Hammond's case studies. Most of the news items had been originally published in the so-called "elite press," newspapers like the New York Times, and magazines like U.S. News World Report. But some were written by various editorial writers and syndicated columnists, selected because these pieces "sometimes sustained the issues far longer than the news itself would have and provided the spur that prompted some action or reaction on the part of officials" (x). What did Hammond's research reveal? His conclusion is that, early on in the war, news correspondents from the United States supported both the American soldier and the stated goals of the mission issued by U.S. officials. For their part, the military, in spite of consistent pressure from the Diem regime to restrict information, normally upheld and honored the rights of a free press. News people almost always stayed within the guidelines that had been designed by U.S. officials for the purpose of ensuring military security (291). In other words, at the beginning of the relationship between media and military, Vietnam largely resembled what had become standard during the two previous U.S. wars. Hammond observes that growing, unprecedented hostility between media and military was rooted in the differences between Vietnam and earlier wars. Vietnam, he says, "was born in contradiction and grounded in ambiguity." Wanting to protect their political agendas, Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, "sought to enlist the military as spokesmen for their points of view." By 1972, the year in which President Nixon was elected to a second term, "many substantive news releases emanating from the military command in South Vietnam were drafted in Washington with only perfunctory input from agencies in the field" (292). In neither case did this compromised tactic work for very long. By 1968, for example, President Johnson had issued statements that included so many inconsistencies, both the press and even some officials within the administration doubted General Westmoreland's report that the enemy had suffered many setbacks as a result of their Tet offensive. During the Nixon administration, claims of success led to hopes that were soon disappointed. Promises of an imminent withdrawal from Vietnam were followed by stories of escalation in Cambodia and Laos. As the press reported a conflicted U.S. stance and the inconsistencies that accompanied that stance, both the Nixon administration and the U.S. military almost completely withdrew from the media. In some instances, U.S. commanders took it upon themselves to fight back against the press. They refused, for example, to provide transportation for reporters in combat areas and either delayed or discontinued briefings. Effectively, "they demolished what remained of the military's standing with the press." By the end of 1972, "meaningful give-and-take had all but ceased on both sides" (294). In such an environment, the U.S. government held at least a temporary advantage: the administration largely controlled the information on which the news media depended. Hammond says that what eventually broke the ensuing stalemate between the government and the news media was the American public, which chose to go "its own way." Americans, he says, followed "their own third course, exercising their own independence of mind, and displaying a substantial measure of contempt for all those in the press and government who had sought to manipulate them over the years." The American people, sick of the "many deaths and contradictions . . . moved to repudiate the earlier decision." When they did, it was relatively easy for the American press to follow. By contrast, the U.S. military "lacked the ability to do the same." Wanting to retain whatever honor they could and emotionally tied to the prospect of some sort of victory, leaders of the U.S. Armed Forces "fixed their anger on the press, the most visible element of the society that appeared to have rejected them" (296). Hammond's research and the books he has written give a large measure of insight into why Americans hear the name "Vietnam" the way they do. 8 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Packed with Details on Military and Media Relations By Bear Johnson This book is simply outstanding for anybody who has an interest in how the military manages media relations or who wants a different perspective on the Vietnam War. An abridgement of Hammond's two-volume set, this book is still packed with details covering the war from start to finish, providing lessons that remain relevant for today's changing battlefield. As one who is involved in media relations for a living, there's hardly a page in the book that isn't highlighted for future reference. And as one who has read several books on Vietnam, covering everything from tactical operations to strategic objectives, this book put the war in perspective for me as no other book has. However, as I was pouring over every page and sharing what I learned with those around me, one of my colleagues said he had read it as well and found it one of the most laborious books he had ever opened. So perhaps it is not for everybody, but it's a book I will return to again and again as I continue to study the unique relationship forged between the military and the media. And I am also ordering the two-volume set so I can find the even greater detail that was left out of this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By James Rhodes Great documentation well worth seeing!

For many Americans during the Vietnam era, the war on the home front seemed nearly as wrenching and hardfought as the one in Southeast Asia. Its primary battlefield was the news media, its primary casualty the truth. But as William Hammond reveals, animosity between government and media wasn't always the rule; what happened between the two

during the Vietnam War was symptomatic of the nation's experiences in general. As the "light at the end of the tunnel" dimmed, relations between them grew ever darker. *Reporting Vietnam* is an abridgment and updating of Hammond's massive two-volume work issued by the Government Printing Office. Based on classified and recently declassified government documents including Nixon's national security files as well as on extensive interviews and surveys of press war coverage, it tells how government and media first shared a common vision of American involvement in Vietnam. It then reveals how, as the war dragged on, upbeat government press releases were consistently challenged by journalists' reports from the field and finally how, as public sentiment shifted against the war, Presidents Johnson and Nixon each tried to manage the news media, sparking a heated exchange of recriminations. Hammond strongly challenges the assertions of many military leaders that the media lost the war by swaying public opinion. He takes readers through the twists and turns of official public affairs policy as it tries to respond to a worsening domestic political environment and recurring adverse "media episodes." Along the way, he makes important observations about the penchant of American officials for placing appearance ahead of substance and about policy making in general. Although Richard Nixon once said of the Vietnam war, "Our worst enemy seems to be the press," Hammond clearly shows that his real enemies were the contradictions and flawed assumptions that he and LBJ had created. *Reporting Vietnam* brings a critical study to a wider audience and is both a major contribution to an ongoing debate and a cautionary guide for future conflicts.

From Publishers Weekly Chess lovers will relish every move and countermove in this exhaustive unearthing of the machinations between the military and the press during the Vietnam War. Hammond, senior historian with the U.S. Army's Center of Military History, depicts the tension between the armed services and the media as a game of strategy, with the Pentagon trying to impose order on a bevy of reporters, only to find that the journalists got the scoop anyway. The author points out that the military's efforts to control the way the war was perceived were determined at times not by the public's need to know but by the political fortunes of the president and presiding military officer. Drawing on a thorough examination of military documents and newspaper and broadcast reports, Hammond explains how the press allowed the military to bring back tear gas for use in the war; how various news organizations contradicted themselves and one another in describing the war's unfolding; and how much of the American public came to feel that the war was a hopeless effort. The book would have been stronger had the author done more to personalize the reporters. From the Baltimore Sun's daring John Carroll to the AP's resourceful Peter Arnett (who even today finds himself embroiled in controversy), the reporters are left faceless for the most part, because in the battle between Pentagon and Fourth Estate, Hammond focuses mostly on institutions, not individuals. Still, the author has turned his academic search into a highly readable account of one-upsmanship and high-stakes jockeying. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Hammond succeeds in puncturing much of the mythology about the media and doing so in a readable and thorough fashion." *Washington Post Book World* "Hammond depicts the tension between the armed services and the media as a game of strategy, one-upmanship, and high-stakes jockeying. Drawing on a thorough examination of military documents and newspaper and broadcast reports, he explains how the press allowed the military to bring back tear gas for use in the war, how various news organizations contradicted themselves and one another in describing the war's unfolding, and how much of the American public came to feel that the war was a hopeless effort." *Publishers Weekly* "Today's military professional can see throughout this text the birth of our modern public affairs doctrine. . . . a must read for any military officer or member of the national security community responsible for developing plans or strategies that may have an impact on public opinion." *Naval War College* "Few issues have aroused more controversy than the role of the news media during the Vietnam War. Hammond demystifies the subject in a book that is scrupulously researched, authoritative, and, above all, readable." *Stanley Karnow, author of Vietnam: A History* "Reporting Vietnam is a classic journalism history and an essential work in helping understand America's most controversial foreign conflict. It is not only the definitive account of Vietnam war reporting, but also an engrossing read." *Peter Arnett, CNN correspondent and author of Live from the Battlefield* "By far the best study of the press and armed services yet written." *Stephen E. Ambrose, author of Citizen Soldiers* From the Back Cover Winner of the Richard W. Leopold Prize "Few issues have aroused more controversy than the role of the news media during the Vietnam War. Hammond demystifies the subject in a book that is scrupulously researched, authoritative, and, above all, readable." --Stanley Karnow, author of *Vietnam: A History* "By far the best study of the press and armed services yet written." --Stephen E. Ambrose, author of *Citizen Soldiers* "Hammond depicts the tension between the armed services and the media as a game of strategy, one-upmanship, and high-stakes jockeying. Drawing on a thorough examination of military documents and newspaper and broadcast reports, he explains how the press allowed the military to bring back tear gas for use in the war, how various news organizations contradicted themselves and one another in describing the war's unfolding, and how much of the American public came to feel that the war was a hopeless effort." --Publishers Weekly "Reporting Vietnam is a classic journalism history and an essential work in helping understand America's most controversial foreign conflict. It is not only the definitive account of Vietnam war reporting, but also an engrossing read." --Peter Arnett, CNN correspondent

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