Edward Lansdale: The Image of the
United States in Vietnam

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Introduction

The Vietnam War is a time period in United States history that is often debated and studied from a number of views. It is a historical event that incites heated conversations and academic discussions. When I set out to find a topic for my thesis, I wanted to find a unique story among the many perspectives of the US involvement in Vietnam. However, what I settled on researching for my thesis was a person who embodied a synthesis of the many perspectives. During a lecture in one of my history classes at Rutgers, I first learned of Edward Geary Lansdale. I was intrigued by his contribution in Vietnam and the Philippines. I was interested in his relationship and friendships with Ramón Magsaysay and Ngo Dinh Diem. I was fascinated by status as a member of the Central Intelligence Agency in Saigon in the 1950’s. Finally, I was enticed by his use of and commitment to psychological and black operations. Lansdale was an indisputably complex and influential player in Vietnam and the Philippines. Considering his many sides and accomplishments, he emerged as the perfect story for me to research and explore to better understand the role of the United States in the Vietnam War.

In the beginning of my research, I discovered the many fictional portrayals of Lansdale. As the main character in *The Ugly American* and *The Quiet American*, it was apparent I was not the only person intrigued by his complex history. Furthermore, given the notion that these two novels stood as warnings or recommendations about the US in Vietnam, why was Lansdale the chosen model to contribute to the authors’ stories? If Graham Greene was to choose any American to represent “The American,” Alden Pyle, in his novel, why would he choose Edward Lansdale? Why would William J. Lederer choose Lansdale as a necessary character for his novel? Although the two authors offered opposing views of Edward Lansdale through their
fictional depictions of him, there must be a reason why Lansdale in particular would be selected as the example for characters in their novels. Reading Lansdale’s biographies written by Cecil B. Currey and Jonathan Nashel, I arrived at the conclusion that Lansdale was the perfect choice as a main character of a novel because he embodied many of the controversial issues and aspects that many have debated about the Vietnam War itself. Edward Lansdale was committed to American values and goals abroad, but was deceiving and mysterious. He understood the importance of understanding the culture of a foreign nation, but still commanded the foreign leaders and expected compliance. Lansdale was as heroic as he was destructive. His complex character is comparable to how many Americans remember the US influence in Vietnam: as well-intentioned and committed as it was deceitful and harmful. Looking at the many facets of Edward Lansdale, one can see how he represents the image of the United States in Vietnam.

Given my interest in both Lansdale’s life and his legacy, I have organized my thesis in such a way. To collect biographical information about his life, I relied heavily on the research and biographies of Edward Lansdale written by Cecil B. Currey and Jonathan Nashel. Both of Lansdale’s biographers addressed his contribution to US efforts in the Philippines and Vietnam as well as his portrayal in fictional works following. To acquire a personal view of Lansdale’s life in Vietnam as well as his notes, lectures, and correspondences, I travelled to Stanford University in Stanford, California, and spent several days navigating the archives of the Hoover Institution. Having the opportunity to read the Lansdale Papers at the Hoover Institution gave me a closer look at Lansdale’s private thoughts and a clearer perspective on his persona. Much of the information about Lansdale in Vietnam in this thesis was derived from my findings among the
Lansdale Papers. The collection of correspondences, diary entries, and lectures reaffirmed and expanded my views of Lansdale’s values and beliefs while serving in Vietnam.

In understanding the portrayal or legacy of Lansdale, I have identified two sets of extremes. The first set is *The Pentagon Papers* versus *In the Midst of Wars*. These two works have much in common, given that they both contain information and content that Lansdale himself wrote. However, they offer completely differing perspectives of Lansdale’s role in Vietnam, as well as his character. Whereas *The Pentagon Papers* portrayed Lansdale as part of a scandal or series of war crimes, *In the Midst of Wars* depicted him as a hero. Even more interesting than the content of *The Pentagon Papers* and Lansdale’s memoirs are the reviews of *In the Midst of Wars*. Taking a look at journalists’ reviews and evaluation of *In the Midst of Wars*, and the way they question the memoirs as a reliable historical, source allow a reader to see which view of Lansdale they consider to be the “real” Lansdale. Along this same idea, I pose *The Quiet American* and *The Ugly American* against each other to understand how each author chose their vision of the “real” Lansdale, and of the status of the United States in Vietnam before *The Pentagon Papers* and *In the Midst of Wars* were even published. By providing the contrasting Lansdales in these works, it would appear as though one would need to qualify each source or express which Lansdale one considers to be the real Edward Lansdale. However, after understanding his life, actions, and beliefs, one can see how there is not one true Lansdale. Edward Lansdale was a synthesis of his opposing depictions, making him as complex as the Vietnam War itself.

The themes that should be clear throughout the thesis, and throughout Lansdale’s life and legacy are propaganda and psychological operations, understanding foreign cultures and
befriending their leaders, and committing to American interests abroad. These are the themes that make up the character of Edward Geary Lansdale, as they are among the many facets of the Vietnam War. Throughout the thesis, I will often use the word “patriotism” to describe Lansdale’s sentiments. Recognizing that the word patriotism could mean a number of things, in terms of this thesis, the word “patriotism” will mean, as New York Times columnist Robert Manning described, “…a true American patriot, one who believed with passion in his country and its ideals and sacrificed much for them.”¹ In this way, patriotism is defined as someone who defends and believes in the ideals of the nation. Therefore, when I use the word “patriotism” throughout the thesis, this definition is implied. It is this commitment to Americanism, democracy, and US interests abroad that makes Lansdale comparable to the US in Vietnam. Looking at all of these themes, one can see Lansdale and the Vietnam War were not a list of juxtapositions and disagreeing descriptions. All of the descriptions are true and all perceived qualities are valid. The legacy of Edward Geary Lansdale is simply a matter of interpretation. In this way, Edward Lansdale’s life and legacy has come to represent the United States in Vietnam.

In the Beginning

Edward Geary Lansdale never planned on becoming a legend. He did not come from a family with any military background, and had no intentions on joining the armed services. What was evident from before the time of his transfer to Saigon were his unique tactics and commitment to innovative techniques. From the beginning of his higher education, Lansdale had a fascination and mastery of journalism and mass media which evolved into his skills and career in advertising. By being instrumental in the development of advertising campaigns for top American companies, Lansdale developed a name for himself in the world of marketing and corporations that would end up written on his resume in an effort to earn a position in the military during World War II. It was during this time, and in the emergence of the Cold War that he solidified his firm stance in his devotion to America and its goals in containing Communism. Once he became involved in the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) and US objectives to promote democracy in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, he developed a unique style of executing operations. From his background in advertising, understanding of journalism and the press, and imagination for creative operations, he emerged as a leader of psychological warfare operations and counterinsurgency tactics. Exceptional in his techniques, he gained the trust of Filipino leader Ramón Magsaysay, and the admiration of the anti-rebel people of the Philippines. Although American involvement in Vietnam is better remembered and more controversial, it was in the Philippines that Lansdale developed his legendary reputation to save an Asian country from the threat of Communist rebellion. During this time, Lansdale created his personal philosophies and tactics that would define him as a character for the rest of his life.
Edward Lansdale’s lifetime use of media and propaganda began with an interest in journalism at the University of California at Los Angeles. Because the university did not offer journalism as a concentration, his major was English. After two years of studying at UCLA, Lansdale and a friend developed a college humor magazine called *The Claw*, after the University of California’s symbol, the golden bear.² Lansdale showed off his sense of humor by drawing comics and poking fun at UCLA, illustrating the humor in the daily life of an ordinary student. Beyond his participation in his own publication, Lansdale was a member of the UCLA Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). He was never ordered to fire a rifle, and was rated at the lowest mark in his pistol scores. However, the commander of his unit saw a different potential in young Cadet Lansdale, describing him as “a sane thinker possessed of balanced judgment. Better equipped by temperament for cerebrations than actions.”³ After feeling the weight of *The Claw*, the ROTC, his studies, and his incapability to learn foreign languages (which would follow him for the rest of his career), Lansdale left UCLA before the time of graduation to try to find work in the Great Depression.

In the face of the scarcity of newspaper jobs during the Great Depression, Lansdale moved to the east coast and joined a local Army Reserve in New York City. He found the instruction in the Army Reserve to be lackluster, complaining that the veterans of World War I offered outdated training, “teaching men to fight yesterday’s war all over again.”⁴ Lansdale

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³ Currey, 8.
⁴ Currey, 10.
always sought innovation and modernity. He finally found an interesting job that catered to his interests. His brother, Phil Lansdale, offered him an entry level advertising job at Silverwood’s, a men’s clothing firm that ran several outlets in the city. Under Phil’s instruction, Lansdale learned the basics of advertising. Yet again, he made a name for himself by publishing a storewide magazine that contained columns for employees only and included a biography of each employee. The magazine delighted his co-workers, and even impressed some important leaders in the corporate world outside of Silverwood’s. Leon Livingston, the owner of an advertising firm with large clients such as Wells Fargo Bank, Nestlé’s Nescafé instant coffee, and Levi Strauss jeans, offered Lansdale an account executive position in San Francisco. Continuing in the pattern he formed at UCLA and Silverwood’s, Lansdale emerged as a creative leader with a fresh vision for his clients. On one occasion, he developed an advertising plan for Levi Strauss to devote a large sum of money to salespeople to spread the company name at outlets along the east coast, rather than spending on constant billboard advertising. This simple suggestion contributed to Levi Strauss broadening its base in the United States. Like his ROTC commander had noticed, Lansdale had cerebral capabilities beyond those of his contemporaries. These qualities would define his image for the rest of his career.

On December 7, 1941, the day that would “live in infamy” struck Lansdale with an immediate sense of urgency and duty to his country. After being informed of the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Lansdale parted ways with Livingston, even reprimanding his former boss after joking that he should join the Russian army because they had “better-looking

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5 Currey, 16.
It was in the moments that followed the Pearl Harbor attacks that Lansdale’s unwavering patriotism emerged, and his commitment to democracy and American agenda abroad became ever present. He requested to be reinstated into the army, boasting five years of work with high profile advertising accounts and an interest in the field of intelligence. Finally his imaginative and tactical mind would be put to practical use in a way that allowed him to combine his cerebral power with his undying support for the United States of America. For example, as a member of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Lansdale focused on a propaganda campaign to weaken spirits among Japanese in which he turned around Japanese proverbs such that they seemed against Japanese victory, such as “The man who makes the first bad move always loses the game,” in reference to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This type of propaganda defined Lansdale’s technique and style in several ways, as Jonathan Nashel indicated in his biography of Lansdale, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War*:

“This effort… exhibits a blinding naïveté regarding the complex forces that might motivate another culture. Yet Lansdale’s culture-based approach was strikingly in contrast to the standard contemporary American depictions of the Japanese as subhuman and even insectlike. At the same time, his tactics depended upon assumptions of cultural superiority.”

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6 Currey, 17.


8 Nashel, 30.
Nashel outlined the ways that his ad campaign against the Japanese epitomized his strengths and weaknesses in dealing with US operations in foreign nations. Lansdale committed to understanding the foreign culture to the best of his ability, but tended to fall short to actually reaching a comprehension of the people’s customs by relying on US perceptions. Furthermore, his struggle he encountered in college with studying foreign languages and depending on English translations to communicate with the Japanese is a shortcoming Lansdale overcame. Nevertheless, he was innovative in his attempts to smear the Japanese army’s efforts through psychological warfare. Over time, Lansdale would only strengthen his commitment to operations without need for military intervention.

Comparable to Lansdale’s dramatic reaction on the day of Pearl Harbor attacks, when Ed Lansdale first heard of an imminent Cold War, he recommitted himself to the United States through this new emerging cause. A war that was “cold,” or without military conflict, as the name indicates, was exactly Lansdale’s calling. The same cadet who could not shoot a rifle in Los Angeles and media mastermind who developed a sales campaign for one of the most well-known jeans manufacturers in the world could skillfully handle the intelligence and secret operations that such a “cold” war would imply. As an officer of the OPC, which would in later years merge with the CIA, he went to the Philippines to promote a democratic government that could defend itself against rebel attack. When Lansdale first arrived in Philippines in the mid-1940’s, he performed staff studies and made reports of all Filipino news sources, and sent weekly reports to the Pentagon of US stories in the Filipino press. In the way he attempted to understand the Japanese in order to defeat them, Lansdale studied the Huks, or a group of Communist peasants that led uprisings against the government of the Philippines, by tracking
them, mapping out their trails, and even speaking to them himself.\textsuperscript{9} Lansdale defined his leadership in the Philippines by making an effort to be a man of the people, and to understand Filipino people as well as the Huk enemy in order to promote US interests.

It was in the Philippines that Lansdale developed his status as a legend and a master of psychological warfare. Lansdale was given by his superiors a number of goals or missions he was to achieve during his time in the Philippines. Among these were protecting US interests, consolidating a power base in the Philippines that supported these interests, revitalizing the Philippine Army, helping the government defeat the Huks, and assisting in an honest election.\textsuperscript{10} The routes Lansdale took to achieve success in the Philippines created his celebrity. The leader he chose to become the next President of the Philippines was Ramón Magsaysay, Security of National Defense under President Quirino. Magsaysay embraced the American point of view and Lansdale’s friendship. Furthermore, he was committed to fighting the Communist Huks. Lansdale compared his relationship with Magsaysay with that of two brothers, but others noticed what appeared to be covert coaching in Lansdale’s strong advising. Peter C. Richards, a British news correspondent, recalls, “Ed was… telling Magsaysay exactly what to do. There is no question of that…. By the time Magsaysay stood up somewhere to speak, he knew what he had to say. It was subliminal, but it was there.”\textsuperscript{11} Supporting Richards’s suspicion is an example where Lansdale reprimanded Magsaysay on an airplane for mentioning he may read another

\textsuperscript{9} Currey, 39.

\textsuperscript{10} Currey, 78.

\textsuperscript{11} Currey, 90.
prepared speech in El Paso Texas: “The hell you are…. You are going to use the speech that I wrote for you.” The argument escalated to the point where Magsaysay shoved Lansdale and Lansdale “slugged him real hard.” Whereas Lansdale reflected on the fight as a brotherly fight, any casual observer could see Lansdale attempting to assert his control over the Filipino leader. Other advice Lansdale offered Magsaysay, for example, creating an army to counter the Communist insurgency, was adopted and enforced.

The tactics that separated Lansdale from the pack were his propaganda and psychological warfare operations he employed and executed in the Philippines. Lansdale created a unit in the Philippine Army that revolved around psychological warfare. Operations for this unit included attempts to mislead or confuse the enemy, offering false codes, information, locations, and times in attempt to arrest Huk leaders. Utilizing his understanding of the press, media, and advertising, Lansdale used his skills to his advantage, planting false stories and spreading rumors to weaken the enemy. Another instance of Lansdale’s propaganda talents was when he created the concept of the “eye of God” based on Filipino folklore and myths. The “eye of God” was made up of L-5 airplanes circling above the Huks, with an officer calling through a bullhorn to the world below, “You hiding down there. We see you. Yes I mean you in Squadron 17…. We know all about you. We are coming to kill you. To our secret friend in your ranks I say thank you! Run and hide so you won’t be killed.” In a different scenario, the Philippine Army painted eyes on sides of houses. Another type of operation Lansdale developed was black propaganda, which was

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12 Currey, 116.

13 Currey, 100.
intended to seem as though it was made by the enemy but actually was harmful to them. An example of black propaganda was a rumor spread that the Huks were planning to attack a village and kill women and children, but it was intended to incite anger in anti-Huks to turn more people against them in a personal way. Edward Lansdale was a master of psychological warfare, and with the success of an honest election and all of the US missions accomplished in the Philippines, he had reaffirmed his belief that wars could not be won with military operations alone.

As a result of his work in the Philippines, Lansdale was legendary for both the means and the ends of his work. From his time in the Philippines alone, he became a heroic figure to the Filipino people, and an impressive character to his peers. Frank Zaldarriaga served with Lansdale in the Psychological Warfare Bureau, and spoke of his celebrity in the Philippines: “This man was a legend. Wherever I went he was known.”\(^{14}\) Although he may have been a well-known man, Peter Richards, the British correspondent skeptical of Lansdale’s relationship with Magsaysay, comments that although Lansdale may have been friendly and personable, “…the secret of his success is that he was a man who could disappear. He wasn’t in the room, but he was.”\(^{15}\) Other popular belief is that Lansdale had created Magsaysay, and thus properly advised him to the point where the Philippines could consolidate a government that could counter Communist Huk insurgencies. A Filipino columnist insisted that Magsaysay’s “rise to the

\(^{14}\) Currey, 45.

\(^{15}\) Currey, 45.
presidency had been master-minded by Lansdale.\textsuperscript{16} Embodied in these three quotations is Lansdale’s image after his service in the Philippines. He was well-known, and a man who had genuinely committed himself to understanding Filipino culture while promoting US interests. On the other hand, he was sneaky, manipulating the press and waging propaganda wars against his enemies, completing covert missions that only a person who “could disappear” would be able to master. Finally, he was the advisor who successfully chose, perhaps even created, a leader that the Filipino people would elect, and that the US government could support. It was this legendary reputation that made it only natural for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to send him to Saigon to recreate the miracle he had performed in the Philippines.

\textsuperscript{16} Currey, 90.
In Vietnam

Lansdale was sent to Saigon in 1954 to recreate the magical stunt he had performed in Manila. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Dulles brothers, considered the condition of the Vietminh and the French in Vietnam, Lansdale emerged as a potential leader in their minds based on his reputation for unconventional warfare he had gained after assisting Ramón Magsaysay in fighting off a Communist rebellion. At the time, Dulles must have been drawing comparisons between the two countries and their situations in potential Communist takeover. Years later, Lansdale would consider in an unpublished document the similarities and differences between the two nations, and how their struggle was handled. Given the notion that the Vietminh uprising in Indochina was comparable to the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, Ed Lansdale was the only man for the job in advising the government in Saigon against Communist insurgency.

The same young man who struggled to learn languages at University of California at Los Angeles emerged upon his arrival, with his inability to speak French hanging over his head, haunting him. However, the young agent who sought to understand the culture of the people as well as the position of the enemy in Philippines reappeared. Lansdale integrated himself into society, and valued his own capacity to relate to the people of Saigon. Cecil Currey points out in Lansdale’s biography, The Unquiet American, that although Lansdale was committed to democracy and firmly believed in American ideals and values, he knew that he had many questions unanswered about the government in Vietnam: “In a paper written prior to his

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departure, Lansdale wrote out a number of questions. Answers to them could pinpoint how effectively third world leaders used their own armies. Should the loyalty and obedience of military officers be given to a commander, the chief of state, or a constitution?...Was the role of armed forces understood sympathetically by the majority of a population?... By troops themselves?"¹⁸ In one of Lansdale’s notebooks from 1954, one can find diligent note taking and personal reflection in an attempt to understand the Vietnamese. He wrote down identifications for leaders, places, history, and press in Vietnam, adding in some of his own notes: “Bao Dai – Al Capone Type”.¹⁹ After gaining a feel for the Vietnamese culture, Lansdale began to plot the beginnings of psychological warfare operations, just as he had in the Philippines. The same man who in World War II attempted to destroy the morale of the Japanese troops using their own proverbs realized that he needed to understand the enemy in order to identify the strengths of the Vietnamese government. In the same notebook as his notes about leaders such as Bao Dai, Lansdale brainstormed ideas: “Exploit feeling in North… Give govt means obtaining mass support… Make govt assume leadership/election – constitution – things Commies do not have.”²⁰ After merely scratching the surface of grasping Vietnamese life, Lansdale had already begun to plot a way to turn the Vietnamese people against the Vietminh.

The importance of gaining knowledge about the Vietnamese was an issue that Lansdale never took lightly. His commitment to understanding the people before performing any type of

¹⁸ Currey 201

¹⁹ Lansdale Papers, Box 72.

²⁰ Lansdale Papers, Box 72.
observation was alarmingly unique during this time period. In 1962, Lansdale wrote a document for the Foreign Service Institute called “Lessons Learned, The Philippines: 1946-1953,” and the first lesson he listed called for the necessity of understanding: “…there is no substitute for first-hand knowledge.”21 Later in the war, Lansdale wrote a memorandum to the Johnson administration entitled “How to Win in Vietnam.” Included in this document was the question “Why is the U.S. failing in Vietnam?” Lansdale turned to the first lesson he learned in the Philippines to explain the shortcomings and failures of the United States’ attempt to “win” in Vietnam: “Because our leadership there: Does not understand Asians or politics…. Does not understand how to advise effectively… Does not understand that winning the support of the people is the over-riding requirement for successful counterinsurgency… Does not have meaningful contact with, or influence over such significant Vietnamese political elements…”22 The bottom line for failure in Vietnam, said Lansdale, was that the United States was generally unable to understand the people. Although many would assert that Lansdale himself could not possibly be the authority on comprehending Vietnamese culture, it was apparent that Edward Lansdale did value the importance of connecting with the Vietnamese in order to achieve victory. The proper way to understand a culture before beginning any type of advisory program was outlined in Lansdale’s “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” in 1961. In this document, he wrote about the process of understanding Laos before beginning a civil assistance program.


steps of thoroughly understanding a people: “Become acquainted with the key members of the district… Gather background data on key personnel of district.” Clearly, Lansdale firmly believed in familiarizing himself with a culture before beginning any type of assistance or advisory.

In 1954 Saigon, Lansdale familiarized himself not only with an entire people, but one particular person as well. Drawing the comparison between Lansdale’s contributions in the Philippines with those of Vietnam, many may point to Lansdale’s relationship with Ramón Magsaysay in comparison or contrast to that with Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem, a Catholic nationalist and public figure in Saigon, would become Lansdale’s advisee, close friend, and eventually the President in Vietnam. Beyond the way Lansdale sought to gain an intimate understanding of the Vietnamese people, Lansdale befriended Diem, sharing with him American ideals, and what Lansdale conceived to be the steps he needed to take to emerge as the next leader of Vietnam. Lansdale appeared to follow the same pattern he had with Magsaysay, describing Diem as a good friend while whispering in his ear, commanding his political and military strategy. Even Diem caught on to the parallels between his relationship with Lansdale and the agent’s history with Magsaysay: “Toward the end of 1955 when Don did not so frequently see Lansdale by Diem’s side, he asked the president what had happened. Diem answered, ‘Lansdale is too CIA and is an encumbrance…. Don believed that one reason for Lansdale’s downfall was that he pressed too

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23 Edward Lansdale, “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Box 74, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.
hard ‘to have Diem copy Magsaysay…. [T]his really hurt Diem’s feelings.’”24 Was it fair for Lansdale to expect Diem to live up to Magsaysay’s standards, or is it even fair to say that Lansdale sought to copy his efforts with Magsaysay with Diem? Sometimes it seemed as though Lansdale was a puppeteer and Diem was his marionette doll, as Currey demonstrated how Lansdale managed to convince Diem to execute many of his plans and advice:

“He convinced Diem to attend to the needs of his nations’ people (although Diem was inclined to favor those who were Catholic over others)…. He also convinced Diem to implement a number of social, economic, and political reforms including building schools, repairing roads, teaching personal and public hygiene, and teaching rural inhabitants the benefits of aligning themselves with the Saigon government.”

From this quotation, it would seem as though Diem’s greatest quality was his compliance, and the way he followed Lansdale’s suggestions and orders made them compatible as friends. However, Diem was not always so successful winning the support of his people. In fact, he typically instigated hatred against him. Reactions to Diem’s decisions included demonstrations against the Saigon government and even an attempted coup. When Lansdale traveled home to the United States and met with President John F. Kennedy, he expressed his concern to Diem as a close friend, not as a Colonel, agent, or even advisor. He even greeted him in the letter as “Friend,” and talked about past pleasures before getting into his concerns for Diem, and his strong suggestions:

“Dear Friend:

Your thoughtful kindness made the trip to Vietnam a most interesting and memorable one for me. I was happy to see you looking so well, despite the problems you face every day
…. you do have some sincere friends in Washington.

However, there will be some here who will point out that much of the danger of your present situation comes from your own actions. … too many of your organizations like the Republican Youth Groups and the Can Lao Party are actually formed by coercion—that is, people join because they are afraid not to—rather than being genuine organizations rooted in the hearts of the Vietnamese people…

The best answer to these criticisms would be actions by you in Vietnam. Please remember my suggestion…. Your countrymen need to be told that Vietnam is in grave danger from the Communists, that the help of every citizen is welcomed by the government, and that Vietnam must and will be kept free and independent.”

In this letter, one can see the balance Lansdale used to encourage Diem to follow his recommendations while maintaining a friendly yet concerned tone. His relationship with Diem would play a major role in becoming a key character in the story of the United States in Vietnam.

Another skill Lansdale utilized in Vietnam was his mastery of advertising and the media. The same principles and basics he learned at Silverwood’s decades prior were applied in Saigon. Cecil Currey describes Lansdale’s approach to the people’s war as a necessary “competition of images,” swaying the people of Vietnam one way or another, creating his desired effect in Vietnam. Upon his arrival in Saigon, one of Lansdale’s first tasks was to identify his media weapons he would use to support his agenda. Among his notes from Vietnam was a full analysis of Saigon newspapers and their circulation. For example, he described *Chinh Luan*, a newspaper for political commentary: “…ranks among the most influential dailies both by its mass

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25 Edward Lansdale to Ngo Dinh Diem, Correspondence, Box 39, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

26 Currey, 225.
circulation (35,000 copies) and by its impact on the middle class people (functionaries and intellectuals)… Their general trend may be defined as neutral (neither pro-government, nor pro-American).”

Lansdale had already familiarized himself with newspaper circulation as a potential weapon. In the same “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program” he used to stress the importance of understanding a culture before beginning an assistance program, Lansdale also acknowledged another weapon in the “competition of images”: “Movies: You can obtain a generator and projector from USIS [United States Information Service]…. Show American films also – particularly those with a simple direct theme showing us at our best…. The villagers love to watch American films even when they cannot understand a word.”

Movies, according to Lansdale, were a perfect way to instill American morals, values, and culture in another country. It is also important to note Lansdale’s perception of indigenous reaction to the American films. He commented that foreigners love American films, even if they could not understand a word, and even included examples of Americans at their “best” as adventure movies, comedies, cowboy pictures, and even war films.

Although newspapers had mass circulation and movies appeared to have a mass effect on foreign people, Lansdale’s most valuable and dangerous weapon for advertising and media in Vietnam was word of mouth. Language would be a primary focus for Lansdale, as he advised

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27 Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, Analysis of Saigon Newspapers, Box 18, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California

28 Edward Lansdale, “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Box 74, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

29 Edward Lansdale, “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Box 74, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.
and trained his peers to use the proper wording to create a favorable image for the United States in Vietnam, or even as a psychological tactic to spread a rumor. Lansdale advised his colleagues on the potential of language: “Initially your weapon is talk. It must be interesting, arousing, intelligent. You are a master salesman for the United States.”30 This was Lansdale’s earlier career in advertising back in action. In Vietnam, he never lost an understanding of the value of word of mouth to promote an agenda. Always conscious of the way the war was being portrayed and perceived, Lansdale commented in his notes, “Need for word-of-mouth techniques…. Overall: change aspect or world picture of war, from that of colonial whites… to civil war between newly independent Asian nationals (Vietnam) and natives dominated by Soviet-Chinese imperialists. This picture must be presented throughout Asia, to frustrate Chinese plans.”31 In the memo, also utilizing psychological techniques to “frustrate” the enemy, Lansdale began plans to change an image. Lansdale exemplified his own rhetoric in a series of speeches in the United States to give a positive image to the US efforts in Vietnam. In his speeches, he made constant reference to a character called “Nguoi Thuong Dan,” who stood as the good citizen of Vietnam. Lansdale used Dan to convey to the American people that the war in Vietnam was a people’s war, or a war for the Vietnamese. Americans were to empathize with Dan as the common man, and thus to support US efforts to protect Dan and his people. Lansdale employed tactics such as “Nguoi Thuong Dan” and other language details such as “[Do] not be anti-Communist—be for

30 Edward Lansdale, “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Box 74, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

31 Lansdale Papers, Box 75.
something,” to foster progress for the US image in Vietnam. In this way, the media and his advertising had become his greatest weapon.

Using the weapons of media and word-of-mouth, Lansdale was able to perform his unconventional warfare strategies that made him both famous and infamous. In the Philippines, he solidified his belief that military operations could not win a war. In Vietnam, he would take psychological warfare to the next level, and would preach the importance of “psywar.” As part of a lecture delivered at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, Lansdale explained the “rules” of psychological operations: “First, be sure of your command’s politico-military objective and stick with it in your operations. Second, know exactly what you want to cause people to do as a result of each of your operations. Third, put across your activating idea in a way that these people will understand.” After his service in Vietnam, he continued to be recognized as an authority on the strategy. Another “lesson learned in the Philippines” for Lansdale was the use of psychological missions: “… since the objective in a counterinsurgency is to win over the people to our side, the political-psychological appeal is a most vital element in winning. In this, the old truism that ‘actions speak louder than words’ must be heeded.” Combining politics with his knowledge of advertising, Lansdale knew how to “win

32 Lansdale Papers, Box 74.


over the people.” Like word-of-mouth, newspapers, and movies, psychological operations were to be viewed not as pictures on a page, but as a weapon that could support the military. In the first part of his speech about psychological military operations, Lansdale elaborated on this idea:

“Think of psychological warfare as a weapon… not as propaganda posters, or as surrender leaflets… but as a weapon, like artillery, or torpedoes, or guided missiles. Our military staffs have learned to integrate these other weapons into our operational plans. So it is, also, with psychological warfare. The proper use of this weapon should be included in every combat plan you make—as an important, supporting weapon that will help achieve military victory. “

Lansdale was confident and outspoken about his opinions on psychological warfare, and even went as far as providing examples, somewhat boasting, of his experience in psychological warfare. While in Vietnam, tactics included campaigns to lure people living in the North to move to South Vietnam by spreading rumors. Lansdale even developed a plan to circulate an almanac for popular sale throughout Vietnam. He hired noted astronomers to predict disaster for the Vietminh and prosperity for South Vietnam. Lansdale also utilized black operations and leaflet campaigns to spread rumors among the people of Vietnam. Although his black and psychological covert operations would be condemned by his critics, Lansdale was fully committed to his unconventional warfare tactics.

From Lansdale’s attempts to learn about the Vietnamese to his manipulation of that information in psychological warfare operations, he remained committed to American ideals and democracy. For the same reasons he joined the war effort in World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, Lansdale maintained the firm belief that “American culture was fundamentally

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right for all other people.”

It was this strong belief that labeled him as “The American,” whether it was “The Quiet American” or “The Ugly American.” In his reflections about the Philippines, he identified that part of the mission in Vietnam was helping a nation fight off Communism to embrace freedom: “Our task is the harder one of building up, of employing wisdom, so that we can be brothers to a world family of free people.”

Lansdale attributed the success in the Philippines to the Filipinos: “…Filipinos dedicated to making their democracy live. There were Americans who believed in these dedicated Filipinos and acted upon that belief. As they did, such Americans were accepted as brothers, not outsiders.” The key to success in Vietnam was becoming accepted as brothers, unified under the principles of American freedom and democracy. Lansdale genuinely and firmly believed in this notion. The same duty he felt when he re-enlisted in the Air Force led him to promote US interests in Vietnam. The more people believed in the United States, the more likely they were to succeed: “Americans, when we are true to our heritage, have a real duty to speak up for our belief in liberty.”

Although once again defending the need to defend those whose freedom is in danger, Lansdale also brought up the “heritage” of the United States as a world policeman. Beyond the notions of democracy and

36 Nashel, 50.


American ideals, Lansdale also embraced the United States as a model for what all underdeveloped countries were to become. In his “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Lansdale mentioned the infrastructure that the United States should provide as aid in constructing for the country in need of assistance. Among these were medical support, aid to education, sanitation, agriculture, transportation, playgrounds and parks, market places, and electricity. Therefore, even beyond the system of government of the United States, it was the duty of Americans to provide aid in other physical facets of life for the occupied nation. Again, the American way was the only way.

Lansdale reached the best of both worlds by describing psychological warfare as patriotic. In his lecture about psychological warfare operations, Lansdale manipulated psychological warfare into an act of commitment to Americanism. Similar to the way that all people wanted democracy and freedom, according to Lansdale, another bond that tied all people was the desire to perform psychological operations:

“The Asian men who carried out these operations were dedicated patriots. They had to be, because in these and similar operations, they pledged their lives towards the success of what they did – without expectation of reward other than having a country in which their children could grow up as free men. This, too, is our bond of brotherhood with them… the best psychological operators I have known have had a deep spiritual kinship with our unpaid Continental troops at Valley Forge…”

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40 Edward Lansdale, “Outline of a Civil Assistance Program,” Box 74, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

In this passage, Lansdale compared psychological operations to the battles of the American Revolution, to say that psychological warfare was, as any other service would be, an act of patriotism. Therefore, one could then compare the efforts of the Vietnamese performing psychological warfare operations to the American Continental Army from over two hundred years prior. In this way, Lansdale sold both the celebration of psychological warfare as well as the foreign men completing the dirty work. Lansdale made a final point about psychological warfare in reference to competition with the Communists. He indicated that Communists used psychological warfare, and the only way the United States and other nations of the free world could defeat them was with the support of psychological warfare to conventional military operations. According to Lansdale, psychological warfare should not be overlooked but adopted by US armed forces: “You and every other military man in the Free World is the target of some of the most skilled psychological attack the world has ever seen. If the Communists deem this attack worth so very much of their resources… then don’t be ignorant of this powerful weapon…. In this way, you can help us use a fine weapon which we have over looked to often—a weapon we need today to help us achieve our national objectives.”

In this way, psychological warfare was a weapon that could either be used against us, or would lead us to victory against our enemy.

As the Vietnam War is regarded as a multi-faceted, highly political time in history, Lansdale is remembered as a multi-faceted character and contributor to the efforts in Vietnam. He offers any student of history several layers to unfold and interpret, and too many defining

42 Edward Lansdale, “Military Operations,” Box 80, Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.
characteristics to comprehend. Edward Lansdale is defined by his relationship with Diem, by his psychological warfare, by his ability to “sell America” or “sell Vietnam,” by his psychological and covert missions within the CIA, and by his patriotism and commitment to US ideals. It is this complicated persona that makes Lansdale such an interesting historical figure, and likely such a fascinating subject for a fictional character. Therefore, when authors, newscasters, and historians approach telling the story of the US in Vietnam and how Lansdale added to this story, one could write a myriad of accounts and varying descriptions about one man, just as one could do the same about the Vietnam War itself. Thus, the perception of Lansdale is just as interesting as his biography. It is this perception that makes Lansdale an infamous character representing the US in Vietnam.

43 Nashel, 49.
In His Own Words: *In the Midst of Wars v. The Pentagon Papers*

Edward Lansdale is remembered as a character of multiple facets in Vietnam. Even his own writing seems to paint a schizophrenic image of Lansdale, and a complicated picture of the Vietnam War itself. After his time in Vietnam, two published works of his own words added to his infamous reputation as a covert operations CIA agent, and his legendary reputation as a man of the people in the Philippines and Vietnam. In the *Pentagon Papers*, Lansdale was exposed as a member of the CIA, a supporter of war criminal acts, and a part of the government organization that allowed his close friend, Ngo Dinh Diem, to be assassinated in a riot. On the other hand, his memoirs published a year later in 1972, *In the Midst of Wars*, offered a different side of the story. In his narrative of his contributions in the Philippines and in Vietnam, it seems as though retrospect had given him the self-image of an honorable and virtuous hero. Especially complicating the two Lansdales in the *Pentagon Papers* and in his memoirs was the notion that they were created based on Lansdale’s own words. Furthermore, the two published works created a picture of Lansdale that all readers would remember. Therefore, the image of Lansdale blew up to such an infamous status, and one’s view of Lansdale was based on the document they believed revealed the real Lansdale. In the case of the *Pentagon Papers*, Lansdale ate his words. In his memoirs, he was able to defend himself against the exposé. In the end, Americans created their views of Edward Lansdale and Vietnam based on their belief in the two documents.

*The Pentagon Papers* is a compilation of secret government files from the Vietnam War. In Neil Sheehan’s *New York Times* publishing of *The Pentagon Papers*, he revealed a series of covert operations performed in Vietnam before 1955. Included in the papers was “Lansdale’s Team Report on Covert Saigon Mission ’54 and ’55,” a report of two years worth the covert
missions and psychological warfare planned and executed by Lansdale and his team. This document, which Lansdale wrote, would make him infamous for his involvement in the CIA and his manipulation of Geneva Conventions to complete his missions in Saigon. Sheehan described the Geneva Convention as the Geneva “Disaster” from the perspective of the US government officials. In Lansdale’s report, he outlined all psychological operations he carried out, including black operations. In one scenario, Lansdale dropped leaflets with the goal of getting more North Vietnamese to move south:

“Earlier in the month they had engineered a black psywar strike in Hanoi: leaflets signed by the Vietminh instructing Tonkinese on how to behave for the Vietminh takeover of the Hanoi region…. The day following the distribution of these leaflets, refugee registration tripled. Two days later Vietminh currency was worth half the value prior to the leaflets…. The Hanoi psywar strike had other consequences.”

Not only was Lansdale initiating black operations, but he was succeeding, psychologically manipulating the citizens of North Vietnam, and also tampering with the economic stability of the region. As if the term “black operations” was not frightening enough to the American people, Lansdale also described the Geneva Conventions as a setback in the plans for the Saigon Mission: “It was often a frustrating and perplexing year, up close. The Geneva Agreements signed on 21 July 1954 imposed restrictive rules upon all official Americans, including the Saigon Military Mission.”

Colonel Lansdale then went on to compare the Geneva restrictions to the crippled South Vietnamese economy and the internal problems within the country.

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45 Sheehan, 53.
His language and reports portrayed him as the covert operations, CIA agent who disagreed with the international laws of war while psychologically manipulating the enemy. Even in the commentary provided in the Pentagon Papers, his biographical notes, written by Sheehan, portrayed him as a mysterious figure in Vietnam: “…developed basic concept that Communist revolution best opposed by democratic revolution… went to South Vietnam, as Central Intelligence Agency operative… reportedly helped develop Special Forces… well known but mysterious… described as irreplaceable… reticent about his own role…”\textsuperscript{46} Using words such as “reportedly,” “mysterious,” and “irreplaceable,” Sheehan and the other editors of The Pentagon Papers managed to depict Lansdale as untrustworthy and sneaky. On top of his own report, the commentary would only add to his infamy.

In understanding the vast difference between the language Lansdale used in his report to the US government in 1954 and his memoir in 1972, one can look at his own “About the Author,” in contrast to the biographical notes written in The Pentagon Papers. On the final page of In the Midst of Wars is Lansdale’s short biography, briefly listing his on-the-books rankings and awards: “In World War II, he served as a volunteer with the OSS… At war’s end, he became a career officer in the U.S. Air Force, rising to the rank of Major General before his retirement in 1963. Between 1957 and 1963, Lansdale assisted the secretary of defense in the field of special operations… He holds numerous decorations awarded him by the United States and the

\textsuperscript{46} Sheehan, 634.
Philippines.” Using verbs such as “served,” “rising,” and “assisted,” Lansdale portrayed himself as a caring, modest individual who simply rose to Major General title by providing aid and volunteer work. Edward Lansdale managed to create the image of both an ordinary man and a hero in his memoirs, clinging only to his love of America and his belief in democracy for support. In his Preface, he even compared himself to Thomas Paine: “You should know one thing at the beginning: I took my American beliefs with me into these Asian struggles, as Tom Paine would have done. Ben Franklin once said, ‘Where liberty dwells, there is my country.’ Tom Paine replied, ‘Where liberty dwells not, there is my country.’ Paine’s words form a cherished part of my credo.”

Throughout his memoirs, he glorified himself in the style of a storyteller, only acknowledging his accomplishments and thoughts in retrospect, while occasionally adding in his thoughts about the future of United States foreign policy.

Lansdale’s glorified autobiography was revised and edited with a number of title changes, deleted chapters, and attempts to create an epic tale. His title, *In the Midst of Wars*, was not the title he created when he set out to write his memoirs. In one draft of his memoirs, the title was “The Upside-Down Wars,” referring to the Philippines and Vietnam. Another example included “Yankee Do,” as he described to a friend in a personal letter. This title combined both

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48 Lansdale, ix.

49 Lansdale Papers, Box 76.

50 Lansdale Papers, Box 75.
his unwavering patriotism with his values of hard work and helping foreign nations achieve the same passion for American morals as he possessed. An additional tentative title was “There is my Country,”\textsuperscript{51} clearly referencing the Thomas Paine and Ben Franklin alleged dialogue, which may have actually been part of his “credo,” since he almost titled his book after the quote. However, in a letter from Genevieve Young, his Harper & Row Publishing editor, Young expressed her disapproval of the title, and suggested a title of her own: “THERE IS MY COUNTRY is very apropos… but nonetheless it doesn’t strike me as a good title, being both ambiguous and hard to remember. I would like to call this MEMOIRS OF A COLD WARRIOR… What do you think?”\textsuperscript{52} Apparently, they decided on In the Midst of Wars, not speaking to patriotism, doing good, but to the Cold War. The opportunity to read his draft and study his train of thought as he was producing his memoirs revealed the direction in which he wanted his book to go.

Another example of a constant change throughout his drafting was the first sentence of the first chapter of his memoirs. The way he wanted to begin his memoirs, the tone he wanted to set, could be equally as telling as his title. Given the nature of Americans buying and reading books, the title would lure buyers to purchase the book, but the first sentence would be the grabber to keep the reader interested in his story. One of the openers was a quote a colleague said to Lansdale before his return to Vietnam in 1965: “You are the one they want. I wouldn’t be Ed Lansdale for anything. For anything! Not today in Vietnam! Don’t you know how many people

\textsuperscript{51} Lansdale Papers, Box 75.

\textsuperscript{52} Lansdale Papers, Box 76.
want you dead?"⁵³ This quote would have prepared the reader for Lansdale’s celebrity in the United States and Vietnam, but also would have put Lansdale on the defensive from the start by recognizing that he had enemies who wanted to kill him. An alternative first sentence acknowledged the current day situation and the continuation of the Cold War: “We, the people, are in the midst of a long, long war.” Calling on “We, the people…” from the Declaration of Independence would certainly strike a chord of pride and patriotism in any American reader. Another quote was a bit simpler: “It was June 1968.”⁵⁴ He did not use that sentence either to begin his book. In fact, he did not address the year 1968 or his return to Vietnam in 1965 at all, and this was an omission that critics of his memoirs would note.

Three additional first sentences were different adaptations of the same idea, comparing entering war to birth. One was “A man’s entry into war often is as uncomfortably bawdy as his entry into life.”⁵⁵ A second was “A man usually enters a war as he enters life, in ribald fashion, with little dignity.” Thirdly, he wrote “A man usually enters war as he enters life, in a ludicrous fashion.”⁵⁶ After calling entry into war “uncomfortably bawdy,” “ribald,” “with little dignity,” and “ludicrous,” he ultimately decided on “undignified”: “Usually a man goes to war as he enters life—in an undignified manner.”⁵⁷ This was the first sentence that was published in his memoirs.

⁵³ Lansdale Papers, Box 76.

⁵⁴ Lansdale Papers, Box 76.

⁵⁵ Lansdale Papers, Box 76.

⁵⁶ Lansdale Papers, Box 76.

⁵⁷ Lansdale, 1.
He then went on to compare the wars of modern day with those of Hannibal: “Hannibal is famed in history, but reflect on what it must have been like to have been a foot soldier in his army, walking behind all those elephants across the Alps! Modern-day journeys to war, with their human cargos crammed into air, sea, rail, or truck transports are hardly less dignified.”

Drawing connections to Hannibal, known as one of the most talented commanders in history, Lansdale prepared the reader to see the valor and beauty in such an undignified event. Lansdale’s memoirs continued in this fashion, as he glorified and exaggerated personal experiences he had in both the Philippines and Vietnam. The reader could be sure that some stories are embellished, while others may have inaccuracies and omissions. In a letter from an editor of Lansdale’s memoirs, his colleague pointed out some errors: “You describe a number of events which I can neither confirm nor deny, as I have no memory of them. At other times my memory does not agree with your completely.” As someone who worked closely with Lansdale during his time overseas, the editor’s memory did not align with Lansdale’s at all on “a number of events,” indicating that some stories or facts may have been massaged, altered, or altogether fabricated.

Without being a personal acquaintance of Lansdale’s, columnists reviewing Lansdale’s *In the Midst of Wars* did not necessarily buy the stories that Lansdale was selling. They saw the memoirs not as honest personal accounts but tall tales and glorification of personal achievements and experiences. In many cases, *In the Midst of Wars* was pinned up against *The Pentagon Papers* to compare the two Lansdales, and make sense out of which one was in fact the real

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58 Lansdale, 1.

59 Lansdale Papers, Box 75.
Lansdale. In the Saturday Review in April of 1972, Jonathan Mirsky began a review of In the Midst of Wars with the thought: “With the exception of the Pentagon Papers, Edward Geary Lansdale’s memoir could have been the most valuable account of the internationalizing of the Indochinese war.”

First, identifying The Pentagon Papers and In the Midst of Wars as the top two most valuable accounts of the beginnings of the Vietnam War spoke to the celebrity of Edward Lansdale. The way that his reports and his memoirs could tell the entire story of the US involvement in Vietnam spoke to the importance Lansdale had played in symbolizing the image of the US in Vietnam. However, in the way that The Pentagon Papers was still regarded as the most valuable account, Mirsky was forced to put one word against the other, and weigh the value of each side. He did so later in the article:

“Although at the end of In the Midst of Wars Lansdale says that he regrets Diem’s ‘brutal murder,’ he makes no mention of the CIA’s central role in the affair. And he immediately lies again by claiming: ‘I had been shunted from Washington work on Vietnamese problems in 1961 and had been busy with other duties.’ Unfortunately for Lansdale and Harper & Row, the Pentagon Papers reveal him, in 1961, as very busy indeed with precisely such problems…”

In the opinion of Jonathan Mirsky, in the case of The Pentagon Papers versus In the Midst of Wars, Sheehan’s exposé was the reputation that stuck with Lansdale.

In another article from The Washington Post, in a review by Sherwood Dickerman titled “Cold war condottiere,” Dickerman gave the memoirs even less historical credibility than Minksy. Like Minsky, Dickerman identified contradictory information between Lansdale’s

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memoirs and *The Pentagon Papers*, even commenting that Lansdale may have omitted more stories than he included in his memoirs, using his black operations in Hanoi, cited in *The Pentagon Papers*, as an example. Dickerman viewed *In the Midst of Wars* as an old man’s story of younger, more innocent days, rather than an actual account of his service in the Philippines and Vietnam: “Certainly Lansdale’s 386 page book is no comprehensive record of the U.S. involvement in either the Philippines or Vietnam during this period. Neither are there any historical revelations. What does emerge strongly is the personal philosophy and style of America’s best-known ‘nation-builder’ in Southeast Asia…” In addition to criticizing the falseness of Lansdale’s details, he did not count *In the Midst of Wars* as any accurate depiction of the United States in Vietnam at all. On the other hand, in a *Sunday Star* review by Richard Critchfield titled “Was he Col. Hillandale or the Quiet American?” Critchfield did, in fact, consider Lansdale’s memoirs both a story and a true account: “It is an invaluable historical document and an exciting adventure story, and like the author himself, rugged, humorous, compassionate, baffling, naïve, and a little infuriating.” In this quote, Critchfield managed to marry all of the sides of Edward Lansdale into one agreeing sentence. His memoirs did represent his glorified perspective of himself as well as the story of Vietnam in a multifaceted Lansdale style.

Some review columnists supported *In the Midst of Wars* as a legitimate representation of the United States intervention in the Philippines and Vietnam. In a *Washingtonian* article called

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“General Dirty Tricks,” Rose Kushner defends Lansdale against his critics, and even against *The Pentagon Papers*: “Critics of his war role as described in the Pentagon Papers—and perhaps of his book—should take a giant leap backward to 1954…. Sinister as his operations may appear today in the bright light of détente, Lansdale equates his covert activities with those of the Committees of Correspondence and the Committees of Safety that functioned here during the American Revolution.”64 Even contesting his portrayal in *The Pentagon Papers* in his own report, Kushner aligned with Lansdale’s comparison of himself to patriots during the American Revolution, legitimizing his memoirs as an important historical document as well as a manual for US military strategy. In *The Christian Science Monitor*, an article titled “He told us and told us” by Saville Davis asserted that had Americans listened to Lansdale and stood beside him and his views the United States would not be having so many challenges during the Cold War. *In the Midst of Wars* was to serve as a how-to guide, with the occasional moral guidance and stated beliefs from General Lansdale, a folk hero in his own time. It represented America, and addressed the problems the US was facing at the time with concrete solutions. Davis claimed,

> “Edward G. Lansdale’s message is addressed to those of us who are American. He knew what was wrong with the American role in Vietnam before we assumed it…. He told us and told us… and only a few would understand. Today a good number of Americans grasp what he said then. Had we listened…. When the war was young he failed to persuade. His was a virtuoso performance but the resistance was too deeply entrenched. The United States and the American people failed with him…. No one knew—and knows—like Lansdale.”65


His article supported Lansdale as the solution to the problems in Vietnam, and even asserted that the US failed because Lansdale could not persuade the American people to share his views. This credited him with representing the image of US involvement in Vietnam, or at least how it should have been.

Notable in comparing the Edward Lansdale as portrayed in *In the Midst of Wars* and *The Pentagon Papers* is how each work could be used to represent the US in Vietnam as a whole. They present two very different pictures of the same event, like a story told from two sides. *The Pentagon Papers* told through Lansdale’s report about military and government officials misleading the American people, manipulating the Vietnamese, and committing war crimes to gain an advantage in Vietnam. In *In the Midst of Wars*, Lansdale’s words painted a different creation of a country committed to its morals and beliefs while promoting the best interest of the Asian country it was aiding. Although the two sides of the story may not appear to agree, they are married in the way that they portrayed a single person, Edward Lansdale. Understanding the *In the Midst of Wars* versus *The Pentagon Papers* debate not as opposing forces but as a whole viewed from different angles enhances one’s understanding of Edward Lansdale as well as how the US in Vietnam is remembered. In the way that critics leaned towards *The Pentagon Papers* as the most accurate depiction of Lansdale, those critics are just as likely to assert that *The Pentagon Papers* were the most accurate depiction of the US in Vietnam. In Lansdale’s own words, he portrayed himself as a nation involved in a complex, difficult war that could be interpreted from a number of stances.
In Fiction: The Ugly v. The Quiet

Given the many faces of Edward Lansdale and the parallels of his experience with the entirety of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, when it came to writing novels about various controversies in Vietnam, for Graham Greene, William J. Lederer, and Eugene Burdick choosing Lansdale as a character to portray in their novels was a natural choice. His relationship with Magsaysay and Diem, his involvement in the CIA, and his commitment to the US mission in Vietnam all made him a prime candidate to be a character in these authors’ books. The difference between Lederer and Burdick’s *The Ugly American* and Greene’s *The Quiet American* lies in which aspect of the US in Vietnam the author chose to represent. Whereas Lederer chose the heroic efforts in the Philippines to model the shortcomings of the effort in Vietnam, Greene chose the ignorance and naiveté of American idealism in Vietnam. However, in both fictional portrayals, the character based off of Lansdale came to represent an aspect of the United States in Vietnam in some capacity. Once *The Ugly American* and *The Quiet American* hit the public sphere, the two novels would be pinned against each other as opposing views of the war, as well as opposing views of Lansdale. In this way, Lansdale represents, in these two literary pieces, America in Vietnam.

*The Ugly American* describes the “Ragtime Kid,” Colonel Edwin B. Hillandale. Even the name barely masked Edward Lansdale as his inspiration. Lederer devoted a short chapter of his novel to telling the story of the “Ragtime Kid” as an American who befriended Magsaysay and led the Philippines through a fair election. Hillandale is a heroic portrayal of Lansdale, as Lederer painted a picture of an American with the best interests of the Filipino people in mind:
‘The Communists in the hills and the barrios objected; but the other Filipinos outshouted them. They said, ‘Do not tell us lies. We have met and seen and eaten and got drunk and made music with an American. And we like him.’ And 95 per cent of the inhabitants of that province voted for President Magsaysay and his pro-American platform in the 1953 elections. Perhaps it wasn’t the Ragtime Kid who swung them; but if that’s too easy an answer, there is no other.”

Hillandale interacts with the Filipinos. He leads them in song, shares time and experiences with them, and gets to know them on a personal level. It is Hillandale’s relationship with Magsaysay as well as the Filipinos that empowers them to resist Communist insurgency while electing a president the United States supports. Obviously modeled off of Lansdale’s relationship with the “real” Magsaysay, Hillandale is a legendary portrayal of Lansdale, who represents the success of guiding an Asian country away from the evils of Communism and towards the peace and promise of a democratic society.

“The Ragtime Kid” in The Ugly American represented Lederer’s advice for United States foreign policy. Before Lederer explained the history of Colonel Edwin Hillandale, he first described the arrival of Ramon Magsaysay in the fictional country of Sarkhan to advise Ambassador MacWhite on how to proceed with the US efforts in Sarkhan. Similar to the way Lansdale was asked in Vietnam to do as he did in the Philippines, Magsaysay offers Hillandale’s efforts in the Philippines to MacWhite in Sarkhan. Therefore, when MacWhite asks Magsaysay for advice to solve his problems in Sarkhan, Magsaysay points to Hillandale as the solution:

“‘The simple fact is, Mr. Ambassador, that average Americans, in their natural state… are the best ambassadors a country can have…. They are not suspicious, they are eager to share their skills, they are generous…. if you get one, keep him…”

‘Do you know any around?’ MacWhite asked wryly…
‘I do,’ Magsaysay said. ‘The Ragtime Kid—Colonel Hillandale. He can do anything…’”67

This section identifies the core advice that Lederer was offering to the United States Military, as well as the claim the author was making about Vietnam as well as Lansdale. In Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, Jonathan Nashel offered multiple views on how The Ugly American approached Lansdale and the war. First, the novel itself served as a warning, and as criticisms of the course of the war that Lansdale would offer himself: “Written as an explicit warning to Americans that they were losing the Cold War because of their arrogance and ethnocentrism vis-á-vis the people and cultures of the Third World…”68 The ethnocentrism and the failure of American leaders in Vietnam to understand the Vietnamese people were issues Lansdale pointed out throughout the war, and as a person who stood for immersing himself in the foreign culture, a novel that addressed this central problem must have used Lansdale as a model.

In addition, Nashel investigated what Lederer implied when he wrote “the average Americans, in their natural state.” Lederer created a positive image of the “ugly American,” as a normal, uncorrupted American like Lansdale:

“… ‘ugly’ Americans—that is, good citizens who are not afraid to get their hands dirty and work with peasants… The Lansdale-like character in this case is the ‘ugly’ Edwin Hillandale, an American military officer who is unique among the other American bureaucrats in that he works with, listens to, and—most important—respects the nationalistic sentiments of Asians.”69

67 Lederer, 91.
68 Nashel, 174.
69 Nashel, 175.
The “ugly” American was a celebrated character who understood the nature of a “peoples war,” and Lansdale served as a hero in the novel. In *The Ugly American*, Lederer took an aspect of Lansdale’s history as a leader and friend to Magsaysay and the Filipino people to use him as the example of how the United States should treat the Vietnamese. Therefore, the book offered suggestions for the course of foreign policy for the US, and many US officials took notice as the novel identified America’s triumphs abroad while indicating the current mission’s shortcomings. The US in Vietnam was described as a mission fundamentally sound while Lansdale represented the hero who could bring the US to victory in the Cold War, as he had already begun to do so.

Graham Greene viewed both Lansdale and the United States in Vietnam from an entirely different angle. Greene took a cynical approach to US foreign policy he witnessed as a British journalist abroad. In his novel *The Quiet American*, Lansdale is Alden Pyle, the character who the title describes. Graham contested Lederer’s assertion that Lansdale was the down-to-earth, man of the people by calling Pyle the “quiet” American, naïve and ignorant to the damage he and his country causes in Vietnam. Although there is no certainty that Lansdale was the sole inspiration for Pyle, the character Greene created bore a series of resemblances to the CIA agent. For example, Pyle preaches the American ideals and demonstrates blind devotion to democracy in the way Lansdale had: “…he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined… to do good, not to any individual person, but to a country, a continent, a world.”70 Pyle represented the American mission in Vietnam, and the general foreign policy goals of the United States during the Cold War. Like the United States’

idealistic mission, Pyle makes it his duty to uphold democracy and to “do good” in representing his nation abroad. His commitment to providing aid and advice to Vietnam while fighting Communist insurgency tends to make Pyle blind to the damage he creates in Vietnam. This leads the main character, with Graham Greene’s voice behind this assertion, to try to get through to Pyle, representing the United States: “‘I hope to God you know what you are doing there. Oh, I know your motives are good; they always are….I wish sometimes you had a few bad motives; you might understand a little more about human beings. And that applies to your country too, Pyle.’”71 The frustration expressed to Pyle was also a message to the United States. In this way, the character portrayed as Lansdale represented the attitude and failures of the United States as a whole.

The way Pyle is described as the “quiet,” ignorant American is enhanced in the way that “quiet” also comes to mean mysterious for Pyle, or for Lansdale. Although Alden Pyle claims to have been sent to the United States on an economic aid mission, characters in The Quiet American become suspicious of the massive amounts of plastic he imports to Vietnam, and even suspects his association with a different department of the US government:

“‘And plastic isn’t for boys from Boston. Who is Pyle’s chief..?’
‘I have the impression that Mr. Pyle is very much his own master.’
‘What is he? O.S.S.?’
‘The initial letters are not that important.’
‘What can I do…? He’s got to be stopped.’ …
‘What’ll he do next…? How many bombs and dead children can you get a drum of Diolaction?... He comes blundering in, and people have to die for his mistakes.’”72

71 Greene, 173.

72 Greene, 228-229.
Evident in this dialogue is the danger of the quiet, well intentioned American who is unaware of the damage he is causing. He is not an evil or intentionally malicious character, but he is so blinded by his ideals and American values that he fails to see the reality of the situation in Vietnam. Furthermore, his mysterious association with riots and violence taking place in the cities makes him a part of the problem in Vietnam. He is a do-gooder who needs to be stopped, as is apparent in the dialogue. Ultimately, Alden Pyle is murdered by Vietnamese. Greene did not necessarily blame Pyle, Lansdale, or the United States for intentionally causing escalation in Vietnam, but certainly their “Quiet American” qualities led them to that point.

These same “quiet” manners are the death of Alden Pyle: “They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved. He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair’s about, and you gave him money… and said, ‘Go head. Win the East for democracy.’” In this quotation, one could easily replace “He” with “Lansdale” or even in some forms, “the United States of America.” It was the “Quiet American” in Vietnam that was causing so much damage, according to Graham Greene. In the way that Lederer warned the United States of its current inability to connect with the Vietnamese people, Greene warned the United States of its “do-good” attitude and the danger this ignorance was actually causing. However, Greene’s view of the US in Vietnam as well as of Edward Lansdale was entirely cynical and pessimistic compared to those of Lederer. The reaction to The Quiet American was one that asserted Greene was anti-American, or even pro-Communist. Edward Lansdale himself could recall the moment when interacting with Graham Greene that he

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73 Greene, 32.
knew he would become the inspiration for one of his characters someday. Cecil Currey, Lansdale’s biographer, offered Lansdale’s account of his feelings about Pyle in *The Quiet American*:

> “Lansdale was not pleased by Greene’s portrayal of him, and consequently his own view of the British author was an unflattering one…. It was 1954 and two of Lansdale’s friends… had just returned to Saigon from an interview with Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi…. the Dardins invited him to dine with them at the Continental Hotel…. Lansdale arrives, he saw a large group of French offices at the sidewalk terrace and Greene sitting with them. Later… Greene said something in French to his companions and the men began booing Lansdale. The Durdins knew Greene, and Peg stuck out her tongue at him, turned and gave Lansdale a hug…. For some reason Greene banged the table at which he sat. Lansdale smirked and thought, ‘I’m going to get written up someplace as a dirty dog.””

In commenting that he would be written up as a “dirty dog,” Lansdale had already indicated his frustration with the way he was portrayed as Alden Pyle. He added later, “I had the feeling that Greene was anti-American.” The feelings he experienced that night at the Continental Hotel in 1954 were confirmed when he read *The Quiet American*. He had been right on target, in his opinion: he was portrayed as a dirty dog, and Greene was anti-American. In a personal letter to Diem in 1957, Lansdale described *The Quiet American* as “Mr. Greene’s novel of despair.”

Lansdale was well aware of the criticisms Greene made as well as the way the United States and Lansdale himself are portrayed in the novel.

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74 Currey, 197-198.

75 Currey, 198.

76 Lansdale Papers, Box 39.
Edward Lansdale was not the only person to recognize his portrayal as Hillandale and Pyle in *The Ugly American* and *The Quiet American*, respectively. For the rest of his career, he would be described through his experience in the Philippines and Vietnam, but also included would be the complex viewpoints proposed by both Greene and Lederer. A review of Lansdale’s memoir, *In the Midst of Wars*, in an issue of *The Sunday Star* in 1972, was titled “Was He Col. Hillandale or the Quiet American?” These two titles were those which the American people understood. The Hillandale versus Pyle issue was one both Jonathan Nashel and Cecil Currey addressed as a crucial aspect of Lansdale’s life in their biographies of Edward Lansdale. Even when reviewing and analyzing Lansdale’s biography, columnists took note of the *Quiet* and *Ugly* dilemma. In a *New York Times* 1989 article called “The Many Faces of a Colorful Agent,” one journalist identified Lansdale in the introduction of his review as Pyle and Hillandale: “He was the model for several famous fictional characters. One of them was Alden Pyle…. Another was Col. Edwin Barnum Hillandale…”77 This particular columnist viewed Lansdale’s portrayals as negative, causing him to become an even more controversial figure as a fictional character: “His fictional personas… hurt him by making him seem larger than life and thereby further antagonizing people who were already inclined to fear and resent him.”78 Judging based off of the fear and resentment Christopher Lehmann-Haupt described, one can assume that the image of Alden Pyle came to mind. Although one may stake a claim for or against his status as a hero in *The Ugly American*, it was the negative portrayal of Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American* that would create a controversy surrounding his intentions and the inclination for people to despise


him. In the case of *Quiet* versus *Ugly*, the “quiet” portrayal would triumph in the way it successfully engrained the idea of Lansdale as a sneaky, ignorant character in Vietnam. In another review of Cecil B. Currey’s *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American*, *New York Times* columnist Robert Manning also opened his review by identifying Lansdale’s fictional characters in the same way Lehmann-Haupt had. However, Manning concluded the article by calling Lansdale “a true American patriot, one who believed with passion in his country and its ideals and sacrificed much for them.”79 This concluding perspective seemed to marry the celebrated hero of Hillandale with the blindly pro-American and pro-democracy Pyle in the way that patriotism and unwavering devotion to American values was viewed as something to be venerated. In this case, neither * Quiet* nor *Ugly* triumphed over the other.

Although the difference in point of view between Lederer and Greene is clear and evident, one may also recognize that this is a case where two gentlemen were offering opposing accounts of the same story. In the case of Edward Lansdale and the United States in Vietnam, the opposing accounts agreed. Looking at Edward Lansdale’s history and experience in the Philippines and Vietnam outlined in the first two chapters, one can see that Alden Pyle is in fact an accurate depiction of Lansdale. Lansdale’s solid devotion to his the United States and its interests abroad was a defining characteristic of Lansdale as a leader abroad. Furthermore, Lansdale was involved in covert missions that would be considered war crimes, in the way that Pyle is mysterious, and does not have the position he claims to hold to his acquaintances. On the

other hand, Edward Lansdale was a man of the people in many ways. Despite his struggle with learning foreign languages, he always sought to understand a foreign nation before proceeding with occupation. The flaws in American foreign policy Lederer pointed out through the character of Colonel Hillandale were the same points Colonel Lansdale himself preached throughout the Cold War. He was committed to being a man of the people, and to understand not only the institutions of a society but the cultural practices of its people.

Therefore, the opposing fictional Lansdales are not actually in disagreement. It was the decision of each author to choose his vision of Lansdale’s defining characteristics to portray. Lederer chose his belief in understanding the people to promote democracy. Greene chose his involvement in covert missions as well as his undying devotion to United States interests. All of these characteristics are true in the life and experience of Edward Lansdale. Notable in these conclusions is also the comparison between the multifaceted character of Edward Lansdale and the multilayered involvement the US played in the Vietnam War. The fundamental issues both authors indicated, understanding foreign cultures, covert actions, commitment to democracy, and desire to “do good” abroad, are defining characteristics of the Vietnam War itself. One can identify these relationships that connect Pyle and Hillendale to Lansdale, or Pyle and Hillandale to Vietnam, and finally recognize the connection between the fictional portrayal of Lansdale and of the Vietnam War. Ultimately, Lansdale would represent the image of the United States in Vietnam according to these works.
Conclusion

Edward Lansdale’s life and legacy has come to represent the image of the United States in Vietnam. Given his complex and multifaceted persona, the parallels between his life and the course of US foreign policy during his lifetime became ever present. In the beginning of his career, the themes that would follow and define Lansdale for the rest of his career emerged, leading up to his success in a safe and fair election in the Philippines. His celebrity was defined in the Philippines. He was as a patriot committed to US interests and promoting democracy, and was sure to utilize his career in advertising and his fascination with journalism to work to his advantage. His unusual tactics through black operations and psychological warfare made him stand out from the crowd and appear as a master of his own craft. Finally, his desire to understand the Filipino people as well as the Huk enemy to prevent Communist rebellion, while keeping a constant watch on Ramón Magsaysay, made him unique, and remembered as being incredibly successful in nation-building. At the conclusion of his time in the Philippines, he had built both a resume and a persona, both conveying the qualities of an individual who could achieve US goals in Southeast Asia. The means he employed to achieve each of these ends remained as themes throughout his life, and reappeared as his legacy.

Some can interpret Lansdale’s image after his time in Vietnam as far more controversial than after his return home from the Philippines. However, comparing Lansdale’s actions and beliefs during his time in Vietnam with those while in the Philippines, one can see a natural trend or continuation of themes established before arriving in Saigon. Lansdale attempted to recreate the success he had achieved in the Philippines. He befriended Diem as he did Magsaysay, he
studied the Vietnamese and the Vietminh as he did the Filipinos and the Huks, and in both scenarios he remained committed to psychological war strategies as well as American interests. A “new” Lansdale did not emerge during this time period. His status shift from hero and celebrity after the Philippines to infamy and scandal after Vietnam demonstrated not a change in Lansdale, but a change of perspective for those watching the war unfold from home. An explanation for the change in feelings about Lansdale is the difference between the way Americans viewed the Vietnam War as opposed to the US effort in the Philippines. Lansdale became closely associated with the politics of the Vietnam War, and thus his actions in Vietnam seemed far more scandalous than in the Philippines. Furthermore, many label the US involvement in Vietnam a failure, evident in the number of warnings and suggestions Lansdale submitted to the military identifying where they were going wrong in Vietnam. Lansdale’s actions and general character were a continuation from his service before the Vietnam War, and after his time in Vietnam he served as the perfect character to represent the many sides of the US in Vietnam.

The theme of multiple views was exemplified by the opposing accounts of the Vietnam War provided in *The Pentagon Papers* and *In the Midst of Wars*. Ironically, these completely different views of Lansdale and of the war were both direct quotations of Lansdale’s own words. Up until this point in studying Lansdale’s biographical life, one can identify Lansdale as a character of many faces, talents, values, and roles. This notion was complicated by the polarized categorization presented in the two documents. Forgetting all one knew about Lansdale and his complex persona, one was forced to choose which Lansdale was the real Lansdale. Journalists and critics made their own attempts at deciding whether *The Pentagon Papers* or *In the Midst of
Wars was a more reliable source for understanding Lansdale’s story, or understanding America’s story in Vietnam. While some chose the scandal associated with The Pentagon Papers, others favored the heroic idealism conveyed in In the Midst of Wars. It was perhaps this choosing of sides that made Lansdale such a controversial, scandalous figure. How is it possible that the intentions and morals Lansdale wrote in his memoirs could align with the black operations revealed in the New York Times’ exposé? Remembering Lansdale in his early life and in the Philippines, and how Lansdale sought to achieve the same goals in Vietnam, one can see only one Lansdale, rather than feeling the need to choose the most accurate half.

The “versus” debate continued with the release of The Quiet American and The Ugly American, which were published even before The Pentagon Papers and In the Midst of Wars. In considering the reasons why Lansdale was cast as the “American,” either quiet or ugly, in the two novels, one must confront the connections between Lansdale’s life and the aspects of the war in Vietnam. The authors carefully chose Lansdale for their novels to prove a point to the United States about the way the Vietnam War was being handled at that point in time. However, yet again the reader was confronted with two polarized views of the same person, or of the same event. The portrayal of Lansdale as the “American,” or even America itself, in each novel was based on the author’s individual interpretation of Lansdale. Certainly Graham Greene had his own biases as a British journalist, viewing the US causes and goals in Vietnam from an unattached stance. Moreover, recognizing that Lederer and Burdick published their novel two years after Greene’s with a similar title, one could assert that The Ugly American was written purposely to provide a counterargument to The Quiet American. This distinction and opposition was one that could have had the greatest effect on the way the public remembered Edward
Lansdale as well as the Vietnam War. Lansdale would be the first to emphasize the importance of publications such as these would have in creating an image of a person, a people, or a time in history. Therefore, it was these conflicting views that created the debate surrounding Lansdale’s life and career.

Recognizing this notion, one can see a bigger picture by which the decisions of an individual can affect the perception of an entire war or event. For a literary comparison, one can consider Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In the novel, Dorian Gray sells his soul for the guarantee that Dorian’s portrait would age rather than himself. The decision to sell his soul for such a cause leads him to commit sinful acts, and his image in the portrait is aged or disfigured with each of his actions. Dorian’s image serves as a reminder of the damage Dorian has done to his soul with his demonic behavior. In the case of Lansdale, his portrait was a complicated one. Unlike Dorian Gray, Edward Lansdale was not entirely sinful, but was not pure or utterly well intentioned. The withering figure in Dorian Gray’s portrait is comparable to Lansdale’s portrayal in *The Pentagon Papers* or even *The Quiet American*. His deceitful, mischievous persona created his portrait as a leader behind covert black operations or as a naïve American unaware of the damage he caused. On the other hand, his life as a patriotic friend to foreign peoples with US interests at heart created the portrait painted by Lederer in *The Ugly American* and by Lansdale himself in *In the Midst of Wars*. Therefore, to align Lansdale’s image with that of Dorian Gray would not be entirely accurate. Lansdale’s image was far more complex than a portrait of sin and debauchery. Painting a single portrait depicting of all of Lansdale’s qualities would pose an impossible task on any artist.
Lansdale’s image was determined wholly by one’s interpretation. Considering Lansdale’s influence and biographical history as a series of personal decisions, or historical judgments, one can see how decisions are never black and white. In the broad scheme of Lansdale’s life and legacy, the visions of his decisions, his values, and his actions can be rationalized from a number of views. Looking at the perspectives indicated in this thesis proves this notion. Therefore, beyond the story of Edward Lansdale, one can interpret the relationship between Lansdale and his fictional and nonfictional depictions as representative of historical judgments in general. In the same way multiple authors may portray characters by embracing different aspects of Edward Lansdale, any critic, historian, academic, or author can do the same with any historical decision. The Vietnam War is a perfect example of this. A topic which incites passion and strong opinions amongst Americans is the US involvement in Vietnam, yet another decision that could be rationalized in a myriad of ways. These shades of grey between the seemingly black and white decisions are what connect the impact of an individual’s choices with the policies and judgments made by a nation. In this way, Lansdale serves as a model for the power of interpretation in affecting the memory of a person or event.
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