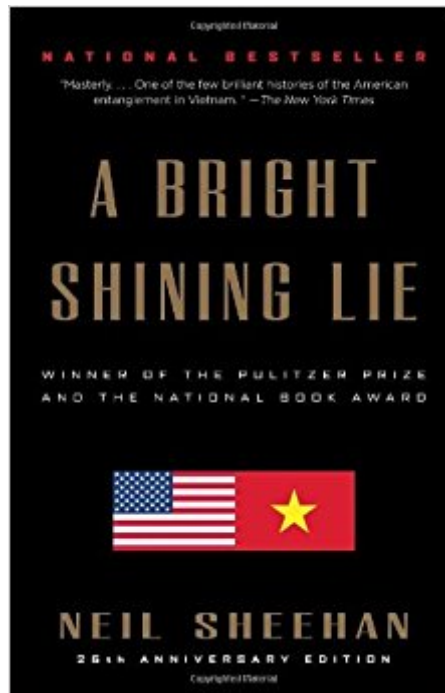


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A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann And America In Vietnam



Synopsis

ONE OF THE MOST ACCLAIMED BOOKS OF OUR TIME25th ANNIVERSARY EDITIONWhen he came to Vietnam in 1962, Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann was the one clear-sighted participant in an enterprise riddled with arrogance and self-deception, a charismatic soldier who put his life and career on the line in an attempt to convince his superiors that the war should be fought another way. By the time he died in 1972, Vann had embraced the follies he once decried. He died believing that the war had been won. In this magisterial book, a monument of history and biography that was awarded the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction, a renowned journalist tells the story of John Vann--"the one irreplaceable American in Vietnam"--and of the tragedy that destroyed a country and squandered so much of America's young manhood and resources.

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Customer Reviews

Having served in Pleiku for two years (4/68-4/70) in the II Corps Interrogation Center as an MACV Team 21 advisor to the ARVN, I turned two days ago to the last third of the book that has been in my library, untouched for years, to read about Vann's time as II Corps Advisor after I had left Pleiku. This was all I planned to read. But once I started I could not put it down --going to sleep was difficult. Mr Sheehan has performed a critical service by exposing how our system operated, and he has been justly recognized for it. I think Mr. Sheehan's readers can confirm what they probably already suspect: That all "great powers" operate like this -- from the beginning of time, and I'm sure to the end. The US was, tragically, no different than the English, Germans, French, Spanish,

Medieval Popes, Chinese, Arabs, Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, you name them at their respective heights. The difference, which I believe Mr. Sheehan was telling us, is that in our relatively free and democratic system there is a greater likelihood that the truth will be communicated in an unvarnished manner, and acted upon, but this did not happen in Vietnam for the many and varied reasons so vividly explained by Mr. Sheehan. What is so incredibly amazing, and I think a tremendous strength in this book, is how close one man, John Paul Vann, got to making the truth crystal clear at a high enough level where it might have done some good at the crucial time just prior to the beginning of the US military buildup. Think about it -- a lowly Light Bird Colonel ready to give the briefing of his life at one of the highest policy levels, and it was stopped only hours before the dam could have been burst. One area I was hoping Mr.

"A Bright Shining Lie" is a masterfully written history of America in Vietnam. Written by Neil Sheehan, a former Southeast Asian correspondent for United Press International (UPI) and later "The New York Times," this book combines a biography of John Paul Vann, considered by some to be ". . . the one irreplaceable American in Vietnam," with a spellbinding narrative of the miscalculations, blunders, and self-deceptions which marked America's decade-plus involvement in Vietnam. John Paul Vann's career in Vietnam spanned a decade, from its beginning in 1962 with Vann as U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel and advisor to the South Vietnamese, to its end in 1972 with his death in a helicopter crash, Vann having become the civilian equivalent of a two-star general. During his decade in Vietnam, Vann was consistently frustrated and angry with the pusillanimous and corrupt performance of South Vietnamese forces and the frequent incompetence of American senior political and military leaders. He repeatedly urged his superiors, through normal channels and in the press, that the U.S. government could not defeat the Communist forces in South Vietnam with its military might alone. The war could only be won by the South Vietnamese with American assistance. That help, Vann recommended, should take the form of facilitating social change and providing military equipment and advice. By the time of his death, however, Vann's views had changed. After the near destruction of the Vietcong during the 1968 Tet offensive, he came to believe that America could indeed achieve a military victory in Vietnam. Sheehan explores every aspect of Vann's life with the keen eye of the best biographers.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills once wrote that the key to meaningful social analysis was to understand the actions of an individual in the context of his or her social situation, to place the person in a historical context so as to better appreciate the aspects of the social environment that motivate the

individual to act and react in a particular way. Thus, to understand the actions of a middle aged German Jew in the context of the 1930s, one must understand the nature of the Nazi society he lived his daily routine within. Here we can observe how brilliantly this principle can be used with journalist Neil Sheehan book, "A Bright Shining Lie", a book in which he not only tells the story of a single man, John Paul Vann, but also explains the history of American involvement in Vietnam. This is a marvelous tale of a modern tragedy, not only for Vann himself, but for the American people and of course, the poor Vietnamese, who had nowhere to run when the bombs started falling. Vann began his involvement with Vietnam as an Army Lt. Colonel. Because of both some personal troubles and his outspoken criticism of the ineffective and unnecessarily cruel way in which the war was being conducted, he was in effect cashiered, and he returned briefly to civilian life back in the United States. Yet Vann couldn't help but be drawn back into this country he had fallen in love with while doing his initial military tour. He found the opportunity to return to Vietnam as a civilian supporting the American military mission, and threw himself into the opportunity with characteristic energy and enthusiasm.

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