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Folder: Writings and research on Vietnam and the Montagnard people: Book reviews: Book review of *Vietnam: the valor and the sorrow* by Thomas Boettcher, circa 1985.

Series: Vietnam War Service.

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Thomas D. Boettcher
Little, Brown and Company
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Boettcher,

I have just finished your work, Vietnam - the Valor and the Sorrow. Congratulations! You have done a remarkably good job of condensing the entire French and American Vietnam experience in 470 pages with many new insights. You must have had to do a lot of cutting and editing to get it all in with so few pages.

I liked especially the way the thread was maintained in the main text with sidelights and insights placed on the outside along with the pictures.

Your discussions about 1. French presence and evils of colonialism; 2. the Air Force role and the POW's; 2. the Khe Sanh engagement; 3. the Peace negotiations; 5. Diem's failure and the origins of his power, his patronage by American Catholics, J.F.K, Mansfield, etc.; 6. the role of the press; 7. J.F.K.'s leadership and how we all were willing to pay any price, etc. ; L.B.J.'s dilemma and how he worked it through when he really wanted to create the Great Society. You have done a great service to us who lived that time by explaining it to the next generation.

I can see you have done your "homework." Chester Cooper's The Lost Crusade , Robert Pisor's End of the Line, The Pentagon Papers, Bernard Fall's works, Jerry Hubbell's and Robinson Risner's books, Stanley Karnow's Vietnam a History , Kissinger's works, Peter Arnett's articles, and many more are in evidence as you write. Even Wil Burchett's ideas are included. The Air Force portion seems to be uniquely your own and a definite contribution to the literature.

I have one criticism to make: Where are the Montagnards? As

you know Chu Van Tan, second in command to Giap as you point out, was a Montagnard. The 316th NVN division along with others at Dien Bien Phu, Tet and Ban Me Thuot was Montagnard. Of the first 44 men with Giap in Dec 22, 1944 more than half were Montagnard. What about the FULRO? As you know, more than half of South Vietnam, North Vietnam and Laos was inhabited and controlled by the Montagnards. You call the highlands "critical" on page 319 but you don't say why except to point out that Dung cut the country in half through the Highlands at the end of the war. You also show that Westmoreland feared the V.C. would do the same earlier and thus sent the 1st Cav to An Khe in 1965. You have only two references in your index to the Montagnards - p. 316 and 347. Yet I find the following references in your text:

p. 145 (picture)

p 175

pp. 184, 185, 186, 189

p 200 (picture)

p221

p 301

p316

p 318 -321

p 323

p 347

p 348 (shows Montagnard bracelets on the soldiers cap for identification and protection.)

pp 469 - 470

The camp at Kham Duc was a Special Forces/ Montagnard camp with SOG assignments, as you know, directly on the border of Laos. (p 220)

Buon Enao was a Montagnard Special Forces camp quite famous in the Highlands and written up by Nat'l Geographic and Charles Simpson

in his Inside the Green Beret. Shakelton was one of the first Special Forces men sent by J.F.K. in 1961 from Okinawa. It was definitely NOT Vietnamese. In fact the Montagnards were rebelling against the South Vietnamese and the Special Forces were trying to wean them from the choice of going with the Viet Cong who offered them autonomy.

(By the way, on page 182, there is a typo where you have Diem stepping out of his Mercedes-Benz in Oct 26, 1982.)

As you may remember Giap was the one who said, "He who holds the Highlands holds the key to victory in Vietnam." Nowhere do you relate the hatred between the highlanders (Montagnards) and the lowlanders, the fact that the highlands were the turf of the Montagnards. You relate that Ho Chi Minh found sanctuary in the Highlands; that the Highlands were "strategic" and "critical"; that Ky had problems with the Montagnards. You never show how the Montagnards contributed to the outcome of the war; how the promise of autonomy to the Montagnards by Ho gave him sanctuary; why the Highlands were critical and strategic; or what Ky's problems were with the Montagnards. (Perhaps space did not permit or you simply didn't know.) It was first Diem's, then Ky's and Thieu's failure to win the Montagnards over that led to the losing of the Highlands to the NVA/ VC. Unlike the American Indian, the Montagnards had a powerful friend in the North Vietnamese and others.

I spent 1967-68 among these Montagnards near Pleiku and found their organization, their dedication to the cause of autonomy, their ability to fight and their loyalty to their word once given very impressive. I have reason to believe they were the vanguard of the army Dung put together in the Highlands in 1975 that started the downfall of the South Vietnam forces. The "Trail of Tears" was largely caused by the Montagnards turning on their tormentors, the South Vietnamese. They were interlopers put there by Diem, Ky and Thieu. They had robbed

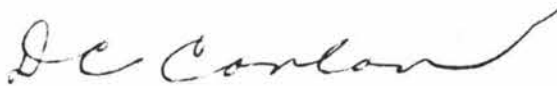
the Montagnards of their ancestral lands and called them "moi" - savage.

I have reason to believe, also, that the army of the FULRO in exile in N.E. Cambodia - 10,000 Montagnard soldiers trained by the Special Forces and led by Y-Bhaum - joined the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot and were eventually eliminated in the blood-bath in Cambodia.

I find it strange that, at this late date, you essentially ignore this story. Perhaps you are ignorant of these facts. If so, I would be delighted to help you out with some facts. In my experience, the reporters you mentioned largely ignored this story for reasons of their own.

Again, I want to congratulate you on your work. It is a real contribution to the growing literature on Vietnam. I hope my criticisms have been constructive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "D C Conlon".

Daniel C. Conlon, M.D.