

A Snub and a War

John T. Correll's brilliant piece of work covers an event that set the course America would follow for decades to come [*"The First Domino," October, p. 54*]. Our involvement in Vietnam still affects military planning today, and politicians are wary of any future involvements that could turn out for us as Vietnam did.

The picture of President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on p. 68 shows the two men who could have kept us out of Vietnam. But neither saw the situation as it really was. On p. 415 of Ted Morgan's book *Valley of Death*, Eisenhower even disavows his own "domino theory."

"Unilateral intervention is off the table," Eisenhower said. Even if it were tried, "we would have to take it to Congress and fight for it like dogs." He also expressed his "hostility to the notion that because we might lose Indochina we would necessarily have to lose the rest of Southeast Asia." So much for the "domino theory" by the man who developed it.

And later, during the Geneva Convention, Dulles turned his back on Zhou Enlai rather than shake hands with him. How many Americans went to their deaths because of the arrogance of that Cold War warrior?

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Mr. Correll's description of the battle is very graphic and was indeed horrific for both sides. The French clearly underestimated the resolve of both the leadership and the soldiers of the Viet Minh communists. General Giap was brilliant. Not mentioned in the article was the fact that many of those artillery pieces that were finally embedded into those mountains got there by boring tunnels from the opposite side, until they got into firing position, looking down into the valley below—an incredible feat. Also not mentioned was the use of delayed-fuse explosive rounds from mortar and artillery. General Giap's effective use of these explosives literally collapsed the walls and ceilings and entombed many of the bases underground facilities, along with men and equipment.

My recollection of our involvement, both during and after the battle of Dien Bien

Phu, was that the US never really left the area. Mr. Correll's article correctly states that once the country was partitioned at the 17th parallel, the Viet Minh communists got the north, and the south went to the last existing monarch and his prime minister. The Geneva Accords called for elections in 1956, but they were never held, due mainly to our interventions. Eventually the south declared independence, and the French left, but the US never did. After the placement of Ngo Dinh Diem as President of South Vietnam, the US became its major ally, and following Diem's visit to the US in 1957, we very slowly and gradually increased our aid and assistance. Our policies toward communism's expansion were very clear, and the "Cold War" was beginning to heat up in Europe and elsewhere around the world. In 1960, after the major declarations of the communists in North Vietnam to reunify the country at all costs, and the follow-on meeting with VP Johnson and Diem, in Saigon, our assistance and aid really started to dramatically increase.

When I first arrived in Southeast Asia in early 1962, our presence was very real. Thailand was getting a lot of our attention due to communist Laotian insurgents crossing the border into that country. Downtown Bangkok was relatively quiet during the week; however, it took on a more "noisy" atmosphere during the weekends, when literally hundreds of US soldiers came on "liberty passes." The "Tent City" at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon was huge. I also flew to other air bases as well, e.g. to Da Nang and Nha Trang, and the US Army and Air Force "advisors" were everywhere. In April 1963, I took part in a four month-long deployment installing air navigational aids at Nha Trang Air Base. A very large US Army hospital was already in place. They could perform major open heart surgery at this hospital, and our wounded "advisors" received excellent care. It was also "home" to the 5th Army Special Forces. It is kinda hard to say exactly "when" the US was actually "drawn into Vietnam," but for me, and for the many thousands of soldiers and airmen who served there during this time frame, it was certainly before 1964.

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On p. 65, the picture caption identifies Dien Bien Phu as being in South Vietnam. If I recall correctly, there was no north or south at that time, it was just Vietnam. Also, if memory serves, Dien Bien Phu would have been in what became North Vietnam. Am I correct?

Bob Roit
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■ *The caption was wrong, but the text of the article had it right. Dien Bien Phu was in the far northwestern part of Tonkin, near the border with Laos. The French had traditionally administered Vietnam as three separate regions in the Indochina Union: Cochinchina in the South, Annam in the middle, and Tonkin in the north. The French made several gestures at forming a nominally independent Vietnam within the Indochina Union but met with marginal success.*

Headquarters for the French Expeditionary Force was in Saigon but headquarters for the Tonkin theater, of which Dien Bien Phu was a part, was at Hanoi. Then and later, "North Vietnam" was a shorthand term rather than the actual name of a country. After partition by the Geneva Accords of 1954, the nation north of the Demilitarized Zone was the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam," but the Americans in Southeast Asia called it North Vietnam.—JOHN T. CORRELL

We Make Both Sides Mad

While both sides of an argument deserve to be heard, they should be at least somewhat rational and backed up with facts. The letter you published from Colonel Sexton [*"Letters: Women Titans," October, p. 10*] was devoid of both. As

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someone who served with some outstanding female airmen I was insulted by his unsubstantiated opinions. Please try to do a better job in showing the other side of an argument or I will look to other sources for military opinion.

Sean M. Mallory
Edinboro, Pa.

Retired Col. Michael Sexton's comments in the October 2013 issue in reference to the article "Women In Combat" [August, p. 30] are dead on: "Air dominance is impacted by more than just aging systems, and one would hope that at least AFA would tackle the truth about manning developments, focus on what makes military sense, and not become a cheerleader for insane policies."

I have been an AFA life member for over 30 years and have noticed, just as Colonel Sexton did, that *Air Force Magazine* rubber stamps questionable USAF policies and seems more concerned with political correctness than actual discussion of the issues. The title "Women in Combat" was simply a segue for a listing of statistical data of women's upward movement in USAF and a platform to trumpet the success of social engineering and affirmative action in the US military.

On p. 38 of the May 2013 issue of *Air Force Magazine* (the "USAF Almanac" issue) is a table titled "Number and

Percentage of Active Duty Airmen by Gender." It provides data that *Air Force Magazine* publishes every year but has never analyzed or acknowledged. The table shows that in 1970 the total number of USAF officers was 129,803, of which 3.6 percent were female. In 1990 the total number of USAF officers was 100,045 of which 13.3 percent were female.

In a 20-year period the total number of USAF officers decreased by 29,758 (23 percent) and yet the percentage of female officers increased by [nearly 200 percent]. Statistically, there is no way such a dramatic change in the officer force could have occurred without external interference. The increase could not happen through recruiting; it had to be done through promotion. Senior USAF leadership would claim that the promotion system is unbiased and yet the data shows that to be false. Berkley vs. The United States proves it to be false.

The 20-year period of 1970 to 1990 is a perfect example of social engineering and affirmative action rampant in the US military. No group can be given preferential treatment without another group being put at a disadvantage. It is a dirty little secret but you are the ones who resurrected it. Shame on you.

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