

design problem.

Like all books in the Osprey Vanguard series, space and layout considerations allow only the briefest explanations and analysis of the subject, but Zaloga does a better job here of covering the design and deployment of U.S. airmobile armour. He touches on the troubled life of the M22 and its only combat deployment via Hamilcar glider during Operation Varsity in 1945, and then examines the evolution of the M56 Scorpion SPAT (Self-Propelled Anti-Tank) that served as the U.S. primary airborne tracked fighting vehicle during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The M56 saw combat service in Vietnam, but was considered a poor choice as the exposed crew was constantly susceptible to small arms fire. The M551 Sheridan soon replaced the M56 in operational service.

As Zaloga rightly points out, the M551 was a vehicle very much representative of the period in which it was conceived. As the United States moved away from its mutually assured destruction defence policies toward a flexible response strategy at the end of the 1950s, an emphasis returned to fielding advanced conventional weapons on the battlefield. This in part explains the rather unique armaments of the Sheridan, which consisted of both traditional 152 mm tank round ammunition as well as a tube-launched 152 mm MGM-51 Shillelagh infrared command-guided missile.

Development and deployment of the M551 was problematic from the beginning. The overall design suffered from many errors, including weak armour protection, the lack of anti-personnel protection armament, a lack of night-fighting capability, and no dozer kit. In addition, the vehicle suffered from chronic electrical malfunctions, forcing crews to jury-rig wiring so that guns would continue to fire despite system failures. In combat, the vehicles were highly vulnerable to rocket-propelled grenade (RPG)-2 and RPG-7 rounds, making them less respected than the older but more robust M48A3 Patton tanks.

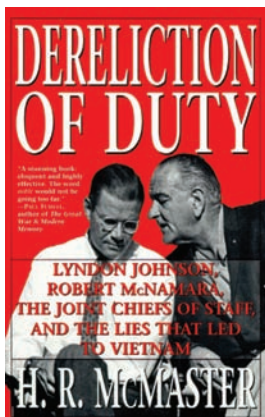
For all its problems, the M551 Sheridan survived its Vietnam experience to be upgraded for further service in Europe, as "VISMOS" (visual modifications) for opposing forces at the National Training Center, and later during Operation Just Cause in Panama, where it played a central role in the only combat parachute drop of tanks in history. The final combat deployment of highly upgraded M551s was during Operation Desert Storm, where the Shillelagh missile was fired in anger for the first, and last, time.

Zaloga's overview of the M551 is a useful examination of a focused land force development problem, and this book is recommended as a case study for those engaged in future combat vehicle concepts and design work.

DERELICTION OF DUTY: LYNDON JOHNSON, ROBERT MCNAMARA, THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE LIES THAT LED TO VIETNAM

MCMASTER, H.R.. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998, paperback, 446 pages, \$19.95, ISBN-10: 006092908.

Second Lieutenant T. Fitzgerald, M.A., LL.B. (2IRRC)



Originally released in 1998, but reprinted in 2008, Brigadier-General McMaster's expanded doctoral dissertation *Dereliction of Duty* is as topical a read today as it was when originally published. In a compelling manner, well researched and sourced, the author carefully develops his two primary theses. First, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for a number of reasons—inter service rivalry, Executive promises of bigger budgets and responsibilities to name but two—abandoned their ethical duty to serve the nation, first by failing to advise President Lyndon Johnson and the Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara of the military unsoundness of McNamara's proposed "graduated pressure" policy. Second, the Vietnam War became increasingly "civilianized" or "domesticized" whereby civilians, primarily the "whiz kid" assistants under McNamara, eschewed military advice, which they knew or cared little about, in

favour of putting the war on a business footing. The author concludes that “the Vietnam War was not lost in the field, nor on the college campuses, nor on the front pages of the *New York Times*, rather, it was lost in Washington almost from the beginning”.

Dereliction of Duty relies upon secondary services, interviews with some of the principal parties and recently declassified material. McMaster, himself a front line armour officer, winner of the Silver Star and an instructor of military history at the Military Academy at West Point, drafts a damning indictment of those Generals and politicians who started a war they knew they could not win, at least not the way they were prepared to resource it. This powerful, but at times repetitious history, examines the period 1963-1966 and focuses on four critical decisions made by President Johnson, which had a profound impact on the administration’s concept of operations for the war: the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution; the February 1965 decision to conduct air strikes in North Vietnam (“Rolling Thunder”); the March 1965 decision to introduce American ground troops into Vietnam, and finally, the decision in July 1965 to introduce substantial American forces without federalizing the National Guard. McMaster writes that Johnson was only interested in Vietnam as its impact affected his “Great Society” domestic legislative agenda.

He neither understood the war he was fighting or the enemy he was confronting, and he made no attempt to do so, relying, increasingly, on those individuals ill-equipped to properly advise him.

McNamara saw the escalating conflict and the consequential American response as a series of “communications” in which the U.S. would “signal” its resolve by graduated pressure. So, following the dubious Tonkin Gulf clashes a series of military strikes on the periphery of Vietnam’s military power was commenced. When that failed to achieve a positive result, namely the removal of Hanoi’s support for the insurgent Viet Minh forces, controlled bombing raids were planned. When North Vietnam did not disavow their military support, Johnson and McNamara reluctantly escalated the U.S. commitment by deploying ground forces, secretly admitting that they were fighting for a stalemate, which would lead to a more favourable future withdrawal. (The Korean War phrase “die for a tie” indicates that this was not a new strategy). What is perhaps the most shocking of all was the gradual politicization of the senior military management. That is to say, rather than resigning, or at minimum arguing against this dubious policy of gradual escalation,¹ the Chiefs abandoned their ethical responsibilities and accommodated themselves to the limitations imposed by the Executives, eventually becoming, as McMaster astutely notes, “the five silent men.”

Dereliction of Duty is replete with a number of sub-themes: the “massaging” of military intelligence to fit with the perceptions of the Secretary of Defence and the President of the United States; the writing of military reports with predetermined conclusions and recommendations; the inability of the military leadership to understand that it was fighting a new kind of war and a new kind of enemy; and finally, the inability and unwillingness by the military to frame clear strategic objectives. In essence, there was no end game planned.

The book is not without its faults. The writing is ponderous at times. The author’s strident language is problematic as it obscures what should have been a completely objective study of an important period in American history. The author’s characterization of many of the book’s principals is overly harsh and subjective. *Dereliction of Duty* does not offer any new ideas, concepts or evidence, and as such, does not contribute to the vast literature of the Vietnam War. It does, however, provide a valuable case study of the intersection of domestic politics and military strategy. It should be on the night stand of all commanders and politicians who believe wars can be fought in absolute isolation from domestic politics.

Endnote

1. In Richard Gabriel’s *The Warrior Way: A Treatise on Military Ethics* (2007), the author develops the thesis that the soldier’s ultimate “duty” is not to his/her superiors but to the state. There are, in fact, the author asserts, limits to obedience. In the face of unethical orders, the soldier has four options: resignation/retirement; request for relief; appeal of order to a higher level of command; and, direct refusal to carry out the order. It is submitted that following a strategy which one knows will result in the unnecessary deaths in one’s command is, at worst unethical, and at best unsound, conduct. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should have resigned.