



# ENDURANCE

*A Parallel History of the  
American Experience in Vietnam -  
the Why, the How, and the  
What of it All*

**(Introduction)**

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# INTRODUCTION

Given the broad spectrum of interests and perspectives about Vietnam and, further, that anything said about the place seems invariably to be heard in the context of the person saying it, there are a number of things about me of which the reader should be aware.

I was born in 1943 on the south shore of Long Island, New York, of Irish Catholic parents and tradition, and raised in a town where there were enough of us doing well as not to suspect that there was anything particularly wrong with this. I went to the parish grammar school, St. Patrick's, no less, and then to a Catholic high school, Chaminade, where "whole men" were developed. From there, it was to Boston College, a Jesuit University, where a degree in Accounting was awarded in 1965, if not wholly earned or appreciated.

On graduation, I ventured to Baghdad, Iraq, and for one academic year taught Economics at Al-Hikma University, a sister Jesuit institution. Leaving Baghdad in June of 1966, graduate studies were begun at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York, yet another Jeppie school, with the intention of imbuing others with the mental contortions of assumption and reality that is the science and discipline of Economics.

That was until I ran into something called Econometrics, that engine of prediction and policy which so tempted its adherents with expectations of the best of all possible worlds — controlled growth in a free market economy. Think about it. Someone should have known better. Anyway, to most of my classmates, Econometrics came hard. To me it came not at all, ending my graduate studies at the Masters level.

It was in my last months at Fordham, however, that I came across an opportunity that was to set the course for the remainder of my life. In June of 1967, with the certainty of graduation in September and an immediate eligibility for the DRAFT, I visited the placement office for contact information on companies to which I might apply after my military service. The idea was to have someone to call when I got back, if I got back. Having explained this to the fellow behind the desk — thirtyish, thin and short — he fixed on me briefly then asked, “You Irish Catholic?”

Now I had never been asked that question before, certainly not in the abrupt, matter-of-fact way he asked it, like some herdsman sorting his keep. Was I some item on a shelf? What business was it of his whether I was an Irish Catholic? And what possible difference could it make, anyway? Taking my silence for assent, he proceeded to announce with some authority that the FBI and the CIA were hiring “...and they *love* Irish Catholics.”

Surprised by this, I cleared my throat in an unconscious gesture to explain my silence and straightened to my full height. I was taller, after all. “That so. And why’s that?”

“Cause they do what they’re told,” was the answer, he now looking away, filing some file.

Insolence compounded by ignorance! My experience with Irish Catholics was and remains to this day that the one thing they do not do is what they were told to do. In fact, this not only marked them as a people, but had been their curse over the ages, and had surely contributed to most, if not all, of their troubles.

However, sensing by his confidence and slight swagger that he had something to offer, something that he was confident I would appreciate and that he was in a position to dispense, I refrained from an instinctive ‘Up yours, shorty!’ and replied only “Really?”

“Yes, really,” he still looking away, then at me, eyes fixed. “Interested?”

“Maybe. How do they pay?”

“By cheque, of course...” He liked the smartness of his answer, offered in a practiced tone, his eyes narrowing now, a slyness to them as he approached the counter, his five feet five inches made taller by his seeming confidence that I would want, indeed crave, what was his to dispense.

“And the perks are *great*...” His pause was practiced,

pointed, making it absolutely clear that to learn the correct answer, I would have to offer an incorrect one and in having been wrong confirm his ascendancy.

“What?” I asked. “A pension? That’s a long way off...”

His eyes rolled in the manner of the comfortably-in-charge, a victorious smirk coming to his lips, loving it, telling me I was off base, way off. There was something beyond retirement, beyond anything I was capable of even imagining...

“Better,” he said, “*much* better.” Fixing on me again, his lips now turned to a smile as he leaned closer over the counter and in the silence of the room mouthed the word *deferment*. Then again, aloud, with a knowing nod of the head, *defer-r-r-ment*, the word coming in a long, low octave befitting its gravity and prospect. Thus assured of my interest, he reached toward a file drawer. “Which shall it be? FBI or...”

“Like to travel,” I said. “Been to Baghdad, you know...”

“The CIA it is then...”

And thus to Washington where I started with the CIA in January 1968, leaving the “Company” in March 1972, with a 19-month tour in Saigon in the interim. Following this, I spent seven years on international affairs at the Treasury Department, including a 15-month tour in Saigon as the Financial Attache.

Another fifteen months at the Overseas Private Investment Corporation primed me for the private sector which I joined in 1979 with the *Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association*, again working on international affairs. Leaving PMA in 1990, I worked as an executive recruiter in the Greater Washington, DC area in the service of associations and non-profit clients until retirement in June 2024.

So much for the early years, my people and education, my likely rooted and embedded biases.

You should know also that I have a knack for striking people as something they are not. For example, people who consider themselves to be of a liberal orientation seem to expect me to be a conservative, and those of conservative inclinations appear to expect that I am a liberal. Apart from my actually being somewhere in between, this may more precisely mark me as being neither so

much as a *contrarian*, an appellation with which any true Irishman would go gladly to his grave.

My life and likely prejudices thus exposed, we can proceed to the matter at hand; *Endurance*. My purpose is to show that we accomplished in Vietnam largely what we had set out to do there, and to explain how what we set out to do was consistent with our national interests, which is to say our values. In fact, it was our values that projected us into the war and provided the context for it.

It will not be claimed that the war was prosecuted without error. It was, in fact, prosecuted for too long, certainly beyond the achievement of our objective. Nor will it be claimed that the war was prosecuted without moral lapses and in many instances wastefully and routinely without regard to common sense, or with the benefit of it.

Indeed, war is the abandonment of the rule of law and peace, of rational process and the instinct to share. It unleashes and licenses the dark side where the sanctity of life falls victim to expediency, obsession, to the reptile's single imperative of *survival*. Atrocities were committed in Vietnam...on both sides. They cannot be dismissed, only forgiven. Yet in forgiveness, they must never be forgotten.

What is claimed is simply that our objective was not only appropriate to the times, it was achieved, though at a far higher price than might have been paid. In this, I have drawn largely from what I know and have come to appreciate about the nature and complexity of our national character and have come to understand regarding its role in an ever evolving world.

I ask only that you listen with your eyes and with your mind open. And remember this: I can't see you, catch your eyes roll or your head nod, nor hear you hiss or see your face brighten in agreement or contort in disdain. And you can't stop or interrupt me, save closing the book.

But I hope you won't. This is not supposed to be a discussion. Discussion is what comes after you have read this. My purpose in writing *Endurance* was to help the reader get their arms around this country's years in Vietnam. *Wudda, cudda* are simply not good enough for what has recently been cited and broadcast as *The War that Changed America*.

Indeed, for the 2.7 million who served in Vietnam, and

for the millions more in the half-of-a-full generation of Americans of the era, Vietnam was perhaps the most challenging, cathartic chapter in their most formative years.

And one last thing about me. For some, the world about us is perfect save the human beings on it and what humankind has done to it. Well, to me, without humanity, the world that we see about us is *meaningless*. Absent human *consciousness*, the beauty and majesty of planet Earth is unknown and ungloried, a blue speck whirling about a minor star amid the gases and debris of dead stars and the near and distant light of new ones.

Humankind is not perfect, nor even perfectible. Indeed, it is just this imperfectability that drives the human heart to make things better, or at least to understand better what cannot be changed.

So, welcome to *ENDURANCE – A Parellel History of the American Experience in Vietnam*. I hope you find it worthy of your time and engagement.

History comes in several sorts,  
that to be celebrated and then that  
to be endured.  
And of that to be endured, there is  
that to be celebrated as endured,  
as in gotten through, as in met  
then and now done.

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To  
the Lost and  
the Living  
of It