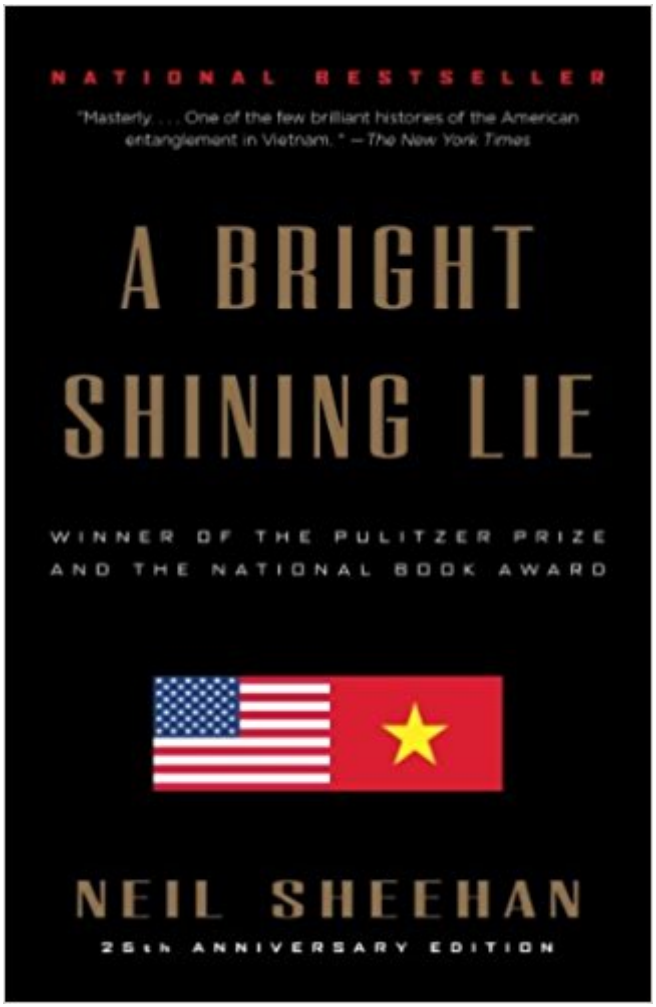
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A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann And America In Vietnam



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Synopsis

Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best nonfiction books of all timeIn this magisterial book, a monument of history and biography that was awarded the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction, renowned journalist Neil Sheehan tells the story of Lieutenant Colonel John Paul VannÃ¢â ¬â œ"the one irreplaceable American in Vietnam"Ã¢â ¬â œand of the tragedy that destroyed that country and the lives of so many Americans.Outspoken and fearless, John Paul Vann arrived in Vietnam in 1962, full of confidence in America's might and right to prevail. A Bright Shining Lie reveals the truth about the war in Vietnam as it unfolded before Vann's eyes: the arrogance and professional corruption of the U.S. military system of the 1960s, the incompetence and venality of the South Vietnamese army, the nightmare of death and destruction that began with the arrival of the American forces. Witnessing the arrogance and self-deception firsthand, Vann put his life and career on the line in an attempt to convince his superiors that the war should be fought another way. But by the time he died in 1972, Vann had embraced the follies he once decried. He went to his grave believing that the war had been won.A haunting and critically acclaimed masterpiece, A Bright Shining Lie is a timeless account of the American experience in VietnamÃ¢â ¬â œa work that is epic in scope, piercing in detail, and told with the keen understanding of a journalist who was actually there. Neil Sheehan' s classic serves as a stunning revelation for all who thought they understood the war.From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

A Bright Shining Lie is a biography of John Paul Vann. The book focuses mainly on his life as an advisor to the South Vietnameese army in the early 60's. In hindsight, he was a visionary of future events that doomed the US military in Vietnam. The book also provides a very interesting historical timeline of the history of Vietnam. Sheehan provides biographical sketches of many of the characters in his book, sometimes a little too long. That is why I gave it only 4 stars instead of five. He also delves quite deeply into Vanns life and exposes "The Bright Shining Lie". The other half of the bright shining lie is the action of the US government from the President (all of them from Truman through Nixon) and all staff, military leaders, congress and even the media. A very thorough and deep analysis of the early days of US involvement in Vietnam.

An excellent book by a correspondent present from the time of advisors to the Diem regime forces during the Kennedy Administration to the time the US forces pulled out. A moving biography of an officer who opposed bombing and shelling of the countryside as a misguided practice that would never defeat the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese regulars that entered the war with the American build-up. Very critical of General Westmoreland and his policies. It made me glad I protested the war as a college student.

I had been in Viet Nam just a short time before John Vann arrived, I didn't stay as long. This book as answered a lot of questions, I have asked myself for the last 55 years. I believe John Vann was correct from the getgo, shame the brass couldn't open there minds to see the handwriting on the war.

Neil Sheehan's book offers a fascinating depiction of the events surrounding the onset and unfolding of the American war in Viet Nam as told from the perspective of Lt. Col. John Paul Vann. Vann was an early proponent of "pacification", a strategy that he hoped would prevent the South Vietnamese from supporting the Viet Cong and the Communist insurgents in the north of the

country. Sheehan describes the reasons for the ultimate failure of this policy in a book that offers not only an insightful analysis but a taut, deeply engrossing narrative. Sheehan also describes how Vann eventually became virtually "intoxicated" with a vision of infallibility and invincibility, a view that led to his ultimate fall. This book was first published in 1988, before our involvement in Iraq, and one wonders if our leaders, political as well as military, had learned anything from our fiasco in Viet Nam. This is a brilliant, deeply-researched book and I highly recommend it to any one interested in our relations to the rest of the world, both past, present and future.

A fascinating study of the Vietnam war through the experience of one participant, and of his life. The story works both as history and biography, with sections covering the development of the war in Vietnam and John Paul Vann’s family history and life up to his transfer to Vietnam. The title applies equally to America’s experiences in the war and Vann’s life. The author took an interesting approach by breaking the story up into sections on Vann’s early war experiences, the history of the war before his arrival, his family and early personal history that are told out of chronological order (for example the introduction is a description of Vann’s funeral). This works well, allowing each section to concentrate on a part of the overall story. The last section brings together all the strands into the last period of Vann’s life and the war.A comment rather than a criticism - this book falls short of being THE comprehensive history of the war because of it’s focus on the war experiences of one man.I had just finished Embers of war by Frederik Logevall and this book is a perfect complement to that volume.

The really interesting thing about "A Bright Shining Lie" is that Neil Sheehan can’t, in the very end, seem to fully work through his own political antipathy towards the work of John Paul Vann in Vietnam. The author is willing to, if not excuse altogether, at least look beyond the lies, the statutory rapes, and the various other immoral acts committed by Vann over the years. In fact, I think that it’s pretty clear that he admired the man. Yet, for reasons that I can only presume are a mix of political and personal, Sheehan begins, especially as his narrative works towards the later part of the 1960’s, to work from the assumption that the war was irrevocably lost by, at the absolute latest, the time of the Tet Offensive and refuses to look critically at that belief, even as it chronicles work by Vann that arguably suggests a contrary point of view.It’s a strange form of myopia in an otherwise-excellent work. I wonder, though I have not researched, at what point Sheehan’s personal feelings turned against the war. Because, editorial commentary aside, the book does a fairly good job of making the case that the adoption of the sort of strategies advocated by Vann during the early

part of his time in Vietnam by the Nixon Administration had created a situation where a free South Vietnam might have been sustained as a fairly low continuing cost. This is especially true if one looks at the situation from the perspective of the late 1980's - or even today. South Vietnam would not have had to survive under siege conditions indefinitely. All other things being equal, it would only have had to make it to 1980 or so before changes in both American foreign policy and the geopolitical structure of Asia would have rendered it safe. It strikes me as genuinely odd that, in assessing the life and work of a man like John Paul Vann - who believed in and gave his life for a free Vietnam - Sheehan never even stops to seriously consider the possibility.I find this omission to be particularly jarring because, otherwise, this is a very fine work and fully deserving of the Pulitzer Prize that was bestowed upon it. Sheehan is a first-rate journalist and the depth of his research, both in the field in Vietnam during the 1960's and throughout the world later, shows on every page.This is a book that I avoided for many years because of Sheehan's evident biases. Yet, having read it, I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the topic of the Vietnam War or the American military during the Cold War, regardless of their exact thoughts on the details of either topic.

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