

**ACCURACY VERSUS DRAMA:
PRESS COVERAGE OF KHE SANH, JANUARY - APRIL 1968**

A Senior Honors Thesis

by
Amy C. Hatcher

Landon B. Lane Memorial Scholar

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications
Washington and Lee University
Lexington, Virginia
May 1991

**ACCURACY VERSUS DRAMA:
PRESS COVERAGE OF KHE SANH, JANUARY-APRIL 1968**

by
Amy C. Hatcher
Landon B. Lane Memorial Scholar

I. Introduction

The media have faced much criticism for the reporting of the Vietnam War. This paper will attempt to show that, in the case of the battle of Khe Sanh, press coverage for the most part reflected official military and government statements, and although an emphasis on the dramatic was present, the slant toward negative or positive was based on official reports.

The paper begins with a description and chronology of the battle itself. A critical inspection of press coverage follows, citing examples from the New York Times to show the relationship between drama and accuracy in stories from and about Khe Sanh.

Special attention will be given to the frequent comparisons of Khe Sanh and Dienbienphu, a 1954 battle disastrous for the French in Indochina, including an examination of the comparisons that occurred in the New York Times and the CBS Evening News.

II. Battle description/chronology¹

This chronology is a basic outline given to provide a background for discussion of news stories generated at Khe Sanh.

The Khe Sanh Combat Base (KSCB), in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam (Quang Tri province), was situated on a plateau surrounded by mountains, overlooking a tributary of the Quang Tri River.

Khe Sanh was in use as early as 1962 as a United States Special Forces outpost,² but this study will focus on the battle period from January 21 to April 8, 1968.

In December 1967, Marine reconnaissance teams reported large North Vietnamese Army (NVA) groups moving into the area and staying. Marine patrols had an increased number of contacts with enemy units. Hill outposts received more sniper fire and the base itself received probes along its perimeter.

Reinforcements were sent to Colonel David Lownds, commanding officer of the 26th Marine Regiment at Khe Sanh, to prepare for the coming enemy attack testified to by a captured NVA lieutenant in early January 1968.

The expected onslaught came on January 21, when KSCB came under heavy rocket, artillery and mortar fire. One of the first rockets fired struck Khe Sanh's main ammunition dump, blowing up 1,500 tons of ammunition. Also that day, one of the hill outposts (Hill 861) was attacked by an NVA battalion. That attack was repulsed.

¹Shore, Moyers S., Capt. *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1969)

All information from this source unless otherwise noted.

²MacDonald, Glenn. *Report or Distort? The Inside Story of the Media's Coverage of the Vietnam War* (New York: Exposition Press, 1973).

Accuracy versus Drama -- 3

The next day, General William Westmoreland began Operation NIAGARA to provide massive air support for Khe Sanh. During the last days of January, supporting forces kept arriving. A Marine battalion took up positions at a rock quarry southwest of KSCB, and the 37th Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Ranger Battalion took up positions in the eastern part of the base. Also, a large number of South Vietnamese were evacuated from the Khe Sanh area to avoid hostile fire.

On January 30, Communist forces launched the nationwide Tet offensive.

Along with heavy shelling of KSCB on February 5, an NVA battalion attacked Hill 861A. 109 NVA and 7 Marines were killed in action.

Two days later, the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei (west of Khe Sanh) was taken by an NVA battalion with PT-76 Soviet-built tanks, the first NVA use of tanks in South Vietnam. The next day, February 8, about 3,000 military and civilian personnel from Lang Vei moved to Khe Sanh. Several hundred refugees were air-evacuated from the base.

Also on February 8, a Marine combat outpost 500 meters west of the Rockpile (a Marine artillery base supporting Khe Sanh) was hit and partially overrun by a reinforced NVA battalion. In a three-hour battle, the NVA was driven from the position. Colonel Lownds decided to abandon the outpost, and the units withdrew to the Rockpile.

On February 10, a Marine C-130 aircraft was hit by enemy fire during approach and crashed after landing at Khe Sanh. Six were killed.

Due to bad weather and heavy enemy fire, the primary means of resupplying the 26th Marines from February to April were paradrops, helicopters and low-altitude extraction systems.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 4

After a heavy mortar and artillery barrage on February 21, an NVA company probed the 37th ARVN Ranger lines but withdrew after a distant firefight. An estimated 25-30 NVA were killed.

The KSCB received its record number of incoming rounds for a single day-- 1,307--on February 23. Enemy trenches first appeared around Khe Sanh on that day as well.

A Marine company on patrol was ambushed south of KSCB on February 25. Twenty-three Marines were killed.

On February 29 and March 1 an estimated enemy regiment maneuvered to attack the ARVN Rangers but failed to reach the defensive wire due to air support. The NVA lost 78 men.

On March 6, a U.S. Air Force C-123 was shot down east of the KSCB runway. Forty-eight U.S. military personnel were killed.

On March 7 large groups of refugees begin filtering into KSCB to be evacuated. ARVN Ranger patrols attacked the enemy trenchline east of the runway on March 8, killing 26 North Vietnamese.

American intelligence noted the withdrawal of major NVA units from the Khe Sanh area on March 15.

The heaviest shelling during March occurred on the 23rd: 1,109 rounds.

A Marine company patrol killed 31 NVA west of the Rockpile on March 24.

Reconnaissance began in preparation for Operation PEGASUS on March 25.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 5

Main objectives of the operation were to reopen Route 9, relieve the pressure on the KSCB and destroy the remaining NVA units in the Khe Sanh area.

On March 30, a Marine company attacked an NVA fortified position south of the KSCB, killing 115 North Vietnamese to the Marine loss of 9.

This day was the end of Operation SCOTLAND I, which began November 1, 1967. Confirmed enemy dead numbered 1,602; Marine dead numbered 205. Estimates placed probable enemy dead between 10,000 and 15,000.

Also on March 30, a diversionary tactic was launched along the Gio Linh coastal plain to divert attention from Ca Lu, where the 1st Marines were preparing for Operation PEGASUS.

PEGASUS began on April 1, with attacks moving west from Ca Lu along Route 9. A joint engineer task force began repairing Route 9 from Ca Lu to Khe Sanh. Brigades of the Army Air Cavalry Division (ACD) began attacking landing zones in the area.

Hill 471 southeast of the Rockpile was taken by the 9th Marines on April 4-5.

On April 6, one company of the 3rd ARVN Airborne Task Force was airlifted to KSCB to link up with the defenders. The 9th Marines on Hill 471, after being relieved by the 2nd Brigade of the 1st ACD, began a sweep northwest to Hill 689. Battalions 2 and 3 of the 26th Marines pushed north of KSCB with one company engaging the enemy and killing 48 NVA.

The combat base at Khe Sanh was officially relieved on April 8. Operation PEGASUS ended on April 15, and on April 18 the 26th Marines withdrew to Dong Ha and Camp Carroll.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 6

President Johnson presented the Presidential Unit Citation to the 26th Marines and their supporting units during a May 23 White House ceremony.

The KSCB was dismantled and abandoned on June 23, although forward fire support bases were maintained in the area. A landing zone at Ca Lu became the base for air mobile operations in the western DMZ area.

III. Examination of Press Coverage

Ralph Blanchard, in a 1969 article, discussed the five basic criticisms that have been leveled at the press in Vietnam. He dismissed four as invalid: position reporting (choosing a position and stressing news which supports that position), uninformed reporting, nonfactual reporting, and "not-on-the-team" reporting. The fifth criticism-- crisis reporting--he was unable to dismiss. Crisis reporting, using Blanchard's definition, is the overplay of sensational, headline events while downplaying or overlooking activities vital to the complete understanding of a situation.³

An important misconception supported by press reports was that Khe Sanh was a typical situation, a microcosm of the war. This engagement was exceptional, but because it was "visible, tangible, and conventional," it was treated as a microcosm.⁴

The typical engagement in Vietnam was a one-day firefight: hard to find and seemingly inconclusive. The press seized upon Khe Sanh as a sustained contest--it was the longest both sides kept troops in one place from 1961 to 1968--and for its dramatic value.⁵

Khe Sanh was nothing if not dramatic. Isolated Marines and ARVN Rangers surrounded by large numbers of concealed enemy troops were bombarded by hidden

³Blanchard, Ralph. "The Newsmen in Vietnam," Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute. 1969 95(2): 51-53.

⁴Bishop, Donald M. "The Press and the Tet Offensive: A Flawed Institution Under Stress," Air University Review. 1978 30(1): 85.

⁵Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1977. p.338.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 8

enemy artillery in the enclosing mountains and dependent on airlift for supply.⁶ The battle generated huge amounts of coverage. It was the subject of 50 percent of Vietnam reports on the CBS Evening News (25 percent of Vietnam reports on all weekday evening television news programs). Khe Sanh was featured in the lead paragraphs and headlines of the New York Times war wrap-ups on 17 of the 60 days of Tet.⁷

After several NVA attempts to take Khe Sanh's outposts in late January and early February, there was only one push at Khe Sanh's main perimeter on February 29 and a few probes. Aerial resupply, reinforcement and casualty evacuation continued throughout the battle despite enemy shelling. Marine losses at Khe Sanh were a fraction of those suffered by American troops elsewhere in Vietnam.⁸

Those are the facts: Khe Sanh was not that significant in the overall picture of the war. It was the only place United States forces were still on the defensive in Vietnam after the first few days of Tet, but by placing such a heavy emphasis on Khe Sanh, many in the media seemed to believe that the North Vietnamese were still "exerting heavy military pressure" in Vietnam after the pressure had eased. Khe Sanh was shown well into March as being in a "state of peril" even though enemy shelling had slackened and U.S. air power had been aided by clearing weather.⁹

However, the press did not create these perspectives for themselves. General

⁶Braestrup, p.338.

⁷Braestrup, p. xxix-xxx.

⁸Braestrup, p.337.

⁹Braestrup, p.337.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 9

Westmoreland and other "senior military officials" had predicted a coming NVA offensive throughout the battle of Khe Sanh. President Johnson was clearly worried about the United States' situation at Khe Sanh, as shown by his requiring the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a document stating that Khe Sanh would be held. The press's main sources--the government and the military--were telling them how important Khe Sanh was, so the reporters responded by emphasizing it in their coverage.

An examination of reports in the New York Times about Khe Sanh supports the following points:

1. Dramatic occurrences received greater emphasis than the day-by-day events that were the actual story of Khe Sanh.
2. Statements from official sources about an imminent offensive at Khe Sanh contributed to the impending-doom stories that were generated at Khe Sanh.

On the first day the battle of Khe Sanh was covered in the New York Times--January 22, 1968--the front-page article contained just such a statement:

American intelligence officers have said privately for several weeks that North Vietnamese troop movements ... pointed to a renewal of fighting in the western end of the demilitarized zone.¹⁰

Later in the same article, Khe Sanh is said to be "vulnerable to infiltration through the wooded ridges surrounding it."¹¹ This is perhaps the first example of the foreboding writing style adopted by reporters to describe Khe Sanh.

¹⁰"18 Marines Killed As Enemy Shells Camp Near Laos," the New York Times, Jan. 22, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹"18 Marines Killed As Enemy Shells Camp Near Laos," the New York Times, Jan. 22, 1968, p. 2.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 10

The next day the New York Times article about Khe Sanh said that "Marine sources quoted Col. David Lownds ... as having said that the enemy had not yet begun in earnest his campaign against Khesanh. An offensive has been forecast for weeks by American intelligence."¹²

In a January 24 article, the Times reported that over 5,000 men had been concentrated at Khe Sanh, "amid indications that one of the major battles of the Vietnam War may be in the offing."¹³ The same story contained reports of body bags being shipped to Khe Sanh: "Few body bags have been needed at Khesanh so far, but they were brought here because of the possibility of a big battle."¹⁴

Later in the article, the first of many "however" statements in the coverage of Khe Sanh occurs. Frequently, items mentioning the high spirits of the Marines or successful Marine action at Khe Sanh were immediately followed by negative statements, as shown in this example: "Marine morale seems high, despite the obvious constriction of Khesanh by a gathering enemy force."¹⁵

In the front-page article about Khe Sanh on January 25:

[A] senior American officer in Saigon was expressing the growing conviction of the high command that the greatest battle of the war would explode at Khe Sanh.

"It may not come until after the Tet (Lunar New Year) truce," he said, "but it'll come."¹⁶

¹²"Allied Force Withdraws Into Khesanh Stronghold," the New York Times, Jan. 23, 1968, p. 2.

¹³"5,000 Men Massed At Khesanh By U.S.," the New York Times, Jan. 24, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁴"5,000 Men Massed At Khesanh By U.S.," the New York Times, Jan. 24, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁵"5,000 Men Massed At Khesanh By U.S.," the New York Times, Jan. 24, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 11

This article also contained the first comparison of Khe Sanh to Dienbienphu, the 1954 battle disastrous to the French in Indochina. An extended examination of that comparison takes place later in this paper, but as related to the discussion here, the Khe Sanh-Dienbienphu comparison can be seen as fulfilling the need to make Khe Sanh as important as the senior military officials seemed to think it was. That comparison occurred often, and it contributed much to the feeling of impending doom in many stories about Khe Sanh.

Another January 25 story said that “the marines here [at Khe Sanh] consider a North Vietnamese attack merely a matter of time.”¹⁷

In the Times’ January 26 Khe Sanh article, the wet weather of the monsoon season provided a negative tone:

The weather at Khesanh will be a continuing problem for many weeks as the marines attempt to hold this post against the extremely large enemy forces that have surrounded it.¹⁸

Also in that article was a description of the air support of the base, calling it “a record effort in any battle for one day,” but discounting it by saying that “the situation at Khesanh, however, is by no means an encouraging one despite such massive air support.”¹⁹

¹⁶“Khesanh Base Hit By Artillery Fire,” the New York Times, January 25, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁷“ ‘Everybody a Little Jumpy’,” the New York Times, Jan. 25, 1968, p. 13.

¹⁸“Khesanh Shelled Under Fog Cover,” the New York Times, Jan. 26, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁹“Khesanh Shelled Under Fog Cover,” the New York Times, Jan. 26, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 12

On January 28, the Times quoted General Westmoreland as saying that 15,000 troops had been shifted to the northern provinces of South Vietnam “to help the Marines there meet a ‘sizable invasion’ by the North Vietnamese.”²⁰ An “official spokesman of the United States command” followed, saying that “the massive invasion up there is more than the Marines can handle.... That’s pretty obvious. They need help.”²¹

In a January 29 article, Khe Sanh is described as having been “under almost constant enemy shelling since ground attacks began last²² Jan. 21 in what officers believe to be a major North Vietnamese offensive in the area.”²³

Another article from the same day titled “Marines at Khesanh Sure a Big Attack Is Near” says that “two North Vietnamese divisions prowl the hills that look over Khesanh. The American command is all but certain that in a matter of days, perhaps sometime after the lunar new year ... they will spring to the attack.”²⁴

²⁰“15,000 U.S. Troops In Vietnam Shift To Help Marines,” the New York Times, Jan. 28, 1968, p. 1.

²¹“15,000 U.S. Troops In Vietnam Shift To Help Marines,” the New York Times, Jan. 28, 1968, p. 1.

²²The word “last” is incorrect here. The January 21 to which the Times refers is in the same year, 1968.

²³“150 Of Foe Killed As Marines Upset Vietnam Ambush,” the New York Times, Jan. 29, 1968, p. 1.

²⁴“Marines at Khesanh Sure a Big Attack Is Near,” the New York Times, Jan. 29, 1968, p. 6.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 13

The same article says that “morale is high but the tension and fatigue increases with every day of waiting for the battle to begin.”²⁵

A January 30 article reports only light shelling in the Khe Sanh area, “where the American command is all but certain that a major North Vietnamese blow will fall in the next few days.”²⁶

In a February 2 article, General Westmoreland again predicted an attack at Khe Sanh:

General Westmoreland said at his news conference yesterday that the enemy’s “main effort” would be a big attack at or near the United States Marine outpost at Khesanh near the borders of Laos and North Vietnam.... “I give him [the NVA] the capability of attacking at any time in the Khesanh area.”²⁷

On February 3, President Johnson joined in the predictions, saying that “the second stage of a long-planned enemy winter-spring offensive was imminent around Khesanh.”²⁸

A February 4 article described a flight stopping at Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh is referred to as a “valley ... where entrenched Marine units wait for North Vietnamese soldiers believed to be massed in the surrounding hills to attack....”²⁹ The Marines

²⁵“Marines at Khesanh Sure a Big Attack Is Near,” the New York Times, Jan. 29, 1968, p. 6.

²⁶“Foe Opens Drive; Truce Cancelled,” the New York Times, Jan. 30, 1968, p. 3.

²⁷“Enemy Toll Soars,” the New York Times, Feb. 2, 1968, p. 12.

²⁸“President Terms U.S. Ready for a Push by Enemy at Khesanh,” the New York Times, Feb. 3, 1968, p. 1.

²⁹“Stop At Khesanh: A Perilous Rescue,” the New York Times, Feb. 4, 1968, p. 4.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 14

were positioned atop a plateau at Khe Sanh, not in a valley.

On February 5, a heavy ground attack by the NVA prompted more speculation:

Enemy [NVA] officers had speculated for weeks that the enemy was preparing for an offensive against the marines at Khesanh.... There was no immediate indication whether the new attack was a prelude to such a drive.³⁰

The description of the actual attack was accurate, but underemphasized:

The North Vietnamese assault teams broke through an outer ring of barbed wire on Hill 861 after an hour and a half of fighting but were driven out in 25 minutes by a determined counterattack.³¹

That sentence was the only description of the attack. The speculation about an enemy offensive, however, received three full paragraphs.

Also on February 5, an article titled "Johnson Said To Get Pledge On Khesanh" appeared. The opening paragraph was as follows:

President Johnson has required each member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a statement declaring that he believes Khesanh ... can be successfully defended, according to the current issue of Time magazine.³²

The obvious fact that President Johnson was concerned about Khesanh added to the importance it was given in press coverage.

The February 7 article about the attack of Lang Vei, a special forces camp three and a half miles west-southwest of Khe Sanh, contained another prediction of an enemy offensive:

³⁰"Enemy Artillery And Ground Force Assault Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 5, 1968, p. 1.

³¹"Enemy Artillery And Ground Force Assault Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 5, 1968, p. 1.

³²"Johnson Said To Get Pledge On Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 5, 1968, p. 14.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 15

Earlier this week Maj. Gen. Philip Davidson, chief of intelligence for the American command, said that the widespread enemy offensive in the South had not deterred him from his view that the heaviest blow would fall along the demilitarized zone and in Quangtri Province [Khe Sanh's province].³³

The article also highlighted the fact that the NVA was using Soviet-made tanks, possibly attempting to emphasize connections between the Soviet Union and North Vietnam.

A follow-up article the next day said:

Military experts believe that the armored strike was one of a series of probing attacks preliminary to the long-awaited assault on Khesanh, where the North Vietnamese are said to be hoping for a climactic victory similar to the one at Dienbienphu in 1954.³⁴

Another February 8 front-page article said that "the attack on the camp may have been a prologue to a major North Vietnamese offensive in the northernmost section of South Vietnam, military sources said."³⁵

Later in the same article:

The United States commander in Vietnam, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, has predicted that the enemy offensive elsewhere in Vietnam will culminate with a major offensive in the northernmost part of South Vietnam.³⁶

³³"Foe, Using Tanks First Time, Mauls Outpost Near DMZ," the New York Times, Feb. 7, 1968, p. 14.

³⁴"Latest Soviet Tanks Used By Enemy Near Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 8, 1968, p. 1.

³⁵"Allied Post Falls To Tank Assault Near Buffer Zone," the New York Times, Feb. 8, 1968, p. 1.

³⁶"Allied Post Falls To Tank Assault Near Buffer Zone," the New York Times, Feb. 8, 1968, p. 14.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 16

On February 9 a front-page article in the Times contained the following:

High military officials said yesterday that the United States was prepared to defend Khesanh at all costs. With the fall of the nearby Special Forces camp at Langvei Wednesday, the military command has re-examined allied strategy in the Khesanh bastion. "We are going to proceed," a high American official said. "We feel we can handle it."³⁷

By stating that Khe Sanh would be defended at all costs, the "high military officials" were, in a sense, predicting an offensive.

In a February 11 article, the following rumor appeared for the first time:

Of somewhat greater importance [than the sighting of Soviet-made planes], according to a senior United States officer, is the possibility that the North Vietnamese have hauled enough steel matting down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to a point in eastern Laos within 100 miles of Khesanh to build a runway that would be used by MIG-21's.³⁸

This was the only mention of the possible, apparently nonexistent North Vietnamese runway in the Times' coverage of Khe Sanh. The story went on to say that the enemy use of MIGs "could have a decisive effect in a final assault on the stronghold."³⁹

The same article contained another "however" statement:

At Khesanh, only scattered shelling was reported at the base and its outpost to the northwest. But this was described by a source at the United States command as "the lull before the storm--and it could begin any minute."⁴⁰

³⁷"56 Marines Die in Battles In Tense Northern Sector," the New York Times, Feb. 9, 1968, p. 1.

³⁸"Jet Bombers Seen At Base In North During U.S. Raids," the New York Times, Feb. 11, 1968, p. 1.

³⁹"Jet Bombers Seen At Base In North During U.S. Raids," the New York Times, Feb. 11, 1968, p. 3.

⁴⁰"Jet Bombers Seen At Base In North During U.S. Raids," the New York Times, Feb. 11, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 17

The February 12 New York Times contained a man-in-the-news-type feature on Colonel Lownds, the commander at Khe Sanh. It was quite an exercise in dramatic writing. The writer of the feature works the predictions of an offensive into his story with no trouble:

When troubled, the Marine colonel sometimes strokes his mustache. He has been doing quite a bit of this lately, for ... he is at the center of what appears to be developing into a major battle of the war in Vietnam. In the steep, wooded hills outside the camp's barbed-wire perimeter, at least two, and possibly four, divisions of North Vietnamese regulars are massing for a major attack, United States intelligence reports say.⁴¹

The feature also tells a story of Colonel Lownds asking an officer what kind of cover they had in his bunker. "One layer of sandbags, sir,' was the answer, which brought a visible shudder from the colonel and an embarrassed silence."⁴²

Inadequate defenses became a popular part of the coverage of Khe Sanh after that story. In fact, the very next day a front-page story focused on Marine defenses. The deck for that article read, "5,000 Sandbags Seem Thin to Marines Crouching at Center of Foe's Target."

This article also contained dramatic descriptions of life at Khe Sanh. It said that, during a shelling,

the small opening to the bunker seemed to be the size of a barn door. The 5,000 sandbags around and over the bunker seemed thin. There were no prayers uttered aloud.... This was life in the V-ring, a marksman's term for the central part of the bullseye.⁴³

⁴¹"Commander at Khesanh: David Edward Lownds," the New York Times, Feb. 12, 1968, p. 4.

⁴²"Commander at Khesanh: David Edward Lownds," the New York Times, Feb. 12, 1968, p. 4.

⁴³"At Khesanh: Life On The Bullseye," the New York Times, Feb. 13, 1968, p. 1.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 18

It also possesses a “however” statement:

Despite heavy casualties, the survivors of the reconnaissance company [whose bunkers were in the “V-ring”], although frightened, are uncowed.

The ending of the article is a touching description of the soldiers’ evening. One Marine was playing a guitar, while the rest sang “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?”

A hard emphasis accompanied the part that went: “Where have all the soldiers gone? To the graveyard every one. Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they ever learn?” Finally the two small bulbs were turned out and the marines struggled toward sleep.⁴⁴

On February 14, a New York Times article quotes Colonel Lownds:

“It’s not a question of whether they will attack, it’s a question of when.”⁴⁵

Later in the article:

With two divisions of North Vietnamese troops steadily closing in on Khesanh for what could be the biggest battle of the war, cleaning rifles, like stringing barbed wire and digging trenches, has become a key to survival. They are also a way of combating the tedium and tension of waiting for the expected attack.... Work is the only possible diversion. The recreation halls have been flattened by the enemy mortar shells that have exploded here every day since Jan. 21. The camp is bleak.⁴⁶

An article from February 16 said that “the embattled base here becomes more desolate with every visit,” and it described the bunkers as “crumbling holes where men

⁴⁴“At Khesanh: Life On The Bullseye,” the New York Times, Feb. 13, 1968, p. 2.

⁴⁵“Marines at Khesanh Clean Rifles and Dig Deeper,” the New York Times, Feb. 14, 1968, p. 2.

⁴⁶“Marines at Khesanh Clean Rifles and Dig Deeper,” the New York Times, Feb. 14, 1968, p. 2.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 19

sleep curled up amid canned rations, cartridges, and still-to-be-filled sandbags.”⁴⁷

In a February 17 article titled “Washington Feels Vietcong Offensive Failed to Gain Maximum Objectives,” Washington officials were

convinced that the enemy “is about to drop the other shoe,” perhaps in the form of a second attack on South Vietnamese cities, and almost certainly a major offensive against the Marine base at Khesanh....⁴⁸

Thus an article meant to focus on the enemy’s failure still contains the prediction of an enemy offensive.

A February 22 article again focuses on the Marine defenses:

Even the most confident marines at the Khesanh camp ... are not boasting about their defenses as they steel themselves against a possible enemy attack that could result in the largest battle of the war. And there is quiet talk among military men, both in and out of the camp, that the trenches are not deep enough, that there are not enough mines and barbed wire on the perimeter, and that, above, all, the bunkers do not have enough overhead protection.⁴⁹

A February 27 story contained the typical prediction:

The enemy forces have been building around Khesanh ... for several months. United States officials have been expecting a large attack aimed at knocking out the Khesanh base and clearing a route for enemy troops to move into South Vietnam’s two northern provinces.

Gen. William C. Westmoreland ... says he sees no reason to believe that the North Vietnamese have changed their plan to attack Khesanh. But he adds that heavy air attacks may force them to modify their strategy.⁵⁰

⁴⁷“Tunnel Hunt at Khesanh,” the New York Times, Feb. 16, 1968, p. 3.

⁴⁸“Washington Feels Vietcong Offensive Failed to Gain Maximum Objectives,” the New York Times, Feb. 17, 1968, p. 2.

⁴⁹“Marines at Khesanh Find Flaws in Their Defenses,” the New York Times, Feb. 22, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁰“Marines’ Patrol Mauled 800 Yards Outside Khesanh,” the New York Times, Feb. 27, 1968, p. 2.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 20

This is the first mention of a possible North Vietnamese strategy change--the first hint that perhaps the predicted offensive was not going to happen.

Another article on the same day restated the prediction: "A major offensive is now believed to be shaping up at Khesanh."⁵¹

A February 29 article describes the Marines at Camp Carroll--a nearby artillery base--as sharing the tension at Khesanh:

Like the United States marines at Khesanh, the troops [at Camp Carroll] ... are awaiting a major attack.⁵²

A March 1 article about the possible changes in command for the forces around Khe Sanh contained the following paragraph:

The politics of the United States military establishment here has evidently complicated the desire of the American commander, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, to make the command structure less diffuse before large North Vietnamese forces attack Khesanh and other allied positions near the 17th parallel.⁵³

Here the enemy offensive is not merely predicted--it is a definite event.

In a March 2 article about an enemy attack on Khe Sanh's perimeter, Colonel Lownds said he "thought this might be the big attack ... but it was just another probe."⁵⁴

⁵¹"Vietcong Indicate Giap Heads Offensive in South," the New York Times, Feb. 27, 1968, p. 3.

⁵²"Marines at Camp Carroll Share Khesanh Tension," the New York Times, Feb. 29, 1968, p. 4.

⁵³"Shift In Command At Khesanh Is Due," the New York Times, March 1, 1968, p. 3.

⁵⁴"Khesanh Attack Repulsed," the New York Times, March 2, 1968, p. 2.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 21

A March 4 article gave yet another reason to worry about the defenses at Khe Sanh: enemy tunnels. The article said that "the possibility that the North Vietnamese ... might tunnel under this two-square-mile plateau has been a constant worry."⁵⁵

One tunnel had been found near the base's perimeter, and the commander of that sector said that the marines were "well-equipped to handle the Communists in a frontal assault, head-on. But these tunnels--they could blow up the wire from underneath, knock out the airstrip, infiltrate men. They worry us."⁵⁶

An article on March 6 discounted the United States' air support of the Khe Sanh base:

Near the demilitarized zone, North Vietnamese troops continued to shell the United States Marine outpost at Khesanh despite steady pounding from American artillery and bombers.⁵⁷

On March 7, the Times reported a change in opinion from the United States command:

The United States military command has revised its opinion and now thinks that an attack on Hue--rather than on the Marine encampment at Khesanh--is the enemy's next objective In the view of the command, supply-and-transportation problems and a steady pounding by American bombs have also weakened the enemy's position around Khesanh ... and have decreased the possibility of an immediate attack.⁵⁸

⁵⁵"Khesanh Marines on Guard for Enemy Tunneling," the New York Times, March 4, 1968, p. 3.

⁵⁶"Khesanh Marines on Guard for Enemy Tunneling," the New York Times, March 4, 1968, p. 3.

⁵⁷"Vietcong Attack City In The Delta; Fighting Is Heavy," the New York Times, March 6, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁸"U.S. Command Sees Hue, Not Khesanh, As Foe's Main Goal," the New York Times, March 7, 1968, p. 1.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 22

Another article on the same day said that the enemy continued to dig closer to the perimeter “despite heavy attack by allied aircraft and artillery,” and it called enemy shelling “unrelenting” at a rate of 100 rounds a day.⁵⁹ As stated previously, the shelling of Khe Sanh was far lighter than, for example, the 1954 battle of Dienbienphu--unrelenting was perhaps a poor choice of words.

On March 11, General Westmoreland’s prediction of an enemy offensive had broadened to include “the two northern provinces of South Vietnam.”⁶⁰

A March 13 article states that “last week a high military official known to reflect the views of the United States command said he believed allied bombing missions had upset the enemy’s schedule for an all-out attack.”⁶¹ This reference was in an article about the United States’ heavy bombing of enemy positions around Khe Sanh.

On March 14, the Times ran a story about bombing the NVA. This article contained a “however” statement, but in reverse--the negative part of the statement was first and was dominated by the positive part. It read:

Despite continuously bad weather that has kept the outpost [Khe Sanh] obscured from the air much of the time, scores of fighter-bombers and larger B-52 bombers have attacked daily in the vicinity of Khesanh in the heaviest sustained bombing in history.⁶²

⁵⁹“U.S. Plane Carrying 49 Downed Near Khesanh,” the New York Times, March 7, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁰“Westmoreland Asserts ‘Very Heavy Fighting’ Is Ahead in 2 Areas,” the New York Times, March 11, 1968, p. 1.

⁶¹“Big Bombs Blast Foe At Khesanh,” the New York Times, March 13, 1968, p.15.

⁶²“Through Heavy Clouds, Bombs Scar Terrain Around Khesanh,” the New York Times, March 14, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 23

On March 18, an article about an attack on Khe Sanh's perimeter said that "there was no indication that it was the start of a long-expected, all-out offensive against the base."⁶³

March 24 reports of heavy shelling of Khe Sanh were surprisingly not accompanied by speculations that it could be the start of the predicted offensive. Instead, high-level military officers in Saigon were reluctant to attach special significance to the unusually heavy shelling of Khesanh. Many officers have said that they believe the North Vietnamese shelling is directly related to the enemy's supply levels.⁶⁴

The same article quoted the belief of "most American commanders" that the fading of monsoon season "makes an all-out attack on the outpost increasingly less likely."⁶⁵

The next day's reports of continued heavy shelling contained a statement from an Army colonel that "the last two days of shelling had not given rise to expectations that the long-awaited assault on the base was imminent" and that the enemy's shelling was giving away its positions to American bombers.⁶⁶

On March 26, an interview with Gen. Leonard F. Chapman, the commandant of the Marine Corps, contained the following paragraph:

⁶³"Foe Hurlled Back At Khesanh Base," the New York Times, March 18, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁴"Khesanh Shelled Heavily By Enemy," the New York Times, March 24, 1968, p. 8.

⁶⁵"Khesanh Shelled Heavily By Enemy," the New York Times, March 24, 1968, p. 8.

⁶⁶"Foe Keeps Up Fire On Khesanh Base," the New York Times, March 25, 1968, p. 1.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 24

General Chapman ... said ... that if the North Vietnamese intended to assault Khesanh with infantry, "they are going to have to hurry because the weather is running out on them."⁶⁷

An April 2 article about enemy troop cuts around Khe Sanh said that:

...there is now some doubt ... that the assault on the Marine camp, long predicted by United States military commanders in South Vietnam, will take place.⁶⁸

An April 4 article about the beginning of Operation Pegasus (see battle chronology) said:

The successful opening of Route 9, in the opinion of most military men here, would almost completely nullify any chance that enemy troops might overrun Khesanh. They also said that if the enemy resisted the offensive, it could mean a conventional type of battle that might cause heavy allied casualties, but even heavier losses to the enemy.⁶⁹

On April 5, an article about the Marines' successful takeover of Hill 471, "southwest of the base and visible from it,"⁷⁰ contained singularly positive descriptions of the effort.

In an April 6 article, the battle of Khe Sanh was declared to be officially over,⁷¹ and coverage on the following days told stories of elated Marines and a quiet base.⁷²

⁶⁷"General Says U.S. Can Hold Khesanh," the New York Times, March 26, 1968, p. 3.

⁶⁸"Foe's Khesanh Force Cut," the New York Times, April 2, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁹"New Allied Drive," the New York Times, April 4, 1968, p. 1.

⁷⁰"Marines Beat Off Attack at Hill As Relief Units Near Khesanh," the New York Times, April 5, 1968, p. 15.

⁷¹"Siege Of Khesanh Declared Lifted; Troops Hunt Foe," the New York Times, April 6, 1968, p. 1.

⁷²"Nearly 1,000 Men Land At Khesanh; Marines Elated," the New York Times, April 7, 1968, p. 1.; "G.I.'s Ready to Relieve Khesanh Post," the New York Times,

Accuracy versus Drama -- 25

As shown by the preceding examples, negative coverage of Khe Sanh occurred as long as military and government officials were predicting a huge enemy offensive in the area. When those officials changed their predictions and finally were doubtful of the offensive, the coverage of Khe Sanh was no longer given a dramatic, foreboding emphasis.

April 8, 1968, p. 4.

IV. Khe Sanh-Dienbienphu Comparison

The battle of Khe Sanh was frequently compared in Western media to the 1954 French defeat at Dienbienphu, also in Indochina.

Similarities did exist: Khe Sanh was surrounded by hills, as was Dienbienphu; the Marines were outnumbered by the enemy, as the French were at Dienbienphu; both places were supplied mainly by air.

However, differences far outweighed the similarities. Dienbienphu was located “at the bottom of a valley while Khe Sanh was situated on a plateau which provided some measure of defensive advantage.”⁷³ Dienbienphu was over 100 miles from friendly forces; Khe Sanh was only 12 miles from U.S. troops at the Rockpile and 17 miles from the Marines at Camp Carroll.⁷⁴ The French could not use Dienbienphu’s airstrip; Khe Sanh’s was active throughout most of the siege.⁷⁵ The French flew only 10,400 missions (6,700 for resupply) while U.S. planes made 40,000 trips to Khe Sanh (12,000 for resupply).⁷⁶ French pilots flew World War II-vintage B-26 Marauders; Americans had F-4 Phantom jets with the ability to carry more than twice the ordnance than the B-26.⁷⁷

⁷³Swearingen, Mark A. “Siege: Forty Days at Khe Sanh,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 1973 57(4) p.25.

⁷⁴Chubb, Oliver Edmund, “Johnson’s Dienbienphu?,” *New Republic* 158 April 6, 1968, p.10.

⁷⁵Braestrup, p.346.

⁷⁶Swearingen, p. 28.

⁷⁷Swearingen, p. 28.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 27

Dienbienphu had no external artillery support; the Rockpile and Camp Carroll had 175-mm guns trained on the North Vietnamese.⁷⁸ An average of 2,000 rounds hit Dienbienphu daily; Khe Sanh's daily average was 150. Khe Sanh's highest recorded daily number of rounds--1,307--fell below Dienbienphu's daily average.⁷⁹

After the initial ground action, the enemy continually assaulted Dienbienphu; Khe Sanh received only four assaults through March 1, then probes.⁸⁰ The wounded could not be evacuated from Dienbienphu and replacement troops had to parachute in; helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft evacuated Khe Sanh's wounded and brought in fresh troops.⁸¹ The French casualties totaled roughly 50 percent of their entire forces; Marine casualties were about 18 percent of the garrison.⁸²

Falling prey to what Peter Braestrup calls the "Dienbienphu syndrome," the American press spent a great deal of time comparing Khe Sanh to Dienbienphu, "partly because the two battles indeed resembled one another superficially and partly because officials were obviously preoccupied with the parallel."⁸³ At a February 1 Pentagon briefing, a general officer outlined the similarities between the two battles;

⁷⁸Braestrup, p. 346.

⁷⁹Braestrup, p.346-7.

⁸⁰Braestrup, p.347.

⁸¹Braestrup, p.347.

⁸²Braestrup, p.347.

⁸³Hammond, William M. *Public Affairs; The Military and the Media, 1962-1968*. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1988) p. 364.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 28

by February 5, President Johnson had required each of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a statement saying Khe Sanh would be held, and Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told reporters that the United States “had no intention of sustaining a defeat such as Dienbienphu at Khe Sanh.”⁸⁴

The Marines were “irritated and annoyed” by reporters’ constant references to Dienbienphu because they had stated the obvious existing differences but the questions were still being asked. Reporters took the reluctance to discuss the analogy to mean that American military leaders were ignorant of the parallels and “walking blindly into a trap,” when the opposite was true. Gen. William C. Westmoreland had spoken with a French commander at Dienbienphu and had ordered a staff study of the 1954 battle which showed that “American advantages in artillery and air support more than compensated for differences in troop strength.” Also, interviews with Khe Sanh veterans have shown that “every officer above the rank of captain was required to read Fall’s study (*Hell in a Very Small Place*) long before the Battle of Khe Sanh was joined.”⁸⁵

However, the inaccuracies and misreporting that took place at Khe Sanh were not the “product of malicious premeditation” on the press’s part. The reporters had also read Fall’s book and that perhaps “sensitized them to look for likenesses.” On a short trip to Khe Sanh, they saw the obvious similarities, such as the bad flying weather and the surrounding mountains, but were not able to see the United States’ artillery strength or the bombing missions flown against the enemy.⁸⁶ For most of the press, “a

⁸⁴Hammond, pp. 360-364.

⁸⁵Rollins, Peter C. “Television’s Vietnam: The Visual Language of Television News,” *Journal of American Culture* 4:2(1981) p.120.

⁸⁶Rollins, p.131.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 29

combination of unusual press load, the information gap, unusual restrictions of movement, and, no less important, the professional urge (or requirement) for quick in-and-out reporting led to highly unfavorable conditions for accurate and impartial first-hand coverage of the Khe Sanh siege. In Saigon and in the United States, speculative excess, fed by ignorance, bloomed as a substitute.”⁸⁷

An examination of the New York Times coverage from January 22 to April 8 revealed 76 articles containing some mention of the battle of Khe Sanh. Eighteen of these, or about 24 percent, contained comparisons to Dienbienphu. Two front-page articles were devoted to the comparison and eight more front-page stories contained the comparison.

The first mention of Dienbienphu came on January 25:

The emerging pattern at Khesanh was strongly reminiscent of the battle of Dienbienphu in 1954, in which a French force of 12,000 men was battered into submission by the Vietminh army commanded by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap. The defeat turned French public opinion against the Indochina war and led to French withdrawal.

Although the American officer said General Giap, now the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, was personally directing the battle preparations from Hanoi, he rejected any comparison of Khesanh to Dienbienphu. However, he acknowledged that the two were similar in that Khesanh, with Route 9 cut in a score of places, is also reinforceable only by air.⁸⁸

This article is typical in that any rejection of the Dienbienphu comparison is immediately followed by some sort of “however” statement partially negating the pre-

⁸⁷Braestrup, p.360.

⁸⁸“Khesanh Base Hit By Artillery Fire,” the New York Times, Jan. 25, 1968, p. 13.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 30

vious rejection. This is also the first statement of General Giap's rumored leadership of NVA troops at Khe Sanh. That fact has never been substantiated.

The Times' Week in Review section of February 4 contained a small article titled "Specter of Dienbienphu." The article mentioned the connection with Khe Sanh and then gave a pithy summation of the French defeat:

The Battle of Dienbienphu, whose specter was revived last week by the near-encirclement of an American force at Khesanh, took place in a valley in what is now North Vietnam, over a six-month period in late 1953 and early 1954.

Gen. Henri Navarre, the French commander, placed 17,000 men at Dienbienphu to draw the Vietminh into a frontal engagement in which he hoped to destroy them through superior firepower.

Confounding the French, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietminh commander, ringed the fortress with artillery, pounded it to rubble, and swamped it with "human wave" attacks. With Dienbienphu's fall on May 7, 1954, the French admitted defeat.⁸⁹

This article was placed in a box within an article questioning the decision to defend Khe Sanh. The surrounding article happens to mention American claims of superior firepower. The smaller article plainly states the French hopes of superior firepower and their ensuing grim defeat, as if to suggest that the United States would be making the same mistake.

The next comparison occurs in a February 5 article, rather buried on page 14, about President Johnson's requiring the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a statement saying Khe Sanh would be held:

"I don't want any damned Dienbienphu," the magazine [Time] quotes Mr. Johnson as telling the Joint Chiefs during a White House discussion of the Khesanh situation. Dienbienphu was the site of a disastrous defeat of French forces by Vietminh insurgents in 1954.⁹⁰

⁸⁹"Specter of Dienbienphu," the New York Times, Feb. 4, 1968, p. 1.

⁹⁰"Johnson Said To Get Pledge On Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 5, 1968, p. 14.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 31

By inference, Khe Sanh could possibly be a “disastrous defeat” for the U.S. forces.

On February 10, the Times ran a front-page comparison headlined “US Girding at Khesanh To Avoid a ‘Dienbienphu’”. Excerpts from it will convey the tone of the article:

The military and political stakes have become so great that President Johnson ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff last month to review plans to defend Khesanh, with instructions not to allow “another Dienbienphu”--the decisive military defeat suffered by the French in 1954.

In the spring 14 years ago, Communist-led Vietminh forces laid siege to the proud French garrison in the valley of Dienbienphu in what is now North Vietnam.

By capturing the entire French position after a two-month battle, they delivered the coup de grace to the French war effort. Within two weeks the French entered peace negotiations and began their withdrawal from all Indochina.

Some United States officials believe that President Ho Chi Minh and Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam’s Defense Minister and master military strategist, may entertain similar hopes for demoralizing Americans at Khesanh, either by seizing the position or inflicting such heavy casualties that the United States would enter negotiations on terms favorable to Hanoi.⁹¹

The defeat of the French is, as usual, painted in strong words: the “proud” French troops, the “coup de grace to the French war effort.” This is followed by a statement from unnamed officials about North Vietnam’s “similar hopes” for Khe Sanh: “demoralizing” the U.S. and prompting peace talks on Hanoi’s terms.

The article goes on to cite parallels between the battles:

The war weariness of the French people 14 years ago is matched by the current domestic dissent among Americans.

⁹¹“U.S. Girding at Khesanh To Avoid a ‘Dienbienphu’,” the New York Times, Feb. 10, 1968, p. 10.

In addition, the French were concerned by the incipient revolt in Algeria, and today the United States must be concerned over tensions in Korea following the seizure of the intelligence ship Pueblo by the North Koreans Jan. 23.

French military commanders then, as American commanders in more recent years, longed for a so-called set-piece battle in which the enemy forces would stand and fight rather than hit and run.

The garrison at Dienbienphu was thus made a tempting target, theoretically strong enough to resist the attack it was supposed to attract, so that the French could inflict heavy casualties on the enemy. Some American officers have spoken of Khesanh in similar terms.

Khesanh is an isolated garrison--as was Dienbienphu--tucked into rugged, jungled mountains and exposed to attack at the end of a long supply line.⁹²

These ominous parallels are followed by a statement from unnamed American military commanders that "the parallels end there and that Khesanh will not become another Dienbienphu."

The article cites the Pentagon's contentions of air supremacy, greater artillery power, better air supply and availability of reserve forces. Had the article stopped there, the comparison would have almost been balanced. But it continues on a more negative level:

It is the massive firepower ... that contributes largely to the confidence of American commanders.... But the enemy forces are impressive.

Like the Vietminh at Dienbienphu, the North Vietnamese are believed to have kept most of their artillery positions secret by withholding their fire from these positions.

At Dienbienphu, the French thought before the battle that they had an artillery advantage. But the enemy, on the first day of heavy combat, demonstrated such superiority that the French artillery commander committed suicide.

American military officers...believe that the allies have an advantage now over an estimated total of 150 enemy guns.⁹³

⁹²"U.S. Girding at Khesanh To Avoid a 'Dienbienphu'," the New York Times, Feb. 10, 1968, p. 10.

⁹³"U.S. Girding at Khesanh To Avoid a 'Dienbienphu'," the New York Times, Feb. 10, 1968, p. 10.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 33

The dramatic story of the French suicide almost completely negates the United States' superior firepower: American officers believe they have an advantage--the French believed they did as well before the start of heavy combat.

American forces, unlike the French in the nineteen-fifties, are estimated to have ample capability to lift new troops into combat. The South Vietnamese Air Force alone is larger than the entire French Air Force in the Indochina War.

But the weather now, as it did then, could help the enemy. For the next month or so fog, which hampers aerial activities is expected to hover over Khesanh in the mornings, usually lifting by afternoon. But if a fog cover settles for several days, American officers acknowledged it could be a serious disadvantage.⁹⁴

Again, an initially positive statement about American strength is turned around--this time by the uncontrollable forces of nature.

A February 11 piece, "Hanoi Warns U.S. of 'Dienbienphu' at Khesanh," contains warnings from the North Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper, Nhan Dan:

...[the paper said that] defeat as disastrous as the French loss at Dienbienphu in 1954 threatened American forces at Khesanh.... President Johnson and his military advisors are "afraid of a Dienbienphu," the paper declared. But "if they think Khesanh is like Dienbienphu, then the battle of Langvei is really a repetition of the battle of Independence Hill (a French strongpoint at Dienbienphu)," Nhan Dan added... "With Independence Hill captured, the French troops had to get ready to raise the white flag," the paper said. "With Langvei razed, how can the Americans hold Khesanh? ...By losing Langvei, the Americans living in Khesanh are cornered even more tightly, in dismay and fear.... The entire country awaits new victorious announcements from you who have inherited and who are considerably developing our Vietnamese nation's tradition of Dienbienphu."⁹⁵

⁹⁴"U.S. Girding at Khesanh To Avoid a 'Dienbienphu'," the New York Times, Feb. 10, 1968, p. 10.

⁹⁵"Hanoi Warns U.S. of 'Dienbienphu' at Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 11, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 34

The article contains no American response to the warnings made by the North Vietnamese newspaper or to the new comparison of the fall of Langvei, an outpost west-southwest of Khe Sanh, to the fall of Independence Hill, called Strongpoint Gabrielle by the French. Military sources say the North Vietnamese “quickly exploited” U.S. pessimism by broadcasting “assurances to the world that the United States faced a defeat as humiliating as Dienbienphu.”⁹⁶

A February 19 article, “Hanoi Troops Set To Attack In Laos,” linked the Laotian attacks to General Giap’s strategy in 1954:

Ominous analogies are being drawn with the situation in 1954, when Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese army commander, coordinated widespread attacks by his troops in Laos with the opening of his victorious battle against the French bastion of Dienbienphu.⁹⁷

A front-page article from February 22 almost let military contradictions of the likenesses between the two battles stand:

...the colonel [Lownds] said the enemy would be making a mistake if he thought of Khesanh as another Dienbienphu, a copy of the fortress that the predecessors of the Vietcong overran in 1954 in the successful campaign to drive the French from Vietnam.

An Army general agreed. “There is no comparison between Khesanh and Dienbienphu,” he said. “We hold hill positions around the camp, and the French did not. We have massive air power, and the French did not. And we have heavy artillery in a position to support the camp--something the French didn’t have.

“But,” he added, “it never hurts to dig deeper.”⁹⁸

With that final sentence, the officer devalued his positive statements about the

⁹⁶Hammond, p.364.

⁹⁷“Hanoi Troops Set To Attack In Laos,” the New York Times, Feb. 19, 1968, p. 1.

⁹⁸“Marines at Khesanh Find Flaws in Their Defenses,” the New York Times, Feb. 22, 1968, p. 10.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 35

strength of Khe Sanh.

A February 27 front-page article reported that North Vietnamese troops had been digging trenches and tunnels as close as 100 yards from the Khe Sanh perimeter:

Trenches and tunnels were used by the Vietminh forces in the war against the French as a way to move troops close to Dienbienphu before the attack on the French bastion. The battle of Dienbienphu brought the defeat of the French forces.⁹⁹

The NVA could have been digging trenches to escape the heavy artillery fire from U.S. forces, but that possibility was passed over in favor of the more popular comparison to Dienbienphu.

Another article from February 27 quoted the French general who supervised defenses at Dienbienphu:

...he was convinced American troops could win at Khesanh. But he warned that they should dig in. "They are incomparably stronger than we were," he said.¹⁰⁰

This article was a generally positive statement.

A third article from February 27, "Vietcong Indicate Giap Heads Offensive in South," came from a North Vietnamese radio broadcast:

The broadcast termed General Giap "a master strategist" who "dares guarantee" to Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the United States commander in Vietnam, that Khesanh will "become another Dienbienphu."¹⁰¹

This article, like the February 11 story from the North Vietnamese newspaper,

⁹⁹"Marines' Patrol Mauled 800 Yards Outside Khesanh," the New York Times, Feb. 27, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰"U.S. Forces Urged to Dig In," the New York Times, Feb. 27, 1968, p. 2.

¹⁰¹"Vietcong Indicate Giap Heads Offensive in South," the New York Times, Feb. 27, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 36

contains no response from the United States.

The fourteenth anniversary of the beginning of the siege of Dienbienphu, March 13, neared, and "newspapers around the world noted the significance of the date."¹⁰² The Times was not excluded. On March 8, another front-page comparison article ran.

The 14th anniversary of the attack on Dienbienphu is fast approaching... Both the methods of the siege [Khe Sanh] and the terrain bear at least some resemblance to Dienbienphu. There are those here who believe that the enemy might attack Khesanh on the anniversary next Wednesday as a symbolic gesture.¹⁰³

The article also quotes from General Giap's book, *People's War, People's Army*, published in 1961.

Dienbienphu was very strong, General Giap wrote. This is something American generals now tend to discount.... "The fortified entrenched camp had quite powerful artillery fire, tanks and air forces. This was another strong point of the enemy. We overcame this difficulty by digging a whole network of trenches that encircled and strangled the entrenched camp, thus creating connections for our men to deploy and move under enemy fire."... Anyone who has been at Khesanh knows that the enemy is digging a monumental system of trenches and firing holes all around the perimeter of the camp. The trenches are steadily encroaching closer and closer to the marines' barbed wire.

In his book, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, the late Bernard Fall describes the shock felt by French troops when Vietminh forces rose up and began their assault from trenches dug to within yards of the French positions at Dienbienphu.¹⁰⁴

Further damage is done to U.S. artillery strength by the quote from Giap telling how he got around the French firepower by digging trenches, followed by the descrip-

¹⁰²MacDonald, p.164.

¹⁰³"Khesanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison," the New York Times, March 8, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴"Khesanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison," the New York Times, March 8, 1968, p. 3.

tion of "steadily encroaching" trenches at Khe Sanh and the dramatic description of the Vietminh rising from their trenches at Dienbienphu.

Shelling began at Dienbienphu in February of 1954. But the strength of the Vietminh guns was concealed until the ground assault began on March 13.

Thereafter, however, the bombardment became intense. The last French aircraft landed and took off from Dienbienphu on March 29.

Except for heavy machine guns, no anti-aircraft weapons have yet been detected around Khesanh. But the same was true at Dienbienphu until after the ground assault began.¹⁰⁵

Now we are given another possible threat: hidden guns which could overpower the American forces.

Next the hill positions are discussed:

Khesanh is supported by Hills 561¹⁰⁶ and 881 South, which overlook the main camp to the northwest. The kind of counterattacks elite French paratroop forces launched--often successfully--to retake fallen or relieve endangered Dienbienphu strongpoints do not seem feasible in the case of the two Khesanh hill positions, which are far away and cannot be reached by tanks.¹⁰⁷

Khe Sanh had five, not two, hill positions that were not endangered or fallen.

The counterattacks that did not seem feasible were not necessary.

The article ends with more questioning of American air power:

The main distinction between Khesanh and Dienbienphu, most observers believe, is in the quantity and quality of American air support.

In his book, however, General Giap speaks of the strong 'casements' into which he dug his Dienbienphu artillery. These proved almost totally immune to French air strikes and artillery, which could not locate the Vietminh guns.

¹⁰⁵"Khesanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison," the New York Times, March 8, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶The number intended is 861: the paper made an error.

¹⁰⁷"Khesanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison," the New York Times, March 8, 1968, p. 3.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 38

General Giap even speaks derisively of air raids on what the French “assumed our gun positions to be.”

American air power is strong, but for more than a month last fall it could not silence relatively small batteries attacking the small battalion-size outpost of Conthien. The weight of the firepower was sufficient but the enemy guns could not be located.

General Giap may also believe that an approach trench system around Khesanh can “strangle” the camp in spite of United States air power.

That there may be some truth to this theory is supported by the fact that .50 caliber machine guns and short-range 60-mm. mortars firing at the airstrip have not been silenced, in spite of daily air strikes that have unloaded as much as 1.3 million pounds of explosives on the Khesanh area in one day.

Also, despite the intensive air strikes, it is still not possible for a Marine company of 150 men to go more than a few hundred yards from their barbed-wire perimeter--indicating that air power has not destroyed the gathering enemy force.¹⁰⁸

A March 12 front-page article discusses the supply problems of both battles:

A major factor in the overrunning in 1954 of the French outpost at Dienbienphu which was in many ways similar to Khe Sanh, was the failure of supplies to reach the defenders. Like the Americans, the French found it almost impossible to land planes under the rain of enemy machine guns, and had to rely on air drops. The materiel often fell into enemy hands after antiaircraft guns were put into use.

Most of the United States Air Force planes that have been dropping supplies into Khesanh have been guided by radar and their delivery has been extremely accurate.¹⁰⁹

In this case, a negative statement about American power is followed by a positive one, leaving the correct impression of the situation. Aerial resupply was not a problem at Khe Sanh, since the base received 161 tons daily, not including the supplies brought by helicopter, compared to Dienbienphu's 100 tons.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸“Khesanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison,” the New York Times, March 8, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹“Airdrops Are Khesanh's Lifeline,” the New York Times, March 12, 1968, p. 15.

¹¹⁰Braestrup, p.347.

A March 13 article (dateline March 12) on the front page, "Big Bombs Blast Foe at Khesanh," featured the anniversary angle again.

...[the heavy bombardment] touched off speculation that the allies wanted to preclude any possibility of an enemy attack there tomorrow.... Tomorrow will be the 14th anniversary of the start of the successful campaign against the French at Dienbienphu, an installation that frequently has been compared with Khesanh, where a force of 6,000 marines is encamped.... Last week a high military official known to reflect the views of the United States command said he believed allied bombing missions had upset the enemy's schedule for an all-out attack.

Since then some military men have speculated that the enemy might be waiting--for psychological reasons--for the anniversary of the start of the Dienbienphu siege.

Still others agree with the command that it is much too early for the enemy to have recovered from the persistent allied bombing. But they add that it would probably please Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, if he was in a position to celebrate the Battle of Dienbienphu with an assault on Khesanh.¹¹¹

After the anniversary passed, references to Dienbienphu grew less frequent and comparisons focused more on the positive side of the picture. They were not always followed by a "however" statement.

In a front-page article from March 14, the deck reads, "Some Voice Objections to a Static Defense but Doubt a Dienbienphu Parallel."

The story opens with a description of the anniversary day as "relatively quiet."¹¹²

Deeper in the article, there is a point-by-point comparison:

The differences between the French fortified position at Dienbienphu, which was finally overrun after a bitter and protracted battle, and Khesanh are pronounced.

¹¹¹"Big Bombs Blast Foe At Khesanh," the New York Times, March 13, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹²"Khesanh Disturbs Many In Marines," the New York Times, March 14, 1968, p. 1.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 40

There were more troops on the French side at Dienbienphu, about 15,100, than there are on the United States and allied side at Khesanh. But about 12,000 of Dienbienphu's garrison were Vietnamese or colonial troops and Foreign Legionnaires, and some of these proved unreliable.

Most of the garrison at Khesanh is composed of marines...¹¹³

Dienbienphu is no longer portrayed as an easy victory for Giap, but a "bitter and protracted battle."

Dienbienphu was 170 miles from the main French position in the north in the Red River Delta.... Khesanh is only about 20 miles from a Marine strongpoint, the Rockpile, and much closer to supporting positions than was Dienbienphu.

The greatest advantage the United States has around Khesanh, compared with the French at Dienbienphu, is the quantity and quality of air support. The United States airpower available, from helicopters to B-52's, dwarfs that available to the French. Moreover, the monsoon season ... is drawing to a close and the longer the enemy waits, the more effective United States airpower will become.

Another United States advantage not enjoyed by the French at Dienbienphu is the massive artillery support. Much of this can be supplied by guns of up to 175 mm. emplaced at Camp Carroll and elsewhere outside the Khe Sanh perimeter.... The availability of mobile reserves is still another advantage, one enjoyed by the French to only a minor degree.¹¹⁴

The article does end on a fairly negative point: the enemy's skill in tunneling and digging trenches and his difficult-to-detect guns and mortars. But for the most part, the Dienbienphu comparison has lost the tone of impending doom.

On March 23 a new development brought old fears to light in "Mobile Guns Imperil Khesanh."

United States officers considered the presence of the 37-mm. antiaircraft guns north and south of Khesanh a serious threat. Guns of this type downed planes trying to supply Dienbienphu in the 1954 defeat of French forces.¹¹⁵

¹¹³"Khesanh Disturbs Many In Marines," the New York Times, March 14, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁴"Khesanh Disturbs Many In Marines," the New York Times, March 14, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁵"Mobile Guns Imperil Khesanh," the New York Times, March 23, 1968, p. 13.

In a March 28 article, "U.S. Officers Say Air Power Makes Khesanh a Disaster for Foe," the comparisons are largely positive:

...there are students of warfare in Vietnam--including military men attached to the Saigon embassies of friendly powers--who remain unconvinced. They point out that aerial bombardment failed to stop the Vietminh from conquering the French at Dienbienphu in 1954, and they add that it is obvious that the bombs have not stopped the enemy around Khesanh.... "They are well dug in and they are masters of camouflage," says a former military officer who is now a diplomat. "You can be sure that many of them are surviving the bombs."

The same official argues, too, that the fact that the enemy has not yet attacked Khesanh does not necessarily mean that the attack has been pre-empted. It could mean, he says, that Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap ... is preparing for the attack slowly just as he did at Dienbienphu.

Many senior American military officers counter that it is wrong to compare Dienbienphu and Khesanh since the French at Dienbienphu had only limited air power.... "Compared with what we are doing to the enemy, the French planes conducted only harassment raids," one Air Force officer said, adding that Mr. Fall concluded in his book [*Hell in a Very Small Place*] that the outcome would have been different had even 100 American planes come to the aid of the French.

"You have to remember that if we have to, we could send many more planes against the enemy at Khesanh," another United States military official said. "We aren't hitting him with all we have by any means."¹¹⁶

This picture of strong American air power is a more accurate one than previous descriptions.

An April 2 front-page article, "Foe's Khesanh Force Cut," contains only a simple statement of the comparison as background.¹¹⁷

An April 4 article, the last incidence of the comparison before the end of the battle, contained another description of the forces as background.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶"U.S. Officers Say Air Power Makes Khesanh a Disaster for Foe," the New York Times, March 28, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁷"Foe's Khesanh Force Cut," the New York Times, April 2, 1968, p. 26.

¹¹⁸"New Allied Drive," the New York Times, April 4, 1968, p. 19.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 42

Khe Sanh was a “difficult and unsatisfactory story for all the media, but even more so for television.”¹¹⁹

Network correspondents rarely reported that the “positions under heaviest pressure were not at Khe Sanh Combat Base itself, but on three of its five hill outposts to the west...television crews could not film the outposts, and instead concentrated on the ‘threat’ and the Dienbienphu image. Even before Tet, in accordance with TV news tradition, they projected the specter of Dienbienphu and emphasized heavy losses.”

From January 31 to March 29, the CBS Evening News featured 29 Khe Sanh stories. Seven of these, about 24 percent, contained references to Dienbienphu.¹²⁰

On the CBS Evening News of January 24, anchorman Walter Cronkite followed a report from Khe Sanh by explaining that it was a “miniature Dienbienphu” and that General Giap was again leading the North Vietnamese.¹²¹

CBS State Department reporter Marvin Kalb on February 7 gave a “depressed” comparison on CBS Radio’s “First-Line Report.”¹²²

The events surrounding Khe Sanh, the isolated American fortress near the DMZ, are, if not the same, then very similar to the events surrounding Dienbienphu.

There is a haunting quality about Dienbienphu, a historical ghost, casting a long shadow across Washington at this time. There are few officials who like

¹¹⁹Braestrup, p.384.

¹²⁰Braestrup, Volume 2, p. 648.

¹²¹Rollins, p.122.

¹²²Braestrup, p. 399.

to discuss it. How could they? It raises doubts, naturally, about the course of American involvement in Vietnam, as though any foreign Occidental power must of necessity get trapped in the same complexities of the Vietnam jungle and end as the French did, in a kind of Dienbienphu, having made the same mistakes, the same miscalculations, the same bad judgment.

This is a deeply depressing thought, but it is one which pops up with terrible frequency these days.¹²³

In a CBS Evening News report broadcast February 15, Peter Kalischer's stand-up at the end of the story mentioned the analogy:

American military commanders say that Khe Sanh is no Dienbienphu, but for the Marines here it's just as badly situated.¹²⁴

CBS's Dienbienphu anniversary story on March 12 featured a "Hanoi film of the communist victory in 1954, followed by Newsweek's Francois Sully," who had covered France's war in Indochina. Army Lt. Gen. William Rosson gave a "dry rebuttal" to Sully's speeches. Don Webster served as mediator.¹²⁵

Sully: The first time I went to Khe Sanh, I was traveling in a small plane. The weather was bad, the airstrip was fogged in, the hills were shrouded with haze. I saw the tiny airstrip...and in the background the rugged mountains of Laos, and I thought to myself, oh, my God, Dienbienphu all over again.

Webster: What mistakes do you think the Marines are making at Khe Sanh based on your experience at Dienbienphu?

Sully: Of course, the first mistake is to be there...And the second mistake is, since you have to be there, since it has been decided that you should be there, is to limit themselves to a defensive position...And third, the third mistake is that they don't reinforce the perimeter strong enough.

Webster: In what ways is Dienbienphu different than Khe Sanh today?

Sully: ...The French had nothing to compare with the air power that we enjoy today...we have artillery within range of that position, and a rather substantial amount of it, whereas the French, of course, over the great distances in-

¹²³"First-Line Report," CBS Radio, Feb. 7, 1968.

¹²⁴CBS Evening News, Feb. 15, 1968.

¹²⁵Braestrup, p.402.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 44

volved had nothing to compare with that.¹²⁶

Although the first comparison is a very dramatic one, the answers to the next two questions are fairly straightforward and unembellished. This is also one of the two statements of the dissimilarities between Khe Sanh and Dienbienphu in all network coverage of Tet.¹²⁷

CBS's March 14 anniversary commentary, by Douglas Edwards, said that, in the absence of enemy action, "the enemy's silence was described as eerie."¹²⁸

On March 22, Harry Reasoner of CBS, after receiving an AP report on 37mm guns around Khe Sanh, renewed the Dienbienphu theme which had, as in newspaper coverage, decreased in frequency in its appearances on network news after the March 14 anniversary of the beginning of the siege of Dienbienphu.¹²⁹

Comparisons can be carried too far, but it was noted that the communists used the same guns to knock down French planes trying to supply the men of Dienbienphu.¹³⁰

The Dienbienphu analogy focused attention on "the worst news: a single plane shot down was translated to mean that supplies for Khe Sanh had been interdicted...ambushed patrols received special color coverage, while well-executed attacks and determined defenses were ignored. Tragedy and disaster were sought; as a result,

¹²⁶CBS Evening News, March 12, 1968.

¹²⁷Braestrup, p.404.

¹²⁸Braestrup, p.403.

¹²⁹Braestrup, pp.392-404.

¹³⁰CBS Evening News, March 22, 1968.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 45

tragedy and disaster were found...Story theme dictated what images should be gathered, and the story was Dienbienphu revisited."¹³¹

¹³¹Rollins, p.130.

V. Conclusion

The media, as shown in numerous examples in this paper, undeniably placed a greater emphasis on drama than on accuracy in the reporting of Khe Sanh. Although accurate reporting of day-to-day events took place, it took a back seat to dramatic predictions of a coming offensive and comparisons to the disastrous battle of Dienbienphu. The guilt for this misplaced emphasis, however, should not rest entirely on the shoulders of the press.

General Westmoreland's frequent statements about an "imminent enemy offensive in the northern provinces"¹³² bear part of the responsibility for making Khe Sanh an irresistible story.

The Johnson administration shares the blame. The obvious concern that Khe Sanh might turn into a Dienbienphu-like disaster was relayed to the press through official statements and leaks. The president was uneasy enough about Khe Sanh to require his Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a paper saying the base would be held, and that was important for the public to know.

The Johnson administration is also responsible, to an extent, for the style of coverage during the Tet offensive. In late 1967, "government officials were manufacturing glowing reports about the war's progress; when the same officials attempted to be more realistic during Tet, they were not believed."¹³³ The press coverage during Tet was only devastating in relation to preceding coverage--military propaganda that made the war effort appear "both minor and successful."¹³⁴ A vicious circle was the result--

¹³²Hammond, p.363.

¹³³Rollins, pp.131-132.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 47

military officers told reporters that the war was going well, reporters checked sources and found that things were not that wonderful and wrote a series of “downbeat” stories, the military questioned the motives and loyalties of the reporters, and the reporters dug harder for stories of impending doom while many stories of actual progress were ignored.¹³⁵

The press was largely dependent on government sources for war information but no longer fully believed them. So “upbeat messages were presented in tones that highlighted the media’s doubt as to their accuracy,” resulting in a “strange style of reporting and editorializing that presented ‘facts’ in a way that said ‘these are not facts.’”¹³⁶ A clear-cut example of that style is a New York Times article stating that the “latest propaganda line [is] that we are now seeing the enemy’s ‘last gasp.’”¹³⁷

Another reason Khe Sanh was an irresistible story is that it was the only large-unit combat story remaining after Hue (a battle of the Tet offensive) was over, and it possessed “just the sort of action and drama editors had always deemed attractive to American audiences.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴Carpini, Michael X. Delli, “United States Media Coverage of the Vietnam Conflict in 1968,” *The Vietnam Era; Media and Popular Culture in the United States and Vietnam*. (London: Pluto Press, 1989) p. 56.

¹³⁵MacDonald, p.15.

¹³⁶Carpini, p. 49.

¹³⁷New York Times, February 2, 1968.

¹³⁸Hammond, p. 364.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 48

Most sources agree that the military and the government share the blame with the press for the misreporting that came from the Vietnam War. Military sources, with the exception of General Westmoreland's writings, voluntarily shoulder their portion. For example, Lt. Commander K.C. Jacobsen, who served in the Vietnam War, writes that "we cannot slay the messenger who brings bad news, nor can we attempt to suppress or distort the news, no matter how unfavorable it may be to us."¹³⁹ He also says that "deception of the news media by the military ... leads only to a progressive erosion of our credibility and, more important, our honor."¹⁴⁰

Press coverage of the Vietnam War was shaped by many considerations, according to Gans' *Deciding What's News*. Product considerations led to the fact that "once all news media had chosen to emphasize dramatic action, they were locked in by competitive considerations and no one was prepared to depart from the standard formula."¹⁴¹

Organizational considerations complemented the skew toward official sources "by the practice of top producers and editors placing their faith in the optimistic reports about the war from senior Washington reporters."¹⁴²

Source considerations, according to Gans, are of prime significance. The tendency to favor official sources occurred because those sources had the power "both to supply the information that makes national news and to exert pressure."¹⁴³ Powerful

¹³⁹Jacobsen, K.C., "Television and the War: The Small Picture," Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute, 1975 101(3) p. 60.

¹⁴⁰Jacobsen, p. 60.

¹⁴¹Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News*. New York: Random House, 1979, p. 280.

¹⁴²Gans, p. 280.

Accuracy versus Drama -- 49

sources are also “the most easily and quickly available, as well as most reliable and productive, source of news. The most powerful sources are also the most efficient. This adds further to their power, for efficiency is the other major factor that explains the news.”¹⁴⁴

Gans also says that dramatic news is efficient, and that “the need for efficiency and the choice of efficient methods pervade story selection and production.”¹⁴⁵

Thus the nature of the news industry itself led to the emphasis, however misplaced, on drama in news about the Vietnam War.

¹⁴³Gans, p. 282.

¹⁴⁴Gans, p. 282.

¹⁴⁵Gans, p. 282.

Bibliography

- Bishop, Donald M. "The Press and the Tet Offensive: A Flawed Institution Under Stress." *Air University Review* 30.1 (1978): 84-88.
- Blanchard, Ralph. "The Newsmen in Vietnam." *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 95.2 (1969): 50-57.
- Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1977.
- Carpini, Michael X. "United States Media Coverage of the Vietnam Conflict in 1968." *The Vietnam Era; Media and Popular Culture in the United States and Vietnam*. Ed. Michael Klein. London: Pluto Press, 1989.
- Chubb, Oliver Edmund. "Johnson's Dienbienphu?" *New Republic* April 6, 1968: 9-11.
- Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News*. New York: Random House, 1979.
- Hammond, William M. *Public Affairs; The Military and the Media, 1962-1968*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1988.
- Jacobsen, K.C. "Television and the War: The Small Picture." *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 101.3 (1975): 54-60.
- MacDonald, Glenn. *Report or Distort? The Inside Story of the Media's Coverage of the Vietnam War*. New York: Exposition Press, 1973.
- Rollins, Peter C. "Television's Vietnam: The Visual Language of Television News." *Journal of American Culture* 4.2 (1981): 114-135.
- Shore, Moyers S., II. *The Battle for Khe Sanh*. Washington, D.C.: United States Marine Corps, 1969.
- Swearengen, Mark A. "Siege: Forty Days at Khe Sanh." *Marine Corps Gazette* 57.4 (1973): 23-28.

Appendix Other Sources Consulted

- Backlund, Donald R. "Stalingrad and Dien Bien Phu: Two Cases of Failure in Strategic Resupply." *Aerospace History* 17.2-3 (1970): 60-68.
- Bailey, George. "Television War: Trends in Network Coverage of Vietnam 1965-1970." *Journal of Broadcasting* 20 (1976): 147-158.
- Beavers, Roy L. "An Absence of Accountability." *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 102.1 (1976): 18-23.
- Blumberg, Nathan B. "Defaulting press and Vietnam." *Commonweal* 88 (July 12, 1968): 457.
- Boylan, James. "Newspeople." *Wilson Quarterly* 6.5 (1982): 71-85.
- Browne, Don R. "An American Image Presented Abroad by United States Television." *Journalism Quarterly* 45 (Summer 1968): 307-316.
- Cahill, Jack. *If You Don't Like the War, Switch the Damn Thing Off*. Don Mills, Ontario: Musson Book Company, 1980.
- Culbert, David. "Television's Vietnam and Historical Revisionism in the United States." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 8.3 (1988): 253-267.
- Elegant, Robert. "How to Lose A War: Reflections of a Foreign Correspondent." *Encounter* 57.2 (1981): 73-90.
- Ewing, Michael. *Khe Sanh*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987.
- Fall, Bernard B. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1967.
- Fox, Tom. "The Word From the Front: The Unreported War, Army vs. the Press." *Commonweal* 90 (August 8, 1969): 485-486.
- Frank, Robert S. "The IAS Case Against CBS." *Journal of Communication* 25.4 (1975): 186-189.
- Guerra, David Michael. *Network Television News Policy and the Nixon Administration, A Comparison*. Brooklyn, New York: D. Guerra.
- Hammel, Eric. *Khe Sanh: Siege In The Clouds, An Oral History*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1989.
- Hammond, Keith. "Dien Bien Phu: A Study in Courage." *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 111.1 (1981): 88-95.

- Hammond, William M. "The Press in Vietnam as Agent Of Defeat: A Critical Examination." *Reviews in American History* 17.2 (1989): 312-323.
- Hasek, John. "Military Isolation and the Media, The Vietnam Case." *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 115.4 (1985): 418-428.
- Hofstetter, C. Rochard. "Watching Television News and Supporting the Military: A Surprising Impact of the News Media." *Armed Forces and Society* 5.2 (1979): 261-269.
- Johnson, DeWayne B. "Vietnam: Report Card on the Press Corps at War." *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (Spring 1969): 9-19.
- Kaplan, H. J. "With the American Press in Vietnam." *Commentary* 73.5 (1982): 42-49.
- Kinnard, Douglas. "Vietnam Reconsidered: An Attitudinal Survey of United States Army General Officers." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 39.4 (1975-1976): 445-456.
- Knightley, Phillip. *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
- Kopkind, Andrew. "Press at War." *Ramparts* 13 (August 1975): 34.
- Lefever, Ernest W. "CBS and National Defense, 1972-1973." *Journal of Communication* 25.4 (1975): 181-185.
- Lewy, Guenter. *America in Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Lichty, Lawrence, and Murray Fromson. "Comparing Notes on Television's Coverage of the War." *Center Magazine* 12.5 (1972): 42-46.
- Lyons, Paul. "Vietnam: Ambiguous Reconciliation." *Socialist Review* 18.2 (April-June 1988): 55-72.
- MacDonald, J. Fred. *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam*. New York: Praeger, 1985.
- Mandelbaum, Michael. "Vietnam: The Television War." *Parameters* 13.1 (1983): 89-97.
- McNulty, Thomas M. "Vietnam Specials: Policy and Content." *Journal of Communication* 25.4 (1975): 173-180.
- Moody, Randall J. "The Armed Forces Broadcast News System: Vietnam Version." *Journalism Quarterly* 47.1 (1970): 27-30.
- Mungham, Geoffrey. "The Eternal Triangle: Relations between Governments, Armed Services, and the Media." *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 115.1 (1985): 7-21.

- Parham, David A. "Siege at Dien Bien Phu." *Conflict* 6 (1963): 4-27.
- Porter, D. Gareth. "How Scholars Lie." *Worldview* 16.12 (1973): 22-27.
- Powers, Thomas. "Press: Reporting on Indochina." *Commonweal* 102 (May 9, 1975): 112.
- Powers, Thomas. "Press: Neglected Stories." *Commonweal* 103 (November 19, 1976): 752.
- Purvis, Hoyt. "Vietnam Re-viewed; The Media and Selective History." *Commonweal* 112 (May 31, 1985): 325-326.
- Radvanyi, Janos. "Dien Bien Phu: Thirty Years After." *Parameters* 15.2 (1985): 63-68.
- Sarkesian, Sam C. "Soldiers, Scholars, and the Media." *Parameters* 17.3 (1987): 77-87.
- Schechter, Danny. "Reporter in Saigon: Being Briefed." *Ramparts* 13 (April 1975): 13.
- Shayon, R. L. "Cool Medium; Television Handling." *Saturday Review* 52 (November 8, 1969): 41.
- Sheehan, Neil. *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.
- Springer, Claudia. "Vietnam: A Television History and the Equivocal Nature of Objectivity." *Wide Angle: A Film Quarterly of Theory, Criticism, and Practice* 7.4 (1985): 53-60.
- Stein, Robert. *Media Power: Who Is Shaping Your Picture of the World?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.
- Sussman, Leonard R. "The Imitation of America." *Freedom at Issue* 27 (1974): 3-7.
- Turnbull, G. S., Jr. "Reporting of the War in Indochina: A Critique." *Journalism Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1957): 87-89.
- Turner, Kathleen J. *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Venanzi, Gerald S. "Democracy and Protracted War: The Impact of Television." *Air University Review* 34.2 (1983): 58-72.
- Warner, Denis. "Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu." *The Reporter* 38 (february 22, 1968): 16.

Westmoreland, William C. "Vietnam in Perspective." *Military Review* 59.1 (1979): 34-43.

Wright, James D. "Life, Time, and the Fortunes of War." *Trans-action* 9.3 (1972): 42-52.

Wyatt, Clarence R. "At the Cannon's Mouth: The American Press and the Vietnam War." *Journalism History* 13.3-4 (1986): 104-113.

_____. "Debugging the VC: Associated Press and New York Times Reports." *National Review* 19 (September 19, 1967): 1002.