



The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors In North Vietnam

Richard H. Shultz Jr.

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From 1964 to 1972, the United States executed an extremely secret campaign of covert operations against North Vietnam. Controlled by the Pentagon's Special Operations Group, under the cover name "Studies and Observation Group" (SOG), it was the United States' largest and most complex covert operation since World War II. Because it was so highly classified and politically sensitive, once the war was over the story of SOG was buried deep in the vaults of the Pentagon--until Dr. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., one of the world's leading experts on SOG's activities in Southeast Asia, began his impressive investigative research and wide-ranging special interviews.

The Secret War Against Hanoi is based on thousands of pages of recently declassified top-secret SOG documents, as well as interviews with sixty officers who ran SOG's covert programs and the senior officials who directed this secret war, including Robert McNamara, Walt Rostow, Richard Helms, William Colby, William Westmoreland, and Victor Krulak. It is the first-ever definitive and comprehensive account of the covert paramilitary and espionage campaign, with many eye-opening disclosures.

Dr. Shultz reveals how in 1963, President Kennedy, dissatisfied with the CIA's ineffective guerrilla operations against North Vietnam, turned over operational control of the covert war to the Pentagon and demanded results. Despite Kennedy's strong directive, those results were slow in coming. United States policymakers and the senior military leadership had little interest in or understanding of special operations and resisted any expansion of the secret war. When SOG finally did get started in January 1964, under newly inaugurated President Johnson, it was constantly hobbled by the micro-management of the National Security Council, State Department, and Pentagon leadership.

Despite these restraints, SOG conducted its intense secret war for eight years, through the Johnson and Nixon administrations, and managed to execute a range of operations, including the dispatch of numerous spies to North Vietnam and creation of a sophisticated triple-cross deception program: psychological warfare through a fabricated guerrilla movement, manipulation of North Vietnamese POWs and kidnapped citizens, and dirty tricks; commando raids against Hanoi's coast and navy; and operations on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to kill enemy soldiers and destroy supplies. Ultimately, the Pentagon's spies, saboteurs, and secret warriors would produce both spectacular and disastrous results.

There are lessons to be learned from Washington's conduct of the secret war against Hanoi that will be valuable and valid for years to come for presidents who engage in covert special operations to meet twenty-first-century threats to vital U.S. interests.

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