

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni
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**Popular Culture and the Vietnam War: Reflection in
Cinematography, Literature and Video Games**

Štěpán Čapek

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**Popular Culture and the Vietnam War: Reflection in
Cinematography, Literature and Video Games**

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1 Introduction

The Vietnam War was one of the considerable US foreign involvements after World War II and became one of the most impactful proxy wars in the period of the Cold War. It was one of the largest-scale ideological disputes between the two major superpowers that emerged after World War II – the USA, the defender of Capitalism and the Soviet Union, the defender of Communism – both supporting their ideals in Vietnam and Indochina through military involvement. The main goal of this intervention was to prevent the spread of Communist support in Indochinese countries, beginning in 1955 and lasting all the way until 1975. Despite the casualties being relatively low – compared to other wars – the conflict itself received severe criticism by the public and became one of the most disliked events by the public in the history of the USA. The main reason for such opposing views on the event was due to the government tactics in the war and also due to suffering rather smaller-scale defeats but humiliating enough for the Superpower of the world. The aftermath of the war brought a surprising change to the image of the USA and its government. They were seen as inhumane, harsh and cruel, not only by the foreign countries but also their own citizens. Thanks to the innovative technology the war was perceived very differently by the public compared to the other wars, where more modern televisions decisively outmatched the old fashioned newspapers and radios due to its fresh video and sound broadcasts from the event. In the end, the public slowly began to not support the decisions of the government and protested against the USA's military intervention in Vietnam.

However, every cloud has a silver lining and the same applies to the conflict in Vietnam. From every event, whether it was viewed as a success or a failure, one can extract something beneficial for humanity. Over the past decades The Vietnam War proved to be a great inspiration - whether real or fictional - in the fields of Literature (*The Vietnam War, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*), Cinematography (*The Deer Hunter, Rescue Dawn*) and Videogames (*Rising Storm 2: Vietnam, Vietcong, Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War*), through which common population can virtually experience the art of the Vietnam War and acquire insights into this particular conflict.

This comparative semiotic study aims to show the extent of significance of the Vietnam War in the cultures of the Film industry (*Forrest Gump*), Video Games (*Vietcong*) industry and popular Literature (*A Rumor of War*). The study will also compare real events with the inspired selected products, their accuracy in interpretation, the differences in point of

views, and its impact on the people. In addition to that, the study will describe the course and the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

The elaboration of this conflict and its impact on the various cultures of popular culture industries will be achieved by the study of printed literature and Internet articles whose content is the military conflict itself. Furthermore, publications dealing with the aftermath of the war and its impact on these industries will be used. Additionally, this study will rely on various internet sources with broader points of views and also my own personal acquaintance with several pieces that are based on this event.

The reason why I chose this theme is because of my strong interest in history in general and thanks to my being the type of person that enjoys Video Games and Films, especially those that are inspired by historical events and conflicts through which one can actually acquire a broader knowledge not only of this specific event but also any other historical conflict that was impactful on these or other industries. To be more specific, I find the Vietnam War to be the most impactful conflict of all the Cold War events that had a major effect on the American society and thrown it into turmoil and profoundly influenced the industries of literature, cinematography and video games for decades to come.

2 The Vietnam War - Origins of the conflict

After World War II the decolonisation – a process where a nation disestablishes and abandons its domination of overseas territories – of European colonies further spread in Africa and Indochina.

Prior to World War II, Vietnam and the rest of eastern Indochina had been under the rule of the French Empire. The first major hit to the French power came in 1940 when Germany defeated and occupied the French mainland. The Japanese later seized control over French colonies in Indochina including Vietnam and draining their resources. During the War a resistance movement known as the Viet Minh was formed under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh – who was inspired by Chinese and Soviet Communism – to fight against Japanese occupiers during and the French colonial administration after World War II (Walsh, 2001, p. 353).

Ho Chi Minh was a well-educated individual who lived in France, Britain and the USA, and in the 1920s studied in the USSR where he was inspired by the Russian Revolution and Communist ideals. In 1930 he established the Indochinese Communist Party and motivated the Vietnamese population to fight for an independent Vietnam. When the Second World War ended, the Viet Minh controlled northern Vietnam and were resolute to take over all of Vietnam. In 1945, as the Japanese withdrew their forces from Indochina, the Viet Minh seized the city of Hanoi and declared Vietnamese independence with Ho Chi Minh as their president.¹

2.1 The French try to regain control

In 1945 the French wanted to restore their rule over Vietnam again, however, the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam refused to give up their power to France and thus in 1946 it escalated into a war between the French and the Viet Minh. For the first few years the conflict was seen as a fight opposing the French colonial rule over Vietnam. The situation changed in 1949 when Mao Zedong and his Chinese Communist Party began to rule the People's Republic of China (PCR) and decided to support Ho Chi Minh. From this moment the USA perceived the Viet Minh as puppets of the PCR and feared that Communism unifying Vietnam would cause the ‘domino effect’, i.e. that if one Indochinese country fell to

¹ Ho Chi Minh, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2010, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/ho-chi-minh-1>.

Communism, their neighbouring countries would follow, resulting in all of south-east Asia being Communist.² ‘‘The USA poured \$500 million a year into the French war effort and helped the French to set up a non-Communist government in the south of the country.’’. Yet despite all this support, the French were not making any progress. The fighting lasted for 8 struggling years until 1954. The French usually had control over urban areas and the Viet Minh over the countryside (Walsh, 2001, p. 353).

For the French – and later also for the Americans – the Viet Minh’s use of guerrilla tactics was impossible to overcome, and the French ransacks of Vietnamese villages further increased support for the Viet Minh. The encounter that decided the outcome of the conflict came in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was the decisive engagement in the first Indochina War (1946–54). After French forces occupied the Dien Bien Phu valley in late 1953, Viet Minh commander Vo Nguyen Giap amassed troops and placed heavy artillery in caves of the mountains overlooking the French camp. Boosted by Chinese aid, Giap mounted assaults on the opposition’s strong points beginning in March 1954, eliminating use of the French airfield. Viet Minh forces overran the base in early May, prompting the French government to seek an end to the fighting with the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1954.*³ The French rule in Indochina came to a definitive end.

*‘‘A poor feudal nation had beaten a great colonial power... It meant a lot; not just for us but to people all over the world.’’*⁴

The Geneva Accords divided Vietnam along the 17th Parallel, the Vietnamese Communist Party, led by Ho Chi Minh being in control of the North (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), the capital being Hanoi, and Emperor Bao Dai controlling the South (State of Vietnam), the capital being Saigon. The treaty also specified that domestic elections for reunification were to be held in 1956. However, in 1955 an anti-communist politician Ngo Dinh Diem began to gain influence and pushed for the highest political positions with the help of a foreign power, the USA.⁵

² Battlefield: Vietnam (Part 1/12) - Dien Bien Phu - The Legacy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n62-l6kYBzA&list=PL3H6z037pboH6zS98cjo_xznKzNKEMJJ&ab_channel=Peeta. (Accessed: 2.4.2021)

³ Battle of Dien Bien Phu, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/france/battle-of-dien-bien-phu>.

⁴ Commented by the Viet Minh commander Vo Nguyen Giap after the victory over France, Source 32, GCSE Modern World History Second Edition (Walsh, 2001, p. 353)

⁵ French Rule Ended, Vietnam Divided, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Dien-Bien-Phu>.

2.2 The early Diem regime and U.S. involvement

The USA feared the aftermath, that if Vietnam was to fall into the hands of a Communist regime, the neighbouring countries – Laos and Cambodia – would meet a similar fate. Thus in early 1954 a covert operation ‘‘The Saigon Military Mission’’ was conducted by the U.S. government and CIA. *‘‘The SMM was to enter into Vietnam quietly and assist the Vietnamese, rather than the French, in unconventional warfare. The French were to be kept as friendly allies in the process, as far as possible. The broad mission for the team was to undertake paramilitary operations against the enemy and to wage political-psychological warfare. Later, after Geneva, the mission was modified to prepare the means for undertaking paramilitary operations in Communist areas rather than to wage unconventional warfare (Psychological warfare, also called psywar, the use of propaganda against an enemy, supported by such military, economic, or political measures as may be required. Such propaganda is generally intended to demoralize the enemy, to break his will to fight or resist, and sometimes to render him favourably disposed to one’s position.)’’*⁶

In 1954 a new prime minister of South Vietnam was installed, Ngo Dinh Diem who was opposed not only by the North Vietnamese Communist regime but also by many Viet Minh politicians, various religious groups (Diem was a devoted and intolerant Catholic, yet most of the Vietnamese population was Buddhist) and army officials who remained in the South and favoured the Northern regime.⁷

However, Diem had a complete support from the USA which provided military advisers, training and American weaponry for his army, CIA agents who bribed or menaced his internal opposition, and further financial support of around \$1,6 billion to ‘‘keep his economy afloat’’⁸ and help around one million northerners to flee south from the Communist regime. Diem further solidified his power by persecuting or exiling Communists from the South. However, Diem’s regime could be labelled as corrupt and nepotistic. Towards the end of 1955, after a call for referendum only in the South, Diem declared himself president of Southern Vietnam. In July 1956 the reunification elections were supposed to be held. Ho Chi Minh was confident that the majority of the Vietnamese population would have voted for him

⁶ The Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition Volume 1 Document 95, Lansdale Team's Report on Covert Saigon Mission in 1954 and 1955, pp. 573-83. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/doc95.htm>.

⁷ The Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition Volume 1, Chapter 5, Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent14.htm>.

⁸ French Rule Ended, Vietnam Divided, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/French-rule-ended-Vietnam-divided>.

as the new leader of unified Vietnam – *“it was estimated that 75 percent would vote for Ho, 20 percent would stay neutral and 5 percent were pro-government.”* (Young, 1991, p. 73). For this reason, Diem refused to hold these elections and even got USA’s (quite paradoxical) approval (the paradox being that a few years back, the USA criticized the Soviets for not holding free elections in Eastern European countries which were client states of the USSR; Walsh, 2001, p. 354). The Viet Minh saw this as a *casus belli* and thus, in November 1st 1955, the Second Indochina War began.⁹

In the following year, Diem’s agents, with the help of the CIA, arrested around 100,000 Viet Minh supporters (now newly called Viet Cong) in the south who were later tortured and executed. By 1957, the Viet Cong together with the other groups repressed by Diem’s regime started to fight back targeting government officials, and in 1959 with the increasing numbers in Viet Cong’s ranks, they even began engaging divisions of the South Vietnamese army using guerrilla tactics. In the same year the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and Cambodia has been built for the North Vietnamese troops in order to supply their guerrilla skirmishes against the South. In late 1960 the National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed by opponents of the Diem’s regime and designed to not only act as a political arm of the Viet Cong but also to independently organize resistance to the regime.¹⁰ Their force – called the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) – was made of both regional forces, trained and better equipped soldiers in platoons, as well as guerrilla units which were made up of non-professional soldiers, usually people who worked and lived a normal life at the first sight, so detecting them proved to be problematic. *“Their function was to persuade or recruit their neighbours into supporting the NLF, to protect its political apparatus, and to harass the government, police, and security forces with booby traps, raids, kidnappings, and murders.”* Their strength lied within the ability to mutually help each other in all types of combat in and terrains especially in the jungle and swamps, unlike the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, whose officers were passive, incompetent and corrupt (e.g. selling U.S. equipment to the Communists), higher positions of the army were constantly infiltrated by Viet Cong agents, and U.S. heavy equipment was not designed to warfare in marshes and in the jungle.¹¹

⁹ Watch the Viet Cong's guerrilla communist forces move down the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and Cambodia: <https://www.britannica.com/video/78016/Ngo-Dinh-Diem-South-Vietnamese-Vietnam-Perspective-1956>.

¹⁰ The Vietnam War, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

¹¹ The Diem Regime And The Viet Cong, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-Diem-regime-and-the-Viet-Cong>.

2.3 The U.S. role deepens

In 1960 J.F. Kennedy became the new president of the USA and had to face several conflicts concerning the Cold War: The Cuban Missile Crisis, the construction of the Berlin Wall and supporting South Vietnamese government. Fearing the principles of the domino theory, USA's involvement began to steadily increase. In 1960 President Kennedy agreed to send 400 Green Berets to fight the Viet Cong. In the following years the Viet Cong began to threaten not only South Vietnamese forces, but also American air force and supply bases. *'Kennedy said he was determined that the USA would not 'blunder into war', unclear about aims or how to get out again'*, however, with each year the U.S. kept sending more military personnel to fight the Viet Cong, by 1963 around 11,500 troops and 23,000 by 1965 (Walsh, 2001, p. 354).

Despite receiving American equipment, training and experienced military advisers, the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was as incompetent as it had been in the 1950s compared to the ingenuity and adaptability of Viet Cong soldiers.¹² *'In January 1963 a Viet Cong battalion near the village of Ap Bac south of Saigon, though surrounded and outnumbered by ARVN forces, successfully fought its way out of its encirclement, destroying five helicopters and killing about 80 South Vietnamese soldiers and three American advisers.'*¹³

2.4 Diem's end of rule

By 1963 the Diem's regime had many enemies among social groups especially the Buddhist majority. Discontent rose and Buddhist demonstrations and strikes in Saigon were dealt with violence of the security forces (Jacobs, 2006, p. 142-145). This aggression made many scholars in cities join the Buddhists and soon the army officials began to plot to remove Diem. The coup was carried out in November 1963 and Diem and other family members were captured and murdered. The USA remained neutral, despite knowing about the plot beforehand.¹⁴

¹² The Diem Regime And The Viet Cong, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-Diem-regime-and-the-Viet-Cong>.

¹³ The conflict deepens, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-conflict-deepens>.

¹⁴ The conflict deepens, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-conflict-deepens>.

A few weeks later, J.F. Kennedy was assassinated and was succeeded by Lyndon B. Johnson who was fully aware of the consequence of the domino theory and decided to further increase U.S. military personnel in Vietnam to 23,000 by the end of 1964. In November 1963, Johnson said: *"The battle against Communism ... must be joined ... with strength and determination."* (Karnow, 1997, p. 339).

2.5 Gulf of Tonkin

Compared to Kennedy, Johnson was more committed to a full-scale conflict in Vietnam in order to stop the spread of Communism. In August of 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats torpedoed two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. Congress reacted with passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which gave Johnson the ability to (Walsh, 2001, p. 355) *"take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security"*.¹⁵ Simply said, he could – and would – take the USA into a full-scale war. *"On 8 March 1965, 3,500 U.S. marines, combat troops rather than advisers, came ashore at Da Nang. America was at war in Vietnam."*¹⁶ Shortly after the incident U.S. planes began bombing North Vietnamese land – especially the Ho Chi Minh Trail – under the codename Operation Rolling Thunder. There were no limits to the bombing in Vietnam; in the next 10 years the U.S. dropped two million tons of bombs on Laos – that was officially neutral – aiming for the Ho Chi Minh trail to disrupt the supply line into Vietnam, and to prevent the rise of Laos communist forces. Despite the mass bombardments, the Communists could not be defeated. The Viet Cong maintained their supply lines and were still able to organize assaults on the South. The cost of this operation was disastrous; 14,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft were shot down. *"More bombs were dropped on North Vietnam than were dropped in the whole of the Second World War on Germany and Japan."* It is estimated that the cost to kill one Viet Cong soldier equalled \$400,000 (Walsh, 2001, p. 358).

Operation Rolling Thunder had only a minor impact for the South, where Communists kept having the upper hand in military clashes. Without further help, the South Vietnamese army would collapse. With a strong support from the government and the U.S. public, Johnson endorsed to send more U.S. troops into Vietnam's struggle. By July 1965, over

¹⁵ Tonkin Gulf Resolution; Public Law 88-408, 88th Congress, August 7, 1964; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=98>.

¹⁶ LYNDON B. JOHNSON AND THE VIETNAM WAR, Coleman and Selverstone, 2014, <https://prde.upress.virginia.edu/content/Vietnam#fn1>.

80,000 U.S. troops were deployed in Vietnam and dispatched another 100,000 troops in 1966. At that time the first anti-war movements began to spread over the USA.¹⁷

2.6 The U.S. approach

Apart from using aircraft and combat troops to fight in Vietnam, the U.S. acquired a chemical weapon called Agent Orange. It was a highly toxic herbicide used to eradicate the flora where the Viet Cong would hide. Around 82 million litres of Agent Orange was sprayed over Vietnamese jungle. Another chemical weapon used was Napalm which also destroyed the nature but also burned through skin to the bone. Often was the case that apart from killing nature and enemy troops these chemicals struck Vietnamese civilians (Walsh, 2001, p. 358).

The war effort in Vietnam was mainly fought under the command of General William Westmoreland who developed a policy of attrition – a search-and-destroy policy – raiding rural villages a targeting to kill as many enemies as possible instead of securing territory. The effectiveness of this policy proved catastrophic for USA's reputation as the new inexperienced U.S. troops often found themselves in traps, innocent villagers were mistaken for Viet Cong troops – six human lives (most of which were innocent civilians) for every Viet Cong weapon captured. Westmoreland believed the Viet Cong could be beaten by the mass firepower the U.S. possessed. By 1966, civilians had to flee to camps near the cities as large portions of South Vietnam were labelled as ‘‘free-fire zones’’ which were often under heavy bombardment and shelling as only the enemy had remained.¹⁸

One such case was the massacre in My Lai in March 1968 done by the Charlie Company. The Intel claimed that there was a Viet Cong headquarters and 200 guerrillas in the My Lai area. The order was to destroy all buildings and livestock. Further information was that because it was Saturday the villagers would have left for market so only Viet Cong troops should be present and therefore ordered to kill everyone found in the village. On 16th March the Company arrived and in the following four hours, between 300 and 400 civilians were killed, mostly women, children and elders. Some were killed while working on fields the rest massacred by the concentrated machine-gun fire. *‘‘No Viet Cong were found in the village. Only three weapons were recovered.’’* Initially the tracks of truth were covered and it was

¹⁷ Gulf of Tonkin, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

¹⁸ William Westmoreland, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

recorded as a successful operation. However, a letter exposing the reality arrived a year later to the major politicians in Washington and soon after the popular Life magazine published pictures of the massacre. This caused further unrest among the U.S. public, in November 1969 resulting in *the largest political protest in American history* with almost 700,000 people demonstrating in Washington, D.C. (Walsh, 2001, p. 358)

Despite the initial increase in enemy death toll, the Viet Cong troops refused to surrender, as they were able to recapture the lost territories with continuous supplies and manpower coming in through the Ho Chi Minh Trail and further aid from China and the Soviet Union.¹⁹

“Vietnam is thousands of miles from the USA... Contrary to the 1954 Geneva conference, the USA has ceaselessly intervened in Vietnam. The U.S. government has committed war crimes... Half a million US troops have resorted to inhuman weapons... Napalm, toxic chemicals and gases have been used to massacre our people, destroy our crops and raze our village to the ground... US aircraft have dropped thousands of bombs destroying towns, villages, hospitals, schools. We will never submit to force; never accept talks under threat of bombs.” (Walsh, 2001, p. 360).²⁰

2.7 The Tet Offensive, 1968 – a turning point (Walsh, 2001, p. 359)

By 1967 the American population became increasingly discontent with the war. At this moment the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam increased to close to 500,000 and the annual upkeep costs for the war efforts reached \$20 billion without any significant progress in the conflict. Despite that, the U.S. army officials in Vietnam kept reassuring the public that the war is being won (Walsh, 2001, p. 359).

In early 1968 the Tet Offensive was launched by the Communists. The Viet Cong troops assaulted over 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam. The offensive was so unexpected that a Viet Cong unit nearly captured the U.S. embassy in Saigon. Overall the Tet Offensive was a failure for the Communists losing around 10,000 well-trained troops. The towns were quickly retaken by the South Vietnamese allied forces with the help of artillery and air force, and yet again, the ones who suffered the most were the citizens. *“However, the*

¹⁹ William Westmoreland, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

²⁰ Ho Chi Minh speaking in 1967

Tet Offensive proved to be a turning point in the war because it raised hard questions about the war in the USA.'' (Walsh, 2001, p. 359) First peace talks between North Vietnam and the USA were being discussed but to no effect.²¹

The My Lai massacre that occurred in the same year developed a further build-up of anti-war protests which resulted in hundreds of protest marches throughout the States, the largest taking place in Washington, D.C. with over 250,000 demonstrators demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.²² The newly elected president Nixon attempted to deal with the growing unrest by introducing the "Vietnamization" programme – *'withdrawing U.S. troops, increasing aerial and artillery bombardment and giving the South Vietnamese the training and weapons needed to effectively control the ground war.'*²³

In April 1970, President Nixon announced that U.S. and South Vietnamese troops would invade the officially neutral Cambodia and Laos, aiming to destroy Viet Cong supply bases. But this ended with little to none success.²⁴ This invasion, which broke the international law, caused increased nationwide protests by American students. The following month led to the student strikes of 1970. The initial and most memorable student protest was at the Kent State University in Ohio, where National Guardsmen shot and killed four and injured another nine unarmed students.²⁵

By June 1972, the U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese delegation tried to draft a peace offer that would suit all parties. However, no agreement had been reached, as South Vietnam rejected the terms. Few months later the U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger tried to negotiate for a separate peace deal with the North Vietnamese delegation. In October 1972 both sides initially reached an agreement but soon after the North demanded adjustments to the peace deal. The U.S. reacted with a concentrated bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in December 1972 also known as the Christmas Bombings,

²¹ Tet Offensive, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

²² 1969: Millions march in US Vietnam Moratorium
http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid_2533000/2533131.stm.

²³ Vietnamization, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

²⁴ April 30, 1970: President Nixon announces his plan to eradicate communist sanctuaries along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cAAnoqmksg&ab_channel=RichardNixonFoundation. (Accessed 10.4.2021)

²⁵ Shots Still Reverberate For Survivors Of Kent State, Noah Adams, 2010,
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126423778&t=1617667351390>.

pressuring the Northern leaders to accept the terms. In January 1973, the USA and North Vietnam signed a separate peace agreement which officially ended any hostilities between the two nations (Hastings 2018, p. 649–63). However, the war between the North and the South continued but within the following two years the South Vietnamese capital Saigon had fallen to the Communist forces and was renamed to Ho Chi Minh City (Walsh, 2001, p. 363).

2.8 The Aftermath

The number of U.S. military death casualties in Vietnam totalled 58,220 lives and wounded over 150,000 servicemen.²⁶ The approximate costs of the War reached over \$130 billion – in today’s dollars around \$1 trillion. Furthermore, the annual compensation costs for Vietnam veterans remain above \$22 billion.²⁷ After withdrawing from the war, the United States found itself in a stagflation. *“Stagflation is characterized by slow economic growth and relatively high unemployment—or economic stagnation—which is at the same time accompanied by rising prices (i.e. inflation). Stagflation can also be alternatively defined as a period of inflation combined with a decline in gross domestic product (GDP).”*²⁸

The U.S. containment policy was in ruins – it had failed both militarily and politically. The War proved that their large-scale military investment could not stop the spread of Communism. Furthermore, instead of stopping the spread of Communism, the U.S. policies in Indochina encouraged a greater support for Communist parties in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, all establishing a Communist government after the War (Walsh, 2001, p. 364).

For the soldiers returning back home, the War had multiple effect on their lives both physical and psychological, the latter being a more complex issue. Unlike in previous wars, the Vietnam veterans were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) not only from the horrifying war actions they had to undertake and experience but also they were the first ones not being honoured after returning home; war-opposing people describing them as killers of innocents, and their supporters accusing them of losing the War.²⁹ *“After being wounded twice, infantryman Steven A. Wowwk and other servicemen felt excitement at being*

²⁶ Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.

²⁷ The Vietnam War “How Much Did the Vietnam War Cost?”, Alan Rohn, 2016, <https://thevietnamwar.info/how-much-vietnam-war-cost/>.

²⁸ Stagflation, Investopedia Staff, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/stagflation.asp>.

²⁹ When Did the Vietnam War End? HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

*back on American soil, but his excitement turned to confusion. "I remember feeling like, what could I do to acknowledge them, and I just gave the peace signal," Wowwk says. "And instead of getting return peace fingers, I got the middle finger."*³⁰

The U.S. government too failed to give as equal compensations as they did to the veterans of previous wars. The GI benefits were described as ‘almost non-existent’ – servicemen with uncommon diseases (e.g. malaria) that were caused by the War’s environment but were diagnosed after the War were often denied Veteran health care. In addition, some faced discrimination when applying for jobs.³¹

Another issue was the effects of Agent Orange on humans exposed to the gas. Even a momentary exposure can cause ‘darkening of the skin, liver problems and a severe acne-like skin disease called chloracne. Additionally, dioxin is linked to type 2 diabetes, immune system dysfunction, nerve disorders, muscular dysfunction, hormone disruption and heart disease. Developing fetuses are particularly sensitive to dioxin, which is also linked to miscarriages, spina bifida and other problems with fatal brain and nervous system development.’³²

Lastly, to cope with the horrors of the War the U.S. troops used drugs and thus developed an addiction over the years of the War and some stuck with drugs for the rest of their lives. ‘The Department of Defense reported in 1971 that by that time, 51% of soldiers had smoked marijuana, 28% had consumed heroin or cocaine, and 31% had used psychedelics such as LSD or mushrooms. In addition to illicit drug use, many soldiers became heavily dependent on amphetamines and sedatives; the House Select Committee on Crime reported that approximately 225 million tablets of stimulants was consumed by the armed forces between 1966 and 1969.’³³

In conclusion, the U.S. war efforts in Vietnam ended up disastrously in all ways possible; despite superior equipment the U.S. military was not able to outmatch Viet Cong’s guerrilla tactics, hundreds of protests occurred throughout the whole country, the U.S. economy fell into a recession and their diplomatic reputation was in shambles. But they

³⁰ Why Were Vietnam War Vets Treated Poorly When They Returned? HISTORY, Ciampaglia, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/vietnam-war-veterans-treatment>.

³¹ A Better Way to Help Veterans, Daniel M. Gade, 2013, <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/a-better-way-to-help-veterans>.

³² Agent Orange, HISTORY, History.com Editors, 2011, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/agent-orange-1>.

³³ G.I.s’ Drug Use in Vietnam Soared—With Their Commanders’ Help, HISTORY, Adam Janos, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/drug-use-in-vietnam>.

learned their lesson and all USA's future interventions never ended in such a humiliating fashion.

3 Popular Culture

This segment of this thesis is going to include the introduction to the practical part which will focus firstly on defining what pop culture is, how it differs from other forms of culture, how it can be examined and what types of other popular cultures exist.

3.1 Popular Culture defined

Popular Culture is also sometimes referred to as pop culture, mass culture, culture of the people, or culture of the masses. It is generally agreed that popular culture is tied with mass consumption; this means that the people have an easy access to at least one of the many variations of popular culture.

The history of popular culture goes as far back as the 15th century when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. The spread of this invention then gave an opportunity for the people of non-elite classes to read the Bible in their mother tongue rather than in Latin. This was the first step toward mass consumption, as prior to the printing press only official religious preachers were able and allowed to interpret religious scripts to the common folk (Dittmer and Bos, 2019, p. 22).

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th century further aided the development of popular culture. Prior to that, most of the population was spread throughout the countryside and the people were only influenced by traditions and folk culture. Thanks to the Industrial era, cities offered more life opportunities, causing a mass migration of rural population to cities. These people could then experience all the diverse cultures offered by the (over)crowded cities. The revolution also contributed to mass production; development in technology, education and public health; and further improved printing press to such extent that mass media began to form (i.e. leaflets, newspapers, and later complete books and novels). The technological advancements of the 20th century, i.e. television, radio and cinematography, further influenced and broadened popular culture.³⁴

Today's popular culture is mainly formed by: entertainment (television – stand-up, reality shows -, music, films, video games, comic books and internet – vlogs, memes,

³⁴ The Formation of Popular Culture, Tim Delaney, 2007, https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview.

streaming), news, sports (both active and passive participation – fan or supporter of a team), politics, fashion and technology.³⁵

There are other forms of culture, which are often compared to or are opposing popular culture, are namely Folk and High culture. Folk culture is partially similar to popular culture as it also involves the masses of people, but those are part of a specific geographical area. However, unlike popular culture that is mainly based on constant evolution, folk culture on the other hand is based on tradition. Folk culture is rather more stagnant, local, uncomplicated, conservative and less feasible to changes compared to popular culture. *"Folk culture promises stability, whereas popular culture is generally looking for something new or fresh."*³⁶ Nonetheless, due to globalisation aspects of the folk culture can sometimes be annexed into the world of popular culture, becoming part of it and losing its original *folk* identity. Folk cultures and events are for example: the Amish in the USA, Oktoberfest in Bavaria or the celebration of the Chinese New Year³⁷, though it could be argued, that the latter two also get the taste of globalisation – Oktoberfest attracts visitors far beyond Bavaria and Germany, and the Chinese New Year (speaking from personal experience) is often used as a commercial move by companies, e.g. every year, RIOT Games creates skins for champions in the game League of Legends, which are based on the Chinese traditional costumes and phenomena.

High culture, on the other hand, is popular culture's polar opposite. High culture, sometimes referred to as culture of the social elite, *"is not mass produced, nor meant for mass consumption... the fine arts, opera, theatre, and high intellectualism are associated with the upper socioeconomic classes. Items of high culture often require extensive experience, training, or reflection to be appreciated."*³⁸ Even though these two cultures are perceived as opposites, both cultures affect one another (Dittmer and Bos, 2019, p. 23).

When discussing popular culture, the term *Geopolitics*³⁹ is often linked to it, as media - especially journalists - often use this expression. *"One word that is often associated with media and geopolitics is "propaganda." Propaganda refers to the intentional use of the*

³⁵ What is Pop Culture? 2021, <https://mrpopculture.com/what-is-pop-culture/>.

³⁶ Folk and High Culture, Tim Delaney, 2007, https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview.

³⁷ What is folk culture? <https://humangeography725.weebly.com/folk-culture.html>.

³⁸ Folk and High Culture, Tim Delaney, 2007, https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview.

³⁹ *A study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state.* "Geopolitics" Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geopolitics>.

media to generate public sentiments that benefit the propagandist. This can be in the form of news stories that are purportedly “slanted” against another government, or a film in which the villain is a particular nationality... The difference between “propaganda” and “truth” often depends on where you stand and perhaps on the intentions of the producer, which are difficult to assess in the world of popular culture” (Dittmer and Bos, 2019, p. 22). “It is undeniable that while popular culture is often stigmatized for being a waste of time, it nevertheless feeds off of geopolitical events that are deemed to be important” (Dittmer and Bos, 2019, Introduction, xviii). In the end, the way we perceive anything associated with popular culture and propaganda differs with every individual.

3.2 How can Popular Culture be researched?

Popular culture is hugely influenced by geopolitics. The concept that is related to popular culture, geopolitics and its sphere of influence is ‘popular geopolitics’. Popular geopolitics is one of the ways in which geopolitical knowledge is produced. It argues that geopolitical ideas are not only shaped by the state, intellectual elites and politicians. Rather, it is also shaped and communicated through popular culture and everyday practices. Popular culture constructs a common sense understanding of world politics through the use of movies, books, magazines, etc. (Painter and Jeffrey, 2009, p. 208-209).

Dittmer and Bos (2019) argue that when researching popular culture, the Gillian Rose’s diagram⁴⁰ can be applied. Rose’s diagram shows four individual sites - i.e. site of audiencing (the place in which the product is encountered by consumers), site of production (where the product is made), site of the product (visual content of the product), and site of circulation (where and how the product is distributed) - from which culture can be studied. Each site also has three individual modalities - i.e. social (modality approach that examines the range of institutions and practices that shape how an image is seen and used), compositional modality (deals with the material qualities and the use of different techniques), and technological modality (technical processes by which pop culture products are made, travel, are displayed and consumed) - which can be further studied as well.

Dittmer and Bos (2019) further claim that through a careful analysis of popular culture, scholars can draw attention to the compositional, symbolic, and ideological content in

⁴⁰ From *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, (2016), https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Image-sites-and-modalities-for-visual-analysis-Adapted-from-Roses-2007-2012-critical_fig1_235419850.

order to understand how geopolitical logics are communicated. There are multiple methods of analysis, i.e. Compositional Analysis (study of the organization of elements within a media product), Content Analysis (deals with the meaning found in texts), Discourse Analysis (focuses merely on the specific words used by the authors), Questionnaire Surveys (two types: surveys with fixed number of options to question, and surveys that give freedom to the respondents), Interviews, and Focus Groups (group discussions between several people on a specific topic and moderated by the researcher), Archival Research (associated with historical research on documents and other media), and Circulation (investigates how pop cultural products travel and move from their place of creation – today’s most common means of circulation are social media).

The analysis will reflect on one piece of the three pop cultural industries, i.e. Literature (*A Rumor of War*), Cinematography (*Forrest Gump*) and Video Games (*Vietcong*). I decided to analyse these three specific pop cultural industries because they occupy most of my personal time and interest me greatly.

4 Video Games

Due to the technological advancements of the late 20th century the video game industry began to exponentially grow commercially and in popularity. Compared to other popular culture industries, video games are experiencing one of the fastest developments in e.g. graphics, gameplay, and lately innovation in accessibility (technological features that enable the games to be played even by people with various handicaps). Video games offer multiple genres, one of them being based on warfare and/or historical events. Games that are based on warfare and tactics could be categorised into three groups: Strategies (e.g. *Total War* series, *Knights of Honor*, *Stalingrad*), Online First Person Shooters (FPS) with a short single player campaign (e.g. *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* series), and Tactical FPSs with a narrative and specific missions or objectives (e.g. *Vietcong*, *Brothers in Arms*). As the player you can rely only on yourself, your gaming skills, reflexes and precision. Similarly to other wars, the Vietnam War was an inspiration for game developers. However, only a few of them remain known to this day, i.e. *Vietcong* (2003) for its ‘charm’ and authenticity, *Battlefield: Bad Company 2: Vietnam* (2010) and *Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War* (2020) for being part of the most popular video game franchises. People buy and play these types of games because it gives them the opportunity to immerse themselves into the role of, for example, a soldier or a military leader and to attest their military genius. Many of these games can also offer the player a historical education of the period the game is set in or even create affection towards history. The analysis will focus on the game *Vietcong*, a tactical FPS video game developed in 2003 by Pterodon and Illusion Softworks, and will rely on my personal acquaintance with the game and let’s plays series from Agraelus⁴¹ that will be compared to the historical descriptions of the Vietnam War era.

5 Case study – Vietcong (2003)

5.1 Summary

The game is set during the Vietnam War in 1967. The player takes on the role of Sergeant First Class Steve R. Hawkins, assigned to the United States Special Forces ("Green Berets") camp at a strategic location of Nui Pek in South Vietnam near the Cambodian border. Hawkins and his A-Team carry out a series of various missions against the Viet Cong and

⁴¹ Vietcong, Agraelus, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAiVrKw1iS0&list=PLPkPsKGDDeCLKIWfamCRgQBQefxgPUKN-&ab_channel=Agraelus.

North Vietnamese forces. The game ends in a massive North Vietnamese attack on the team's base camp which is ultimately abandoned by all American forces. The ground assault on Nui Pek is a recreation of the ground assault that happened at Special Forces Camp Lang Vei.⁴²

5.2 Historical references and accuracy

5.2.1 Characters

In the game you play as a commander of a smaller unit of six members – each one having a different role - that has to fulfil various missions, accurate to the typical missions the US troops had to undertake during the American involvement in Vietnam. Your team includes:

- Steve R. Hawkins (You) – joined the U.S. Army in Detroit in 1960 and quickly climbed the ranks and became a sergeant first class. He completed his Special Forces training in Fort Bragg
- Le Duy Nhut – is a Vietnamese tracker, who is able to discover various traps set by the Viet Cong. He formally fought for the Viet Minh, but then moved to the South because he disagreed with the Communist regime and joined the Army of the Republic of Vietnam Special Forces, where he was trained to fight in the jungle.
- C.J. Hornster – a machine gunner, trained as a specialist in US Army and foreign infantry weapons. He underwent basic training in the New England Recruitment Battalion at Fort Williams.
- P.J. Defort – a radio operator who is a communications specialist trained in the use, maintenance, and repair of communications equipment and in encryption and decryption. He underwent training in the Sacramento Recruiting Battalion.
- J. Crocker – a medic who left Stanford University School of Medicine to join the military. Crocker serves as a combat medic on the team.
- Bronson – sapper/pioneer, he grew up on the streets. After committing several crimes, he joined the army as an alternative to sentence in prison.

Another character outside your unit is Samuel Rosenfield, a Captain and the commander of the US military base Nui Pek in the province of Pleiku.⁴³

⁴² Vietcong (video game), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietcong_\(video_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietcong_(video_game)). (accessed 7.4.2021)

⁴³ Details about every soldier can be found in the in-game folders before starting a new mission

All the roles of each individual soldier fit in historically. Even though the characters are fictional, the background descriptions are very authentic, especially Bronson's and Nhut's, as it was often the case that soldiers that had formally fought for the North had joined the South or vice versa, or those who committed crimes had the choice presented to them by the judge to either go to jail or join the army.⁴⁴ The names and locations of recruitment and training grounds also exist, some of them active to this day, e.g. Fort Bragg, is a home to the US army's Airborne and Special Operations Forces, employing about 57000 military personnel.⁴⁵

There are also several 'Easter eggs' – details which the player does not notice immediately -one of them being that whenever you arrive to Nui Pek, there will always be a soldier wearing a sombrero. This refers to the fact that the Hispanic population also served in the U.S. Army. Some sources estimate that 170,000 Hispanics served in Vietnam and that 3,070 (5.2% of total) died there.⁴⁶ Another Easter egg is, if you stand on the same spot looking at the map for longer than two minutes, your character is killed by a Viet Cong sniper, which refers to the fact, that the soldiers had to be cautious at all times.

5.2.2 Missions

The game offers players a total of 13 main missions which were definitely inspired by the possible operations undertaken by the US Army, but they do not refer to any specific operations from the Vietnam War (except for the final mission). However, this game feels even more authentic as you have to fight guerrilla warfare against the Viet Cong and be prepared for all their tricks, such as traps or tunnels. The course and content of the mission are always different, so it gives the player a broader view of what operations such a unit of American soldiers in Vietnam could be sent on, whether it is saving an imprisoned US sergeant from the hands of the Viet Cong, recapturing a village and defending it from a Viet Cong attack, sneaking through a tunnel or a dense jungle, detonating a bridge which is used by the Viet Cong, destroying supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail or shooting down the

⁴⁴ Answered by HARTLEY Josh, former Captain at US Marine Corps: <https://www.quora.com/Can-people-avoid-jail-by-agreeing-to-join-the-military>.

⁴⁵ 10 US military bases still named after Confederate leaders, Ioanes and Choi, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/military-bases-named-after-confederate-leaders-2020-6#fort-bragg-in-fayetteville-north-carolina-is-named-for-confederate-gen-braxton-bragg-1>.

⁴⁶ Vietnam War statistics, 1997, https://web.archive.org/web/20071222105511/http://history-world.org/vietnam_war_statistics.htm.

enemies with a machine-gun from a helicopter. If a player truly immerses himself/herself into the game, they will have the impression that they got back in time to Indochina in the 1960s.

The final mission *Under Siege* is a recreation of the ground assault that happened at Special Forces Camp Lang Vei. North Vietnamese tanks have arrived at the camp. One stands in the entrance gate which the player must destroy. After destroying the tank and killing several Viet Cong soldiers, Captain Rosenfield issues an order to evacuate the entire camp away from Nui Peku. Then the air fighters arrive and drop Napalm (one of the most common chemical weapons used in the Vietnam War) on Nui Pek and destroy the entire camp.

5.2.3 Locations

The game and the missions are set around the existing city of Pleiku in the Gia Lai Province. However, despite that no specific locations are further given and some of the in-game location names have been modified, they were still inspired by real places in Vietnam. Even though the Nui Pek military camp's name and existence is fictional, the location of it is accurate. In 1962, an Air Base was established near the city of Pleiku by the U.S. Air Force the RVNAF⁴⁷. However, as the war progressed, the Americans abandoned the area and it was later captured by the North Vietnamese Army in 1975. Another mission is located in the *Jarai village* which does not refer to any specific village, but rather to the Jarai people who are an ethnic group of around 514,000 people living in the Gia Lai and Kon Tum Provinces of South Vietnam.⁴⁸ A different mission is set in the ruins of Po Tlong Karai which was most likely inspired by the Po Klong Garai Temple located in southern Vietnam. Some missions take place deep in the Vietnamese jungle which is designed in such a way, that the player (just like soldiers) has to be extremely cautious as the enemies hidden in the flora are barely visible and often is the case that you get shot before noticing any enemies - a perfect simulation of the guerrilla warfare.

5.2.4 Illustrations

Depiction of characters

The game shows only two sides that took part in the war; the Viet Cong soldiers and the U.S. Army Special Forces known as Green Berets – who were among the first U.S. troops

⁴⁷ Republic of Vietnam Air Force

⁴⁸ Jarai in Vietnam, 2021, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12326/VM.

that were sent to fight in the Vietnam War. The Viet Cong troops are dressed in basic everyday clothing or even semi-naked, often wearing the typical Asian conical hat. The description might sound a bit cliché, but that is exactly how Viet Cong troops looked like. It was very difficult to impossible to distinguish a Viet Cong soldier from a Vietnamese rice farmer. The U.S. troops are displayed in their typical green camouflage uniforms which were common for the Green Berets at that time. Despite the 18 year old graphics, the soldiers' clothing is displayed rather accurately.

Weapons

Unlike other games, the player has the option of choosing weapons before the mission – both American and seized ones from the Viet Cong. This adds a greater variability to the game which is always appreciated by the players, however, soldiers did not get to choose their weapons.⁴⁹ The game has a total of 22 weapons from handguns and rifles to a grenade launcher from the Vietnam War era. The list of weapons used by the U.S. Army Special Forces is as follows:

Colt M1911 (pistol), Colt Police Positive Special (revolver), S&W model 39 (pistol), M1 Carbine, M1 Garand (semi-automatic rifle), Winchester 70 (bolt-action rifle), M3 Grease gun (submachine gun), Thompson (submachine gun), Remington 870 (pump-action shotgun), M16A1 (assault rifle), M60 (light machine gun), and M79 (grenade launcher).

The list of weapons used by the Viet Cong is as follows:

Tokarev TT-33 (pistol), Makarov PM (pistol), AK-47 (assault rifle), Mosin-Nagant (bolt-action rifle), PPSH-41 (submachine gun), PPS-43 (submachine gun), SKS (semi-automatic carbine), SVD Dragunov (semi-automatic sniper rifle), and RPD (light machine gun). The majority of North Vietnam's weapons were supplied by the USSR or the PRC.

All of the listed weapons are correct in their visual design and their usability is as historically accurate as it could possibly get. Although it is impossible for a game of this age

⁴⁹ Quora Question: How Much Control Do Soldiers Have Over the Customization of Their Weapon? Newsweek, 2015, <https://www.newsweek.com/quora-question-how-much-control-do-soldiers-have-over-customization-their-389988>.

to include all of the hundreds of weapons used during the Vietnam War, the developers must have done a great amount of research to be this accurate.⁵⁰

5.2.5 Soundtrack

The game contains many songs from the era of the Vietnam War protests, which show or discuss not only the reality and the military maelstrom of the Vietnam War, but also refer to what was simultaneously happening in the USA, as many of the songs were born due to the massive anti-war protests in USA. The most famous piece from the soundtrack is *Hey Joe* by Jimi Hendrix. Other less known pieces are, for example, *I Wanna Be Your Dog* by The Stooges, *Riot On Sunset Strip* by The Standells, and *Primitive* by The Groupies. You can listen to these songs played by the bunker radio or hear them at the beginning of missions.

Unfortunately the game is played only from the American perspective, making the game slightly vague and basically telling the story of ‘‘Good Americans fighting the Evil Vietnamese’’. The protagonist, Hawkins, is portrayed as an ideal kind of soldier, one that follows and fulfils all orders, does heroic deeds and is admired by everyone. But other than that, the game is very accurate and authentic in the aspects of missions a military unit would have to fulfil, general surroundings, weapons and even music.

⁵⁰ Literature used for comparison of historical accuracy (Rottman, 2009), (Rottman, 2008), (Ezell, 1988) and (Higgins, 2015)

6 Cinematography

For over a century, filmmaking has had a major impact on popular culture. In many ways, cinematography has similar characteristics as video games – in genres, visual experience, and technological innovations and advancements e.g. colour motion picture, more than two dimensions, or the introduction of computer-generated imagery (CGI). However, the age gap between them is relatively significant. Cinematography, akin to video games, offers multiple genres, one of them, War Films/Series, portray military conflicts, usually, of the twentieth century, mainly inspired by the both World Wars (e.g. *Joyeux Noel*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Dunkirk*, *Band of Brothers*), but also other wars, such as the ones in Vietnam (*Forrest Gump*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Deer Hunter*) or Korea (e.g. *M.A.S.H.*, *The Steel Helmet*), as well as other minor conflicts. They include not only portrayals of combat, but stories set in prisoner-of-war camps, accounts of the homefront, and depictions of the difficulties of veterans returning to civilian life. The genre includes depictions of the primary fronts during the war, as well as the battles on the geographical margins of the conflict. War films can be divided into several subgenres, i.e. Documentary, Comedy, Animated, Anti-war and Propaganda (Neale 2000, p. 117–121).

Propaganda films are used to spread and promote certain ideas that are usually religious, political, or cultural in nature. They are made with the intent that the viewers would adopt the position that is promoted by the propagator and eventually take action towards making those ideas widely accepted. Propaganda films are used for their ability to easily reach a large audience in a short amount of time (Kuhn, 2012, p. 488). War propaganda films have been part of popular culture since World War I, however, it was during World War II when propaganda films and propaganda in general was brought to a higher level. Both sides - the Western Allies and Axis power - made films which justified and glorified their participation in the War, e.g. *Why We Fight*, *Moscow Strikes Back* (Manning, 2004, pp. 86-87). What is unique about filmmaking based on WWII is that the demand for them never ceased to exist. Other movie wars inspired by Vietnam, WWI, or Iraq simply come and go, but WWII seems eternal. For comparison, around 130 films based on WWI or the Vietnam War have been shot, but the number of films inspired by WWII is over 1300.⁵¹

⁵¹ Why are we so obsessed with films about the second world war?, Pulver, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/17/why-so-obsessed-second-world-war-films>.

The USA belongs at the top of the table of film production so a majority of today's known war films include the USA as one of the war participants and are made by American productions – history is written by the victors. This also includes futuristic fictional war films, for example an alien invasion of the Earth, where the USA seems to always be the invader's target but also world's only savior, which in a sense propagates USA as the protector of our world, e.g. in *Independence Day* (1996) where even the President personally joins the other pilots and flies into the battle.

Films based on the Vietnam War are different due to the fact that the USA's involvement proved completely disastrous in both financial and political affairs. Despite that, the Vietnam War was an inspiration for over 150 films, but it could be argued that the war in the films has been conceived of differently. Frank Wetta's and Martin Novelli's study (2016, Chapter 8) *Last Stands from the Alamo to Benghazi: How Hollywood Turns Military Defeats into Moral Victories* claims that the portrayal of the Vietnamese in American war films is often negatively stereotyped. The civilians are often pictured as victims, prostitutes, or supporters of the enemy, whereas the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong troops are shown as either evil torturers or epicene cowards. Furthermore, many facts concerning the conception of war, or USA's admission of how the war was a failure were not accurately addressed. Filmmakers rather focused more on the individual war themes instead of educating the people with hard facts.

However, there are still plenty of films, such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), made after the Vietnam War which focus on actual battle footage and depict the harsh reality on the ground.⁵²

The analysis is going to focus on the film *Forrest Gump* as it showcases not only the Vietnam War, though only partially, but also other events of USA's domestic and foreign affairs of the Cold War, which happened during the course of the Vietnam War.

⁵² Vietnam War: American Cinema After the War, Howell,
<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Romantic-Comedy-Yugoslavia/Vietnam-War-AMERICAN-CINEMA-AFTER-THE-WAR.html>.

7 Case study – Forrest Gump (1994)

Forrest Gump is an American comedy-drama released in 1994 that narrates several decades (from the 1950s to the 1980s) of the life of Forrest Gump, a slow-witted but kind-hearted man from Alabama who always witnesses and unknowingly becomes part of several defining historical events in the 20th century United States, accompanied by soundtrack that pinpoints the different time periods.

7.1 Historical References of years 1955-1975

7.1.1 The Vietnam War

Even though the film does not offer any detailed narrative of the war, war operations or battles, and the conflict itself is only a fraction of the film, there are still some facts and historical discussion that can be extracted from the scenes.

In 1967, as the USA's involvement in Vietnam was in full swing, right after graduating from college, Forrest receives a U.S. Army recruitment pamphlet and decides to enlist in the Army. At the training grounds he befriends a fresh recruit named Bubba who plans to open up a shrimping business after the war and persuades Forrest to join him. A year later both are sent to and joining the 9th Infantry under the command of Lieutenant Dan Taylor in the Mekong Delta region. The 9th Infantry division, also called "Old Reliables", was in fact active during the Vietnam War and operated in the Mekong Delta from 1967 to 1972 and protected the area against Viet Cong radicals (Hunt, 2010, Chapter 1).

Another accurate reference relates to the weather in Vietnam, as Forrest narrates "*One day, it started raining, and it didn't quit for four months*", it points out the monsoon season – several months of rainfall – that have an annual occurrence in Indochina and other tropical regions.

The film offers only one combat scene. After several months of everyday patrols, the platoon is assaulted by the North Vietnamese fire. However, the only things you can see from the NVA are the muzzle flashes, and that is what makes this scene so realistic. It depicts a couple of guerrilla warfare characteristics – the ambush was sudden and unexpected, and you do not quite see the enemy, which is basically the underlining principle of guerrilla warfare.

Furthermore, the U.S. soldiers in the film wear the typical green uniforms used at that time and are armed with weapons that fit the era, such as the M16 models, Colt M1911, M72 LAW rocket launchers, M79 grenade launchers and the notorious M60 machine gun. In the end, as few soldiers make it out, the area is bombarded with napalm.

7.1.2 The Hippie Anti-War Movement

During Forrest's service in Vietnam, Jenny (Forrest's childhood friend) becomes part of the Hippie Culture which also participates in the Anti-Vietnam War protests. These mass protests emerged among the USA's younger population during the mid-1960s. The Hippies created their own social groups, listened to psychedelic rock, practiced open sexual relationships, and explored other states of consciousness through the use of hallucinogenic drugs such as marijuana, LSD and magic mushrooms.⁵³ After receiving the Medal of Honor in Washington, D.C., Forrest is accidentally dragged onto the podium of a peace rally at the Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool in Washington, D.C., and is to deliver a speech regarding his experience with the Vietnam War. However, his speech is never heard due to a technical sabotage, but thanks to this event he manages to meet up with his friend Jenny. This event also became one of the largest political protests in American history.

7.1.3 Black Panther Party

After Forrest's and Jenny's reunion, Jenny introduces Forrest to a group from the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party was an African American revolutionary leftist organization founded in 1966. The main idea was preventing racism against African Americans, and that all "blacks" deserved to be treated equally to "whites" in society. The group was specifically known for its rhetoric, military posture (being armed and wearing uniforms) and its way of expressing their beliefs. The party was dissolved in 1982.⁵⁴

7.1.4 Ping-Pong Diplomacy

In the film, Forrest is introduced to ping-pong, spends all his free time playing it and eventually becomes very skilled. Later, he is invited to play on the All-American ping-pong team against the Chinese. This is a clear reference to the Ping-Pong Diplomacy event which occurred between the Americans and Chinese. The theory behind it is that during the 1971

⁵³ Hippie, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hippie>.

⁵⁴ Black Panther Party, Garrett A. Duncan, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party>.

World Table Tennis Championships in Japan, the U.S. player Glenn Cowan hopped on the bus which carried the Chinese national team. There he was approached by Zhuang Zedong, the Chinese greatest player, and even spoke with Cowan through an interpreter. Chairman Mao Zedong saw this as a political opportunity and, to everyone's shock, he invited the U.S. team to visit China after the tournament. The team accepted the invitation and they thus became USA's most important diplomats. President Nixon, who visited China one year later, wrote in his memoirs: "*I had never expected that the China initiative would come to fruition in the form of a ping-pong team.*"⁵⁵ In fact, during the 1970s both the USSR and PRC had better diplomatic relations with the US than they had with each other (Walsh, 2001, 364).

7.1.5 Watergate Scandal

In the film, Forrest becomes a witness of the Watergate Scandal during his stay at the Watergate Hotel. Forrest calls the security reporting that men with flashlights looking for a fuse box in the building across the street keep him awake. This then became a political scandal from 1971 to 1974 associated with a break-in of the Democratic National Committee, located in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. After investigation it was found out that the break-in was connected to President Nixon's re-election campaign. It was later revealed that they had been caught wiretapping phones and stealing documents. Nixon tried to cover up the crimes, but soon the *Washington Post* revealed him being part of the operation. On August 9th 1974, Nixon resigned.⁵⁶

7.1.6 Presidents

Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, Forrest meets with all the Presidents who were in office during the Vietnam War. During his time in college, Forrest plays in the university's football team, and is soon put on the All-American team, where he gets to meet the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, at the White House in 1963. In 1969, Forrest receives the Congressional Medal of Honor – the highest and most prestigious military decoration – for his courageous actions in the Vietnam War. The Medal is given to him by Lyndon B. Johnson, USA's 36th President who assumed office after Kennedy's assassination in November 22nd 1963. During his injury in Vietnam, Forrest gets introduced to *ping-pong* and

⁵⁵ How Ping-Pong Diplomacy Thawed the Cold War, Adrews, 2016, <https://www.history.com/news/ping-pong-diplomacy>.

⁵⁶ Watergate Scandal, HISTORY, Hisotry.com Editors, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/1970s/watergate>.

becomes so skilled at it, that later in 1971, when Richard Nixon was the 37th U.S. President, he is invited to be part of the All-American Ping-Pong team and participates in the Ping-Pong Diplomacy against players from the PCR. This event helped to ease the tense relations between China and the USA, and a year later, Nixon even visited China and met with the Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

7.2 Dialogue

The film contains several dialogue lines that are connected with the Vietnam War and used accurately. One such a line can be heard right as Forrest and Bubba arrive in Vietnam, when they meet Lt. Dan Taylor who gives them an advice: *“There is one item of G.I. gear that can be the difference between a live grunt and a dead grunt. Socks, cushion, sole, O.D. green. Try and keep your feet dry when we're out humpin'. I want you boys to remember to change your socks wherever we stop. The Mekong will eat a grunt's feet right off his legs.”* For soldiers in combat, proper foot-wear is critical. If feet are exposed to a long period of wet and dirty conditions (criteria which the Mekong Delta meets) the consequence of *trench foot* (initial itching which can lead to paralysis of the foot, and even decay of skin and infection) is highly possible. This condition was often among WWI soldiers who fought trench warfare, but also occurred among the soldiers in WWII and the War in Vietnam.

Another accurate Vietnam War-era dialogue is said by Lt. Dan Taylor during the Viet Cong ambush: *"Get that pig un-fucked!"* he says, as the M60 jams. During the Vietnam War, the M60 received the nickname "The Pig" due to its bulky size and appetite for ammunition. (Zachary M. Sherman, 2012, p.41)

A rather satirical line is said by Forrest: *"We took these long walks, and we were always looking for this guy named Charlie.”* while marching through mud and rain – the whole Vietnam War in a nutshell – and *Charlie* being a nickname for an unidentified Viet Cong.

7.3 Iconic Scenes

Forrest Gump is one of those films that offer several unforgettable scenes. The most iconic scene that is related to the Vietnam War is Forrest and Bubba arriving in Vietnam. The scene starts with Forrest and Bubba sitting in the doorless Bell UH-1 Helicopter with the camera view on the Mekong Delta and a machine gunner on one side, accompanied by the

sound of the rotor and the song *Fortunate Son* by Creedence Clearwater Revival, one of the most notorious songs that is associated with the Vietnam War to this day. This particular song and a scene of a chopper flying to battle became one of the most iconic duos in cinematography.

The film further offers unique visual effects in a couple of its scenes. One of them is Forrest shaking hand and having a short dialogue with President John F. Kennedy. Due to CGI techniques, blue screen and lip-syncing, it was possible to depict Forrest meeting deceased personages (such as J.F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson) and shaking hands with them and having a short conversation.⁵⁷

The scene where Forrest is ‘‘forced’’ to deliver a speech at the peace rally at the Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool in Washington D.C., required visual effects to create a crowd of several hundred thousand protesters. Around 1,500 background actors were used for this shot.⁵⁸

7.4 Soundtrack

A great portion of the scenes from the film are accompanied by music from the 1950s to 1980s. Music producer Joel Sill commented: ‘‘We wanted to have very recognizable material that would pinpoint time periods, yet we didn't want to interfere with what was happening cinematically.’’⁵⁹ The soundtrack contains famous pieces such as: *Fortunate Son* (1969) by Creedence Clearwater Revival, *California Dreamin’* (1966) by the Mamas & the Papas, *For What It's Worth* (1966) by Buffalo Springfield, *Mrs. Robinson* (1968) by Simon & Garfunkel, *Sweet Home Alabama* (1974) by Lynyrd Skynyrd, *I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)* (1965) by the Four Tops and many more songs that emerged during the anti-Vietnam War period.

7.5 Personalities

The film shows three distinguishable personalities of soldiers, Forrest's, Bubba's and Lt. Dan's. Forrest's personality is very similar to Hawkins', the protagonist of *Vietcong* (2003). Gump is exactly what the army ever wishes for, a soldier who never asks questions,

⁵⁷ *Forrest Gump-(Through the eyes of Forrest Gump)*, (DVD), Paramount Pictures, 1994, Event occurs at 12:29

⁵⁸ *Forrest Gump-(Seeing is Believing: The Visual Effects of Forrest Gump-Enhancing Reality)*, (DVD), Paramount Pictures, 2001.

⁵⁹ *Forrest Gump*, Soundtrack, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forrest_Gump#Soundtrack. (Accessed 17.4.2021)

who obeys every order, even if it is an order that will result in his/her death. But he is not a complete idiot, he can act as ordered and get things done without causing accidents. He shows devotion throughout the whole film, whether in combat, keeping true to his friend's dream or caring about the loved ones.

Bubba is an embracement of positivity and hope. Despite the fears the war can bring upon a soldier, he thinks and talks about his plans for the future in the shrimping business and even persuades Forrest to become his partner in business. Unfortunately, Bubba dies in combat but his dream is fulfilled through Forrest's deeds.

Lt. Dan Taylor is the platoon leader who *was from a long great military tradition* (said by Forrest) and believes his destiny is to die in the battlefield, just like his ancestors who fought and died in every single American war (references: American Revolutionary War, American Civil War, World War I and World War II). The words he tells Forrest who is rescuing him from the assault, further strengthen this argument: *'What are you doing? ...Leave me here...get away...just leave me here...get out...I said leave me here God dammit...I can't leave the platoon...I told you to leave me there...I didn't ask you to pull me out of there...you cheated me...I was supposed to die in the field with honor!'*. Upon returning back to the USA, he becomes a drinker.

Forrest Gump is not a typical war film with many combat scenes, but offers several historical references and events which had affected USA's society and political affairs during the 1950s to 1970s. It also stands out due to its unique comedy-satiric genre compared to the seriousness of a typical war film such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Full Metal Jacket* or *Casualties of War*. What might initially seem biased is the fact that the narrator of the film and its political events is the protagonist himself who also acts as an active participant, but the viewer of the film should perceive Forrest more as a third party witness rather than a direct influencer of these events.

8 Literature

Of all three popular cultures, the development of literature has been the slowest, mainly due to the fact that its existence and evolution began several thousand years back. One of the resulting genres also focuses on war and the military motives. Literature based on warfare comes in the forms of war novels which can be both fictional and nonfictional. Military fiction literature is mainly made up of narratives involving war or battle. They include a lot of action and often take place in a field of armed conflict. The characters in this genre are either making preparations for war, experiencing war, or are recovering from war. Most narratives are based on wars of the past or can be about a person, who joined armed forces and/or fights for a cause. Well-known military fiction books are, for example, *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich M. Remarque, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini or even *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien.⁶⁰ The military nonfictional genre consists of books about country's military, strategies, personnel, uniforms, symbols, politics and events, weaponry or equipment. The military genre also includes autobiographies or memoirs of members of various military groups. Famous nonfictional military books are, for example, *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* by Chris Kyle, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest* by Stephen E. Ambrose or *Boots: An Unvarnished Memoir of Vietnam* by Stephen L. Park.⁶¹

The analysis is going to focus on the book titled *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo, a memoir about Caputo's service in the US Marine Corps who were sent to fight the Vietnam War.

9 Case study – *A Rumor of War* (1977)

9.1 The Plot

The opening of Philip Caputo's memoir, *A Rumor of War*, states that his book should not be interpreted as history, as it does not reflect on politics, power, national interests, or foreign policies; nor should it taint those who led them and who caused the death of ordinary men. It is simply a story about war, about what men do in war, and how war affects its people.

⁶⁰ Military Fiction Genre – Complete List of Book Genres, Malatesta, 2019, <https://book-genres.com/military-fiction-genre/>.

⁶¹ Military Nonfiction Genre – Complete List of Book Genres, Malatesta, 2018, <https://book-genres.com/military-nonfiction-genre/>.

Caputo joins the US Marine Corps in 1960 as he is bored of the ordinary life in Chicago and is rather seeks for adventure and danger. He soon gets allured by Kennedy-era's anti-Communist idealism and believes that joining military service is the right way to fight Communism. After graduating from Loyola University in 1964, Caputo goes to Quantico, Virginia for Officers' Basic School for a six-month apprenticeship before being sent to his first assignment. In January 1965 he becomes the second lieutenant in a rifle platoon in the 1st Battalion of the 3rd Marine Division (also called the One-Three) that is stationed in Okinawa, Japan. After the Viet Cong attack on the US air base at Pleiku, the Americans replied with Operation Rolling Thunder campaign, and the battalion is deployed in Da Nang in South Vietnam on March 8th 1965. Their initial mission is to provide defence for the South Vietnamese Army but as the war continues the Marine Corps takes on the brunt of the battle. His eagerness to kill and get *baptized in fire* is soon met with strong disappointment, as the War in Vietnam is not like any of the previous US wars. He does not get to experience any real action and battles similar to previous wars. What Caputo and his company face in Vietnam is an invisible enemy, large insects, terrible weather conditions, boredom and fatigue to the point of insanity, low rations, and mad superiors. What makes the war worse is its savagery. Men lose their arms and legs to mines and booby-traps, corpses maimed beyond recognition, and fate that is worse than death is surviving such an accident. The men also lose their faith of "easily winning the war" as the war experience do not meet their previous expectations. Caputo's situation gets even more morbid as he is assigned to an administrative post and his job is to keep a record of the death toll of both the Marine Corps and the Viet Cong. He even sarcastically names his function as "Officer in Charge of the Dead". Throughout this period he begins to question what the purpose of this war is and what good does it bring as men like Levy (whom Caputo admired) or Adam Simpson come across him in corpse bags. He feels guilty and demands to be transferred back to his Company. His wish is granted and replaces Lieutenant Levy. His and his battalion's missions are those that fit the guerrilla warfare – clearing mines and booby traps, patrolling through villages in search of Viet Cong hideouts, supplies or weapons, and hunting for Viet Cong soldiers and suspects. After 17 months of service, Caputo accepts the opportunity to leave Vietnam and is discharged from the Marine Corps in 1967. He then returns as a newspaper journalist and experiences the Fall of Saigon in 1975.⁶²

⁶² *A Rumor of War* Plot Summary, Sutton, 2018. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-rumor-of-war/summary>. (Accessed April 23, 2021)

9.2 Personalities

The book contains brief descriptions of around one hundred characters whom Philip Caputo had encountered with throughout his military training, service in Vietnam and in his new life after he left the Marine Corps. However, only Caputo's character development is thoroughly described as the author is the protagonist himself.

- Philip Caputo, the protagonist, evolves continuously throughout the narrative. He starts as a naïve and partially rebellious boy in his latest teen age. He gets easily swayed by President Kennedy's anti-Communist message and decides to join the Marines in 1960. Another catalyst for him joining the Marines is his rebellious attitude against his parents' intentions. In Caputo's words: *That is what I wanted, to find in a commonplace world a chance to live heroically. Having known nothing but security, comfort, and peace, I hungered for danger, challenges, and violence...the heroic experience I sought was war; war, the ultimate adventure; war, the ordinary man's most convenient means of escaping from the ordinary (Prologue)*. In 1965, Lt. Caputo and his comrades are deployed to Vietnam and eager to prove themselves as great soldiers with a vision of an early victory and that soon they will be going back home – he does not realize that he has been mistaken until he truly experiences the savagery of this war. However, after experiencing the true side of the war, the actions of his colleagues: *One of our corpsman was treating the infant with skin ulcers...At the same time, and only a few yards away, our interpreter, a Vietnamese marine lieutenant, roughly interrogated the woman who had been tending the fire. The lieutenant was yelling at her and waving a pistol in front of her ravaged face...This went on for several minutes. Then his voice rose to a hysterical pitch, and holding the forty-five by the barrel, he raised his arms as if to pistol-whip her. I think he would have, but Peterson stepped in and stopped him (Chapter 5)* and death of his friends and people he admired (Levy and Simpson), Caputo begins to question his love for the war. His opinion changes for good after realizing that commensurate level of savagery is committed by the US troops as well as by the Viet Cong who were not the only ones committing evil deeds. After 17 months of service, Caputo returns home feeling older than his father.
- A person who Caputo highly admired was First Lieutenant Walter Neville Levy, a member of C Company, First Battalion, First Marines and killed in action in

September 1965 after saving one of his men – described by Caputo as “act of shining self-sacrifice.” Levy is from an upper-class, Jewish background and attended the Columbia University. In contrasting Levy with himself, Caputo mentions how Levy is even-tempered while he is hot-tempered. Caputo also contrasts his personal reasons for joining the Marines with Levy’s nobler patriotism.⁶³ Levy’s death was the breakpoint when Caputo began to question the purpose of this war: *So much was lost with you, so much talent and intelligence and decency... There were others, but you were the first and more: you embodied the best that was in us. You were a part of us, and a part of us died with you, the small part that was still young, that had not grown cynical, grown bitter and old with death. Your courage was an example to us... You died for the man you tried to save... You were faithful. Your country is not. As I write this, eleven years after your death, the country for which you died wishes to forget the war in which you died... But there are a few of us who do remember because of the small things that made us love you—your gestures, the words you spoke, and the way you looked. We loved you for what you were and what you stood for (Chapter 13).*

9.3 Historical references and accuracy

Caputo’s period of service in Vietnam lasted ‘only’ for 17 months but his memoir describes the war from his perspective in great detail, something a film or a video game is not able to display. Despite the author’s claim that his work is not a history book, it refers to not only the events that lead to the Vietnam War and how it all ended, but also an authentic description about the mentality of the soldiers, the conditions, and experience and perception of the war.

9.3.1 Gulf of Tonkin

In August 1964, when Caputo was midway through the Basic course, the Tonkin Gulf resolution was passed and he was sure that the next war would be fought in Indochina. This assumption is completely accurate as the resolution gave President Johnson the authority to use any means in order to prevent any further aggression from the North Vietnamese towards the Americans after several North Vietnamese patrol boats torpedoed two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin (as discussed in chapter 2.5).

⁶³ *A Rumor of War Characters: First Lieutenant Walter Neville Levy*, Sutton, 2018. LitCharts LLC, <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-rumor-of-war/characters/first-lieutenant-walter-neville-levy>.

9.3.2 Operation Rolling Thunder

The author makes a reference to two events during his station in a military base in Japan. The Viet Cong attacked the American air base at Pleiku to which the US responded with a campaign called Operation Rolling Thunder – an aerial bombardment of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Soon after Caputo and his company is sent to Vietnam and deployed at Da Nang – a city with a major air base used by the South Vietnamese and US Army at that time (as discussed in chapter 2.5).

9.3.3 USA's gradual involvement

Another reference made by the author is Captain Peterson's view. He and everybody else thought that their mission is going to be provide security to the South and nothing else, which was also J.F.Kennedy's initial plan – not to commit to a full-scaled war, but with Johnson taking the office, USA's approach changed drastically. A further accurate reference is the naïve mentality of the US soldiers who believed that the Communist guerrillas would not stand a chance (as discussed in chapter 2.5).

9.3.4 Anti-war Movement

After being released from service Caputo joins the Anti-war Movement with other Vietnam War Veterans in 1967. By 1967 the American population became increasingly discontent with the war. At this moment the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam increased to close to 500,000 and the annual upkeep costs for the war efforts reached \$20 billion without any significant progress in the conflict. With each year, the Anti-war Movement gained hundreds of thousand new supporters (as discussed in chapter 2.7).

9.3.5 Guerrilla warfare

The author is able to depict guerrilla warfare, the tactics and weapons used, and the results of in great detail and accuracy. It was the "bread and butter" for the soldiers in Vietnam. During the battalion's patrols the soldiers had to look out for both the enemies but also booby-traps and mines set by the Viet Cong. In some situations several soldiers (and even a dog) very unfortunate to experience antipersonnel mines that were designed not to kill but forever cripple the one stepping on it – in Caputo's words "it turns his foot into a mass of

bruised and bloody meat”. Another Caputo’s accurate descriptions of guerrilla warfare are the encounters with the Viet Cong. In his words, nothing happens for most of the time, but when something does occur, it is instantaneous and without warning, usually in the form of machine-gun fire, mortar shelling, or snipers and “bushes” shooting out of nowhere. To counter guerrilla warfare the US Army, as well as Caputo in his memoir, under General Westmoreland’s command were sent on search-and-destroy missions aiming to raid villages and kill as many enemies as possible instead of securing territory (as discussed in chapter 2.6).

9.3.6 Weapons

The author also accurately, though with not many models, acquaints the reader with some of the equipment used in the war. The plane that carries Caputo and the rest of the battalion to Vietnam is the C-130 which was often used to transport troops. As the large-scale deployment of military forces to South Vietnam began in 1965, the slow ship movements and the lack of suitable roads, ports, and railways made using aircraft essential.⁶⁴ Caputo’s main weapon is the M14 rifle, a semi-automatic standard shoulder weapon with a 20-round magazine, not so commonly used by the infantry due to heaviness (Rottman, 2008, p. 55). Caputo’s dead enemies were usually found with an AK-47, which gave the NVA soldier an edge over the US Forces that were armed with smaller calibre weapons (Rottman, 2009, p. 27). A few accurate references are made with a soldier carrying a Thompson SMG or enemies using 82-mm mortars (Rottman, 2009, p. 31).

9.3.7 Weather and diseases

Caputo does not talk only about the fighting and its bloodshed, but also about the flora and fauna which had a great impact on the US troops in the same way it is talked about in *Forrest Gump*. The troops experience the monsoon season – heavy raining which lasts several months – and Caputo checks the marines for immersion foot, also known as “trench foot” – a consequence of feet exposure to wetness which leads to skin disintegration, rot and from this stage the only solution is amputation. Another cause of casualties was caused by the diseases due to the unsanitary living conditions. Months of permanent rainfall, poor clothing, exposure to unknown insects, humid and hot weather (according to Caputo) caused diarrhoea,

⁶⁴ Airlift During the Vietnam War, AMC Museum, 2021, <https://amcmuseum.org/history/airlift-during-the-vietnam-war/>.

dysentery, malaria, or fever of unknown origin. During his service, Caputo also witnesses the effects the war has on the soldiers and even on him – only three months passed, but he feels three decades older, others are slowly losing their minds or sink into anxiety and depression, which was usually treated by the consumption of drugs such as heroin or LSD (as discussed in chapter 2.7).

9.3.8 Fall of Saigon 1975

Some years later, Caputo returned to Vietnam not as a soldier but as a journalist. He is in Saigon at the very moment when North Vietnamese Army is invading the city. Caputo is still attached to the war and wants to finally see the end of it; however, the outcome of the war is completely opposite to what he anticipated as a soldier. On 30th April 1975, Saigon fell into the hands of the Communists and was renamed to Ho Chi Minh City, after the notorious leader Ho Chi Minh who led the Vietnamese for nearly three decades (as discussed in chapter 2.7).

10 The Comparison of the three products

All three products – *Vietcong* (2003), *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *A Rumor of War* (1977) – were inspired by the events of the Vietnam War, some more than the others. All three titles have a protagonist that served in the Vietnam War, in *Forrest Gump* and *A Rumor of War* the protagonists are also the narrators.

The views on the war differ within each product by their depictions of the war but also due to the protagonist's perception. In *Vietcong*, the view on the war is quiet neutral, you acquire the feeling that ‘it is just another war you have to fight in’, but it accurately simulates all the possible actions the US units had to perform. *Forrest Gump's* view on the war is rather more satiric due to Forrest's partial lack of intelligence to understand the concepts and reasons of the war. The view on the Vietnam War in *A Rumor of War* evolves throughout the story. Being it a memoir, Caputo's eagerness and sheer will to fight in a war changes to a thoughts of doubt and questions which further evolves to the point where he is glad to finally leave the place after 17 months as he also realizes that the same ‘evil’ done by the Viet Cong is similarly performed by the Americans.

All in all, every one of the products can be appreciated for different aspects; in *Vietcong* the player has the opportunity to complete missions and actions typically performed in the Vietnam War through the eyes of an American soldier, which gives an authentic feeling of the war. *Forrest Gump* on the other hand does not focus purely on the conflict, but rather gives the viewer the chance to realize the number of events that had an impact on USA's policies and diplomacy during the Vietnam War period. The memoir *A Rumor of War* offers the reader the most accurate descriptions of situations that cannot be showed on the screen (feelings or morbid descriptions of corpses) and assures the reader that the war looked and felt even worse in reality, something a typical film or video game is unable to convey.

11 Conclusion

The main purpose of this bachelor thesis was to describe the key events and operations of the Vietnam War, the factors leading to USA's involvement in the conflict, and how it affected both the American society and political status, but also how the war impacted pop-culture industries, i.e. Video Games, Cinematography and Literature, compared to other American wars. The thesis further analyses a specific product of each industry.

The first chapter focuses on the general course of the Vietnam War. The roots of the war go back to the Second World War when Vietnam was a French colony during this period. Invaded by Japan, the Vietnamese struggled, as their overlords got overrun by the Germans. The new Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, took the matter into his own hands and managed to fight off the Japanese until the end of the war. After the Axis got defeated, Vietnam had to further fight the French for their independence and succeeded but was split into the North and the South both having rivalrous government types – Communists controlling the North and Democrats the South. This created even more tensions in the region as the South refused to take part in the Unification elections. Thus, another war emerged. Both sides sought and received support from the superpowers representing their government type. From 1955, the USA began to passively participate in the conflict in the form of sending military advisors and army equipment. In the 1960s, USA's participation became more active as the US troops were being deployed to Vietnam to fight the Viet Cong. However, their gradual involvement in the war did not proceed to their expectations. The campaigns and operations, such as the massacre at My Lai or Operation Rolling Thunder created uproars among the American population. A factor that further solidified the unrest were the television broadcasts that were able to show footage from the war, and portray USA's inhumane approach and the effects of chemical weapons, like Napalm and Agent Orange, used by the US Army. This caused massive protests across the whole country and in 1973 the USA withdrew from the Vietnam War also due to financial problems.

The following chapter focuses on defining popular culture and describes the methods suited for the research and analysis of popular culture industries. Popular Culture has several names; it is the culture of the masses or culture of the people as it is tied with mass consumption, meaning that nearly all people have access to at least one type of popular culture.

The practical part defines the genres that are inspired by the war narrative and further compares the War in Vietnam with other wars of which the United States was a part, and the extent to which they affected these three specific pop-culture industries. It could be concluded that the Vietnam War had a great impact on American politics, diplomacy and society, and also on popular culture, but not as majorly as World War II, which even after almost 80 years finds the highest number of consumers. Furthermore, the analysis deals with one selected product of each industry and how much they were inspired by war and war events. This thesis analyses the following products; Video Games - *Vietcong*, Cinematography - *Forrest Gump* and Literature - *A Rumor of War*.

Each of these products was inspired by something different from the Vietnam War period. The *Vietcong* game focuses on the combat and authenticity of the operations and missions that the US Army had to perform. *Forrest Gump* focuses in part on the depiction of war, but mainly on the political and social events during the war that affected US-Soviet-Chinese relations. Philip Caputo's memoir, *A Rumor of War*, is inspired by the author's personal knowledge and experience during his service in the Vietnam War, describing not only the fight against the Viet Cong, but also how the war affected the mentality of soldiers from his surroundings.

As with every war the USA has been part of, the Vietnam War had a major impact on the popular culture industries equal to the WWI had, but maybe even slightly higher - compared to if the war was won by the US - due to the fact that this was a major war that the USA had been part of and suffered their first humiliating defeat which undermined the view of other countries on the United States.

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13 Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with the Vietnam War and its impact on the popular culture industry. The aim is to describe this conflict in detail and to analyze the historical accuracy of the selected products. The theoretical part deals with the course of the Vietnam War, the factors that led to it and its impact on the United States. Later on popular culture is defined with a focus on the history of the origin of this term. Furthermore, the work describes the methods by which popular culture is analyzed and to what extent it is influenced by geopolitics. The practical segment focuses on the parts of the Literature, Cinematography and Video Games industries that are inspired by war themes and wars of which the United States were part of. Each sector then contains an analysis of one specific product, which is based on the Vietnam War, and what purpose it brings to the consumers of popular cultures. In addition, the analysis focuses on the historical accuracy of the selected titles and mutually compares the selected products.

14 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá válkou ve Vietnamu a tím, jaký vliv měla na vybraná odvětví populární kultury. Cílem je detailně popsat tento konflikt a zanalyzovat historickou přesnost vybraných produktů. Teoretická část se zabývá průběhem války ve Vietnamu, faktory, které k ní vedly, a jejím dopadem na Spojené státy americké. Posléze je definována populární kultura se zaměřením na historii původu tohoto termínu. Dále práce popisuje, jakými metodami se populární kultura analyzuje a do jaké míry je ovlivněna geopolitikou. Praktická část je zaměřena na části odvětví literatury, kinematografie a video her, které jsou inspirovány válečnou tematikou a válkami, kterých byli Spojené státy součástí. Každé odvětví posléze obsahuje analýzu jednoho konkrétního produktu, který je založen na válce ve Vietnamu, a jaký účel přinášejí pro spotřebitele populární kultury. Dále se analýza soustředí na historickou přesnost vybraných titulů a navzájem porovnává vybrané produkty.

15 Appendices



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