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Title: Distant War — Recollections of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia

Author: Marc P. Yablonka

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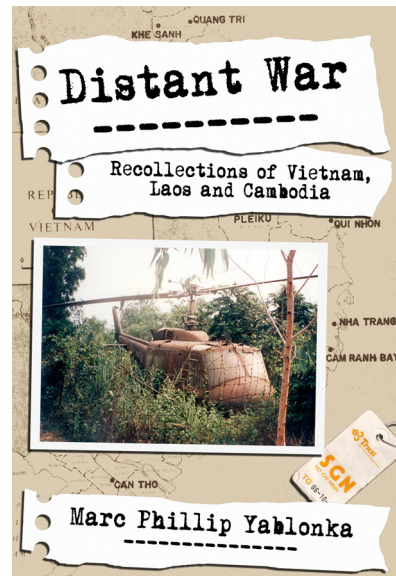
Reviewer: Donald J. Farinacci — AAA Member, Reviewer

Distant War, by Marc Philip Yablonka, a series of vignettes based on interviews by the author of a diverse group of military and civilian participants of the Vietnam War, has the feel of both history and journalism.

An analogy would exist had Ken Burns and his writers working from a detached historical vantage point, still been able to interview the soldiers and civilians caught up in the Civil War.

Yablonka's blending of historical events with first-hand accounts of those directly and profoundly affected by them, lends a certain poignancy to the stories without sacrificing historical accuracy. The result is an historical retrospective having an emotional immediacy. The experiences of the interviewees may have occurred 40 years ago, but they still live with them every day of their lives. The reader is forced to confront their pain, to share their pride and to re-live the trauma of a generation.

Many of the stories are of little known individuals but Yablonka skillfully weaves them into a patchwork of honor. Typical is the story of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, "the Napalm Girl", depicted in the famous and heart-wrenching photograph of the badly burned nine-year-old Vietnamese girl running naked down the middle of the road following a napalm attack. When as an adult, she tells photojournalist Nick Ut that nobody would marry her because of her severely burned body, the reader may be reduced to tears. Fortunately, we learn that her story has a happy ending after all – one of the high points on the emotional rollercoaster which is this book.





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We are again shocked and appalled when POW, Admiral James B. Stockdale, the high-ranking naval officer, was singled out for especially harsh treatment by his North Vietnamese captors at the infamous “Hanoi Hilton”. The most severe beatings and other painful torture were reserved for him. When he quotes Joseph Conrad decades later concerning men “ready to fight a willing battle to the last”, we are provided with a retrospective framework within which to view both the valor and agony of so many of the POW’s of that brutal war. Again, the melding of past history and present reflection provide the reader with a rare insight. So too did the observation of former Green Beret Officer and Vietnam Vet, Jim Morris, made during the 1990’s that, “The collapse of the Soviet Union came about because the United States won a Cold War comprised of a series of Soviet-supported “Third World Wars’.”

There are plenty of these trenchant historical insights in *Distant War*, making it a fascinating read.

