



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors  
Search our website at [thecannonreport.org](http://thecannonreport.org)

**June 14, 2021**

*“In war-time, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies”*

**Winston Churchill**

*“When asked how he would order his thoughts if he had one hour to save the world—he replied that he would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem and save the world in the remaining five minutes. **Albert Einstein***

*“Will this commitment contribute sufficiently to the well-being of the American people to justify putting our troops in a position to die.” Sign on the desk of **General Jim Mattis USMC***

*“The object of war is to achieve a ‘better state of peace.’” **B. H. Liddell Hart***

Our speaker this month is Larry Wozniak from St Joseph. He was instrumental in starting a veteran organization called "Lest We Forget." He will talk about his program in St. Joseph. He will also discuss an upcoming program honoring Korean War veterans, June 19-20.

**MEETINGS** take place the second Monday of every month at the **Downtown Holiday Inn**, 310 Pearl NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 235-7611. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800 hrs), dinner at 7:00 (1900 hrs), business meeting 7:15 (1915 hrs), and program at 8:00 (2000 hrs). Ample free parking available

GENERAL STAFF  
OFFICERS OF THE  
COMPANY

Commandant-Tom  
Buettner  
Executive Officer-Doug  
Voss  
Adjutant-Fern O’Beshaw  
Judge Advocate -Jay Stone  
Mess Officer - Mike  
Krushinsky  
Sgt-at-Arms - Richard  
Foster  
Editor Cannon Report -  
Kingman Davis  
Open Mess Chairman - Jay  
Stone  
Membership - Kingman  
Davis

**Note**

The Morrill Land Grant College Act (1862) allowed states to fund colleges to teach courses related to agriculture and the mechanical arts (engineering), as well as a Reserve Officers Training Corps program to counteract the traitorous departure of West Point graduates to the Confederacy. In 1923 Naval ROTC was added to six universities.

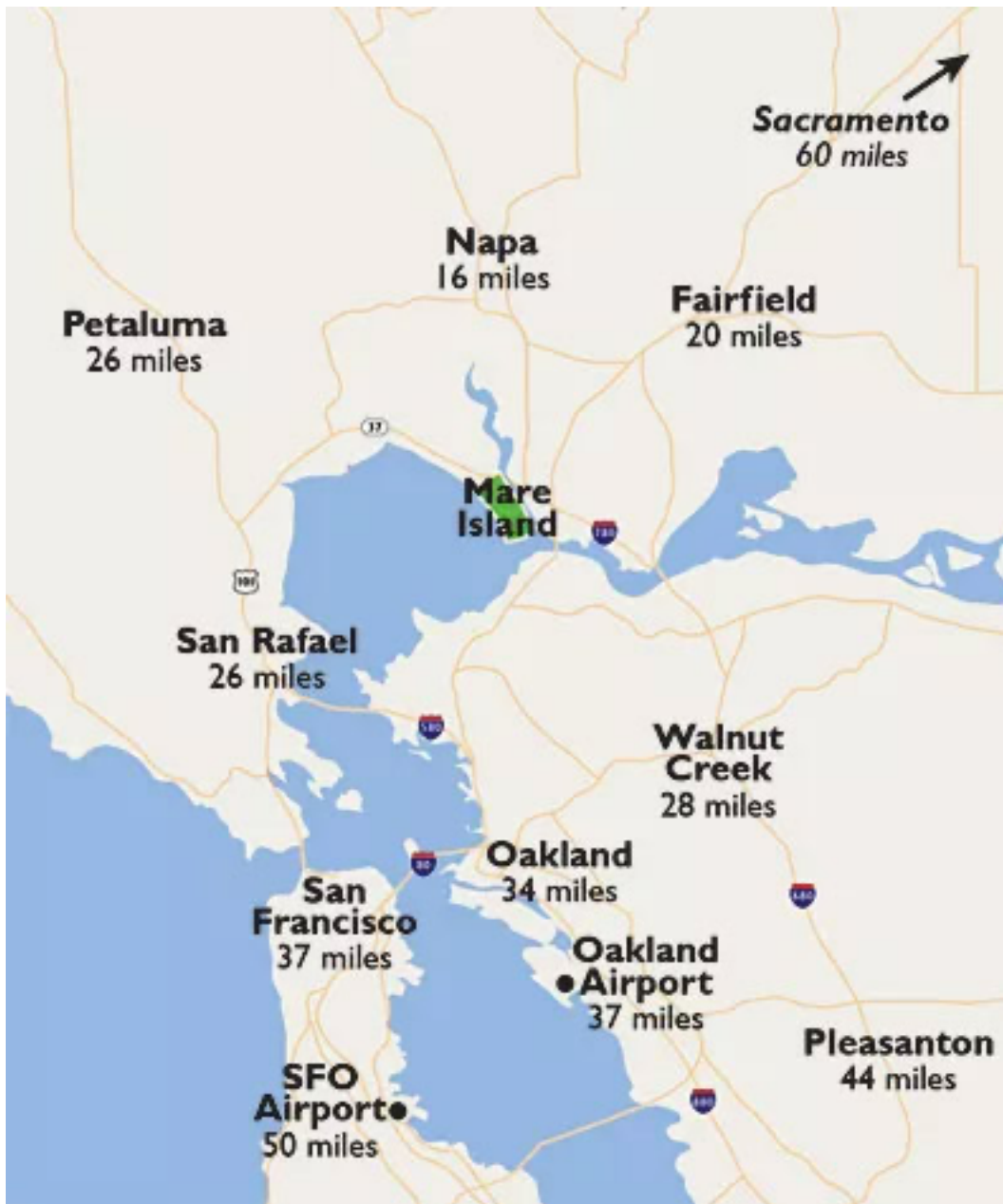
The editorial opinions and articles in *The Cannon Report* do not represent any official position of the Michigan Company of Military Historians and Collectors (MCMH&C) only the opinions of the editor. The MCMH&C is a non-partisan, non-ideological association. All members are welcome to submit material, letters, “For the Good of the Company items”, etc. Direct inquiries or comments to [kuziaks@me.com](mailto:kuziaks@me.com)

# Mare Island Naval Shipyard

On November 6, 1850, two months after California was admitted to statehood, President Fillmore reserved Mare Island for government use. Mare Island is a peninsula in the United States in the city of Vallejo, California, about 23 miles northeast of San Francisco. The Napa River forms its eastern side as it enters the Carquinez Strait juncture with the east side of San Pablo Bay. On September 16, 1854, Mare Island became the first permanent U.S. naval installation on the west coast, with Commodore David Farragut, as Mare Island's first commander. For over a century, Mare Island hosted the Navy's Mare Island Naval Shipyard. It was the home of the oldest naval installation on the West Coast. The growing size and number of the country's naval fleet was making older facilities obsolete and led to increased building and refitting of shipyards nationally. In 1872, the U.S. Public Works Department commenced construction of a 508-foot (155 m) drydock on the island, setting it on a foundation of cut granite blocks. The work was completed in 1891. A second drydock was begun in 1899, a concrete structure 740 feet long set on wooden piles; it was completed in 1910. It soon became the largest integrated industrial plant west of the Mississippi, with shipbuilding and repair facilities. By 1941 a third drydock had been completed and drydock number four was under

construction. An ammunition depot and submarine repair base was added with modern, fireproof buildings. A million dollar, three-way vehicle causeway to Vallejo replaced a ferry service.

Before World War II, Mare Island had been in a continual state of up-building. By 1941, new projects included improvements to the central power plant, a new pattern storage building, a large foundry, machine shop, magazine building, paint shop, new administration building, and a huge storehouse. The yard was expected to be able to repair and paint six to eight large naval vessels at a time. Several finger piers had recently been built, as well as a new shipbuilding wharf, adding one 500-foot and a 750-foot berth. It employed 5593 workers at the



beginning of 1939, and rapidly increased to 18,500 by May 1941, with a monthly payroll of \$3.5 million. In 1941, the drafting department had expanded to three buildings accommodating over 400 naval architects, engineers and draftsmen. The hospital had 584 beds.

By late 1942 the yard employed more than 45,000 workers. The town of Vallejo staggered under the influx of workers seeking any sort of accommodation. Since there was an insufficient amount of adequate housing for the brimming workforce a fleet of 300 chartered Greyhound buses was used to shuttle workers in and out, seven days a week, three times a day for each 8 hour shift. The bus routes extended out to a radius of seventy-five miles. Mare Island's riverfront was a congested warren of machine shops, pipe shops, warehouses, rigger's lofts, administration buildings, launch ways, finger piers, and dry-docks. In the crowded and floodlit workshops, men and women poured over engine lathes, planer mills and shaft bearings. Specialized teams calibrated periscopes for the dozens of submarines built or overhauled at the yard. A paint factory mixed 200,000 gallons of paint each month. A dozen cafeterias turned out food at all hours and a long train of "pie wagons" circulated through the yard and allowed the workers to bolt down their food while on their feet.



During the war the shipyard was one of the two principal submarine construction and repair centers in the nation, the West Coast counterpart to New London, Connecticut. New destroyer escorts were assembled with prefabricated sections brought in from as far away as Colorado. Warships damaged in battle were also repaired and refitted in the base's drydocks. By the end of the war, Mare



Island had produced 17 submarines, four submarine tenders, 31 destroyer escorts, 33 small craft and more than 300 landing craft.

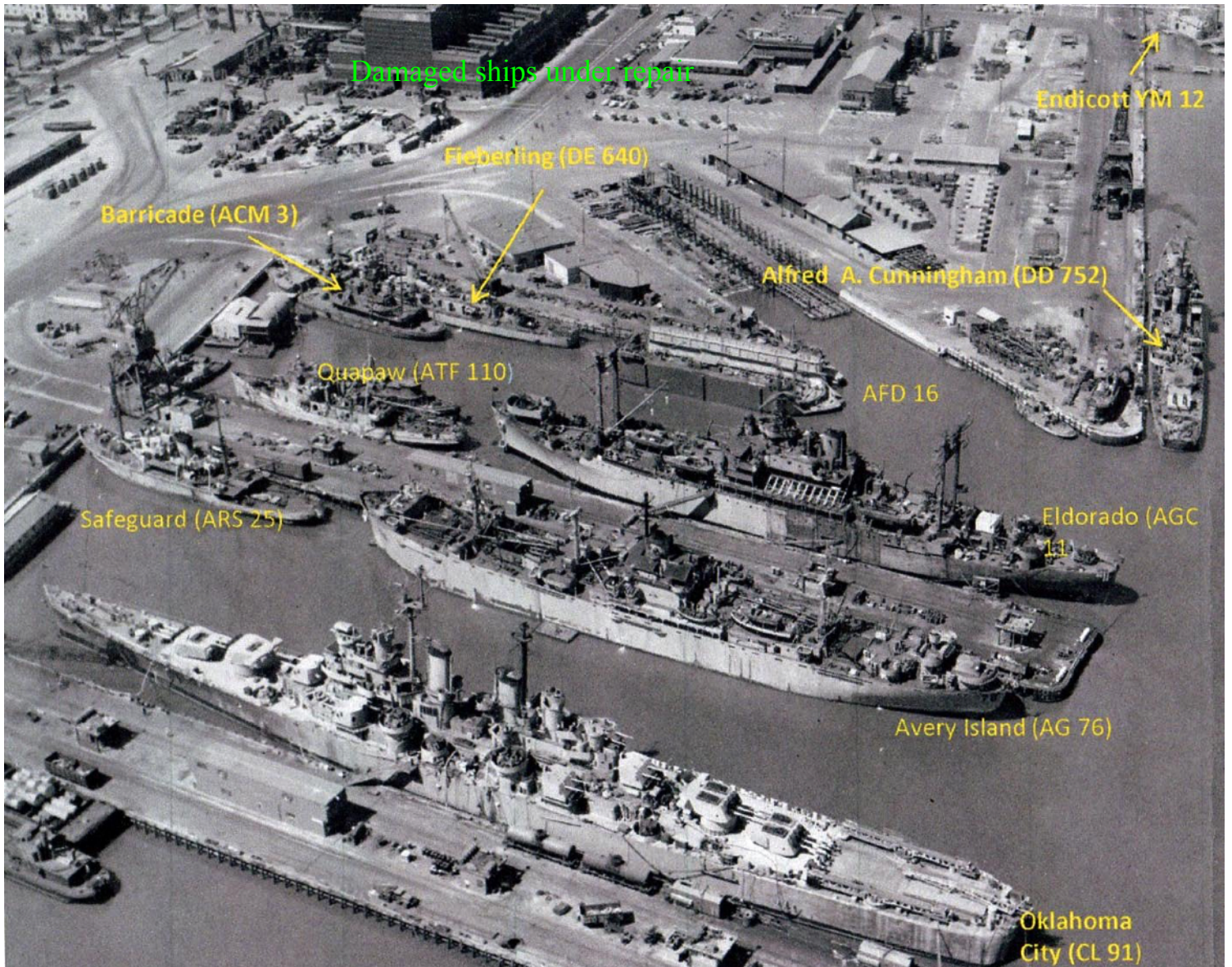
In the last months of 1941 a new *Gato*-class submarine took shape in one of the shipbuilding ways. The *Wahoo*, SS-238 was launched stern first on February 14, 1942. Reasoning that there was no better way to learn a boat's systems than to take a direct hand in installing them, the Navy assigned officers and crew to supervise the latter stages of construction and commissioning. The *Wahoo*'s crew supervised the work from a tumbledown wooden building just opposite the submarine's berth. A surprising degree of customization was allowed, based on the penchants of the captain, his subordinate officers, and the all-important veteran petty officer known as the "chief of the boat." As a result, each submarine, though largely indistinguishable in appearance from others of her class, developed her own personality and quirks



In 1969, the Navy transferred its (Vietnam War) Brown Water Navy Riverine Training Forces from Coronado, California, to Mare Island. Swift Boats (Patrol Craft Fast-PCF), and PBRs (Patrol Boat, River) conducted boat operations throughout the currently named Napa-Sonoma Marshes State Wildlife Area, on the north and west portions of Mare Island. Mare Island Naval Base was deactivated during the 1995 cycle of US base closures, but the U.S. Navy Reserves still had access to the water portions of the State Wildlife Area for any riverine warfare training being conducted from their new base in Sacramento, California. During the latter years of Mare Island's military use, U.S.



Marines were trained for Security Management and Security Force Operations, including; F.A.S.T. (Fleet Anti-Terrorism Team), Security Guards, and Security Force Reaction Forces. In the 1970s Navy technical training schools included those for Data Systems Technicians (DSs), Firecontrol Technicians (FTs), Communications Technicians (CTs) and nuclear power ratings of many types. In 1993 Congress approved the findings of the Base Realignment and Closure report, leading to the closure of Mare Island Naval Shipyard. The shipyard had long been the economic engine of the city of Vallejo, employing 10,000 workers after reductions in 1988. Preservation of many of Mare Island's 661 structures and other cultural resources was an additional factor in the planning process. As the oldest shipyard and naval facility on the West Coast, the shipyard earned a National Historic Landmark designation by the federal government in 1975. In 1979 California listed the entire naval base as a State Historical Landmark. In 1999 the city of Vallejo added Mare Island to the National Register of Historic Districts with 42 individual city landmarks. Mare Island's sprawling National Register historic district boasts hundreds of buildings built between 1854 and the end of World War II, including ranking officers' mansions (c. 1900), duplexes for junior grade officers (1940), and ammunition depots (1856-1960s). Building 46 (1855), which served as an active pipe shop until 1984, is scheduled to reopen as the Mare Island Artifact Museum in 2004. St. Peter's Chapel (1901), the West's first nondenominational military church, features 29 stained glass windows designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany. At Alden Park, visitors can inspect a German Marder Suicide Submarine and Torpedo (1944) and explore bomb shelters built during World War II.



# Military Rivalries

Competition between the various armed forces has been a long standing tradition. But inter-service rivalry often hampered effective prosecution of the war effort. Henry Stimson, FDR's Secretary of War recounts in his memoir that "...the bitter rivalry between the army and navy was a struggle that colored every phase of the Pacific War. It grew mainly from the peculiar psychology of the Navy Department, which frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true Church." The in-fighting between the services was no match between what happened within the various branches. It's important to understand that in the Navy there was a major cultural divide between the surface and aviation communities. People will often refer to the "Brown Shoe Navy" or "Black Shoe Navy" when referring to the the aviation or surface communities, respectfully. "Brown Shoe" is a slang term for an aviator. Traditionally, Naval aviators wear brown boots with their flight suits and brown dress shoes with their service khaki uniforms. In the early days of naval aviation, the pioneer pilots originally wore black shoes, but since the airfields were often dirty and muddy, it made their shoes brown. Tired of constantly cleaning them, they chose to buy brown shoes. Eventually, it caught on and was approved by the Navy. Surface Warfare Officers will almost always wear black boots/shoes in uniform. Aviators will often refer to Surface Warfare Officers as "Black Shoes."

The differences were further exaggerated when officers were promoted. Aviators were not accorded command positions as readily as surface officers. It reached a point to where when a pilot was given command of a carrier his XO had to be a line officer. This animosity traveled down the chain of command to the enlisted ranks but those differences were often settled with fisticuffs. When crews went on liberty the Shore Patrol had its hands full in trying to maintain order with their charges. Add a Marine unit to the mix and trouble was inevitable.

Roy Boehm, our first Navy SEAL, while stationed at the Naval Amphibious Base, in Little Creek, Virginia would relax in a bar where he would wait to take a certain retired Marine general home after he had spent the afternoon with his fellow retirees. Lt. Gen. Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller had met Boehm earlier and had taken a liking to the SEAL. The general refused to let a Marine drive him home after he had had too much anchoring. When ready to leave he would tell the bartender to "call that swabbie and tell him I need a ride." The Officers Club bar was unofficially divided with a Navy section and a Marine section, Boehm choose to sit where he could keep an eye on the general. While waiting for the general a chunky Marine Corps major and two other gyrene officers entered the bar and spotted Roy. The USMC major approached the Navy lieutenant and demanded to know what he was doing there. Sarcastically he said he was waiting for a fare. The major said he could get a drink spilled on him sitting there. Boehm said he wouldn't recommend it to the major. The major then proceeded to upend a glass of beer over his head. Boehm sprang up and drove his fists into the major's nuts, then front-kicked the next Marine in the same spot, and for good measure decked the following skinny lieutenant with a right hook to the jaw. Before departing he poured a glass a beer on the groaning major writhing on the floor. He then told the general he would wait for him outside. Boehm wasn't court-martialed but his O-Club privileges were revoked so he drank with the Chiefs.

The rivalry between the armed services took many forms, most were just variations resulting from boredom but many were symptomatic of a feeling of inadequacy that may result in the loss of perceived power. As infantile as many of these practices appear, nothing compares to what happened in foreign militaries. The attempted assination of Hitler is one well-known example, but a lesser known attempt was a revolt by Imperial Japanese Army officers. On February 26th, 1936, part of the Japanese Army had mutinied and had seized important buildings in the center of Tokyo, after having murdered several men, all were civilian government officials. Loyal troops were massed to suppress



the rebellion, it seemed inevitable that severe fighting would break out. Yet within the space of four days the mutineers surrendered without bloodshed, and life in Tokyo returned to normal. The underlying cause of this outbreak was the rivalry that had developed during the previous four years between two politically active factions in the Japanese Army. Their mutual struggle was quite unknown to the mass of the Japanese people at the time; it was indeed hidden, to some extent, from the eyes of experienced foreign observers in Tokyo. The result of this incident led to the growth of revolutionary and romantic nationalism in Japan. Its outcome meant action against China, and in the end led to Pearl Harbor.

With the lack of any civilian oversight the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff Office and the Ministry of the Army, both of which were nominally subordinate to the Emperor of Japan as supreme commander of the army and the Imperial Japanese Navy governed Japan. However, after Midway the animosity between the IJA and the IJN grew to a dangerous level. The Guadalcanal Campaign raised the intensity of the conflict to such a level that Admiral Isuroku Yamamoto made his office aboard the battleship *Yamato* where he was protected by IJN sailors. The army blamed the navy for failing to adequately supply their forces and the navy blamed the army for failing to recapture Henderson Field allowing Navy planes to continually attack IJN efforts to reinforce the IJA. After Yamato's death in April, 1943, there no longer was a check on the IJA's delusional plans for defeating the Americans. The culmination of this thinking played out in what became known as the Kyūjō incident.

On the night of August 14, 1945, just before the announcement of Japan's surrender to the Allies, a military *coup d'état* in the Empire of Japan was attempted by the Staff Office of the Ministry of War of Japan and many from the Imperial Guard to stop the move to surrender. IJA officers, led by Major Kenji Hatanaka, murdered Lieutenant General Takeshi Mori of the First Imperial Guards Division and attempted to counterfeit an order to the effect of occupying the Tokyo Imperial Palace (Kyūjō). They attempted to place Emperor Hirohito under house arrest, destroy the Jewel Voice Broadcast recording of the emperor announcing the surrender, and assassinate Prime Minister Kantarō Suzuki. Originally, Hatanaka hoped that simply occupying the palace and showing the beginnings of a rebellion it would inspire the rest of the Army to rise up against the move to surrender. This notion guided him through much of the last days and hours and gave him the blind optimism to move ahead with the plan, despite having little support from his superiors. At some time after 0100 on the 15th, Hatanaka and his men surrounded the palace. The palace police were disarmed and all the entrances blocked. The rebels then spent the next several hours fruitlessly searching for the recordings of the surrender speech. The search was made more difficult by a blackout in response to Allied bombings, and by the archaic organization and layout of the Imperial House Ministry.

Around 0300, Hatanaka was informed by Lieutenant Colonel Masataka Ida that the Eastern District Army was on its way to the palace to stop him, and that he should give up. Finally, seeing his plan collapsing around him, Hatanaka pleaded with the Chief of Staff of the Eastern District Army, to be given at least ten minutes on the air on NHK radio, to explain to the people of Japan what he was trying to accomplish and why. He was refused. Colonel Haga, commander of the Second Regiment of the First Imperial Guards, discovered that the Army did not support this rebellion, and he ordered Hatanaka to leave the palace grounds. Hatanaka, on a motorcycle, and Shiizaki, on horseback, rode through the streets, tossing leaflets that explained their motives and their actions. Within an hour before the emperor's broadcast, sometime around 1100, August 15, Hatanaka placed his pistol to his forehead, and shot himself. His second in command, Captain Shiizaki stabbed himself with a dagger, and then shot himself. In Hatanaka's pocket was found his death poem: "I have nothing to regret now that the dark clouds have disappeared from the reign of the Emperor." An appropriate ending to a military ruled government with no civilian oversight.

# The Big Frontier Administrative Center

Max Boot, author of **The Road Not Taken**, writes: “By 1953 the French had been fighting the Vietminh for seven years and the American war had not yet begun, but signs that the first war might be ending and the second about to start were already becoming clear to astute observers.” The Vietminh was an abbreviation for Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (the Revolutionary League for the Independence of Vietnam), a nationalist movement resisting foreign rule during WWII, pledged to fight both the French and the Japanese. When WWII ended France continued with her subjugation of Vietnam, even arming surrendered Japanese troops to aid her in fighting the Vietnamese nationalists. Soon the French resorted to her old colonial habits of torturing prisoners and bombing villages that were suspected of harboring insurgents.

In June, 1953 the joint Chiefs of Staff sent Lieutenant General John W. O’Daniel, commander of the U.S. Army in the Pacific to Indochina to assess whether the French had adequate war plans and, if not, to assist in the creation of better plans. America was already paying 80% of the bill for the French war effort. O’Daniel had met with Colonel Edward Lansdale in Manila and was so impressed by what he had to say that he asked the CIA man to accompany him to Vietnam. Lansdale was responsible for quelling the Huk rebellion in the Philippines and managing Ramon Magsaysay’s presidential campaign. He was an expert in fighting guerrilla insurgency. For three weeks both men travelled all over Indochina and they both drew similar conclusions. “The Vietminh have forces nearly everywhere and have friends where they don’t have forces. It is a secret, hit-and-run business which bewilders the usual person used to an enemy who fights in an orthodox manner. Here the enemy fires from the ground where you don’t expect him, tosses a grenade or fires a bazooka at you when you are in a safe rest area, or comes howling in on your fort in a Chinese mob attack, when he’s suppose to be miles away.” The French occupied static defensive positions instead of actively patrolling and conducting civic actions. O’Daniel was convinced that if the French would leave the forts and take the fight to the enemy, they would prevail in short order. The French viewed Vietnam as a simple problem that could be solved with an aggressive attitude.

The general recommended to the French commander, General Henri-Eugene Navarre, that he reorganize his forces to create seven new divisions to strike out at the Vietminh and launch a general offensive in the north by September, 1953. In the meantime he should organize various raids, clearing operations, and breaking out operations. The ambitious, verging on the delusional, goal these two generals came up with was to defeat the Vietminh by 1955. In return, O’Daniel promised to go home and endorse an extra \$400 million in U.S. aid that the French desperately needed and wanted. He further commented that the French “are in no danger of suffering a major military reverse.” Lansdale was not in complete agreement and realized that France was waging a “white man’s war against the Asians.” Until they recognized that they could not return to the old colonial ways, the conflict would not turn in their direction. Navarre was only able to muster seven battalions instead of seven divisions but he did go north.

On November 20, 1953, 1600 French paratroopers and all their gear boarded sixty-five C-47’s and flew to a valley 185 miles west of Hanoi. After a six hour battle against a battalion of Vietminh these elite troops secured control of a valley eleven miles long and six miles wide. This “aero-terrestrial outpost was near the border with Laos.” It was called the Big Frontier Administrative Center at Dien Bien Phu. It soon became a garrison holding more than 10,000 French troops by December. They were spread across a series of strongpoints with feminine names—Dominique, Eliane, Beatrice, and so on—each one composed of blockhouses and dugouts protected by sandbags and barbed wire, land mines and interlocking fields of fire. Ever attuned to the niceties of war, the French even airlifted two Mobile Field Brothels to keep the troops content in this jungle Verdun. The



## Valley at Dien Bien Phu



Vietminh would soon assemble fifty thousand carefully camouflaged troops on the forested slopes around Dien Bien Phu. Another fifty thousand or so porters and supportive troops—a long line of human ants—dragged heavy artillery and antiaircraft guns through the jungle. Incredibly enough, the Vietminh would have twice many artillery tubes as the defenders.

The French were blissfully unaware of the extent of the enemy preparations. Their only concern was that the Vietminh might slink back into the jungle and refuse battle. A young French officer stationed there wrote his sister on December 26, 1953, in racist prose typical of his comrades, “If they attack, there’ll be plenty of yellow meat in the barbed wire.”

In America, Eisenhower was acutely aware of Vietnam. His decisions were still influenced by Joe McCarthy. Even though Joe was losing public popularity and credibility he was still a force to be reckoned with in the Senate and the Republican Party. Eisenhower did not want to give him more ammunition to snipe at his administration that he was soft on Communism. He had blasted Truman for losing China so he could not afford to be seen as losing Indochina. Ike had won his office by promising to extricate the United States from an unpopular war in Korea. He could hardly afford to send American troops into another Asian war. The president warned prophetically that “This war would absorb our troops by divisions!” The obvious alternative to sending ground troops was to send more matériel and more advisers to help the French.

The Vietminh had methodically overrun strongpoint after strongpoint. The situation became particularly grim after the Vietminh artillery fire had shut down the lone airstrip in the main camp on March 18. Thereafter all supplies and reinforcements had to be delivered by parachute, and there was no way to evacuate the wounded. In desperation the French government asked for American intervention. Eisenhower tried to win congressional approval and British support but neither was forthcoming. He refused to be drawn into a unilateral and unpopular conflict. With no American help the garrison was doomed. The onset of the monsoon season only added to their agony.

Miserable and wet, soldiers staggered on through sheer exhaustion, surviving on a little rice and canned corned beef of uncertain origin nicknamed “monkey meat.” The wounded and the dead piled

up in the mud. Flies and rats were everywhere. Gangrene was starting to appear, and the stink of putrefaction was in the air. An officer observed “one-legged soldiers manning machine guns in the blockhouses, being fed ammunition by their one-eyed and/or one-armed comrades. On May 7, 1954, the French commander, Brigadier General Christian de Castries, concluded he could hold out no longer. The last message sent was “We’re blowing everything up. Adieu.” By then a red-and-gold Vietminh flag was flying over the command post.

The Vietminh had paid a fearfully high price for their victory—25,000 killed or wounded—but they had inflicted on France the worst defeat that any European state had ever suffered at the hands of their colonial subjects. Now the question from the American perspective was, what could be salvaged from the ruins of the French empire in Indochina? The French agreed to withdraw all her military forces from Indochina and agreed to a partition of the country at the 17th parallel. Edward Lansdale, the chief CIA operative, filled the power vacuum left by the French. South Vietnam was now ruled by three independent warlords: the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, two of the largest religious sects each with their own armies; and the Binh Xuyen, a largely criminal enterprise made more powerful when Bao Dai, the last ruling emperor of Vietnam, sold the position of Saigon’s chief of police to General Le Văn Viên, leader of an independent military force within the Vietnamese army. Lansdale’s strategy to save Vietnam was never going to succeed. There was just too much disunity, infighting and corruption to have any hope in achieving a consensus of ruling policies. Even when the CIA installed Ngo Dinh Diem, an honest Catholic mystic with French support, he was ultimately overthrown and murdered by forces within the Vietnamese army in 1963 with US approval.

Our country eventually blundered into a long, costly and divisive conflict, failing to achieve our objectives which were never really enumerated and destroyed the lives of 58,000 Americans and over 1 million Vietnamese because US policymakers failed to understand our national security interests and the nature of the war. War is a political act. When the military and the civilian leadership are not in sync and do not understand what is possible or desirable, bad outcomes are guaranteed. Old WWII tactics do not work in tribal societies when we are seen as invaders by the general population. Our failures were repeated in Afghanistan. Once we routed bin Laden, al Qaeda and the Taliban, we failed to complete the mission, allowing them to escape and we then immersed ourselves in a 20-year debacle that achieved nothing. We should never engage in nation building, especially in a tribal society. Also, we should have paid more attention to the activity of our ally (Pakistan, who provided extensive political, military and financial support to the Taliban, their close ally). Since our invasion, we have suffered more than 2,420 deaths and around 20,660 military personnel wounded in action in Afghanistan.

We continued our bumbling in Iraq. We overthrew a brutal tyrant in a dazzling display of combined arms operations; but, this invasion was based on a lie: Saddam Hussain had no nuclear or biological weapons. We did, however, lay the groundwork for the greatest foreign policy debacle in the history of the United States. We destroyed the country that served as a counterweight to Iran resulting in its elevation to the status of regional super power, unleashed horrific sectarian violence, which led to the resurgence of al Qaeda and the emergence of ISIS and wreaked havoc throughout the entire region. Thus far, more than 200,000 Iraqi civilians have died. More than 2.7 million have been displaced internally and externally and US casualties stand at 4,540 with 31,952 US personnel wounded in action. With over 1.5 million US military personnel having served in Iraq, we are looking at a human and financial cost that our nation will bear for generations to come.

Viewing from a historical perspective, the former battle site at Dien Bien Phu is now a tourist attraction and museum site, much like the tunnels at Cu Chi and other places where Americans died fighting in Vietnam. Years from now what will we see in Baghdad or Kabul?