

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

October 8, 2009 - Issue 345

[Home](#)

**Both Forgotten and Misread:
Robert Taber's The War of the Flea
By Daniel N. White
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

Just finished re-reading the '60's counterinsurgency classic, [War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare](#), by Robert Taber. I think I read it back in high school, as it has that real familiar feel to it of a book you'd read years ago. The details were gone from my memory; if you'd asked me about it last week or earlier I couldn't have told you jack about it. Right now it is being bruited about as a necessary and essential read in military / diplomatic circles. I'm tending to agree; the author ain't dumb and ain't blind neither. Most all the US written stuff in that time frame - the '60's - dealing with counterinsurgency and wars of national liberation and third world security issues was all puerile garbage. This ain't. There's more than a touch of wisdom to it.

Taber seems to have been forgotten almost like his books have. There aren't any more details readily available on his life than the liner notes on his books, which state that he was an investigative journalist for CBS in the '50's, and was among the first journalists who searched out and interviewed Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra mountains in 1958. He wrote a book on that, [M-26; Biography of a Revolution](#), in 1960, and this book, in 1965. This book came to me courtesy of Trinity University via ILL, and it apparently has been checked out exactly once in its lifetime, in 1995.

The book is a quite well-written survey of all the major guerilla movements in the 20th

Century, up to 1965. Taber manages to keep the material lively, which isn't generally the case for military writings, and also manages to keep it short, which is rare most everywhere. See for yourself - here's some of Taber's writings:

Taber, quoting our old friend Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietnamese commanding general from 1944-1978, on guerillas fighting a conventional Western army:

"The enemy will pass slowly from the offensive to the defensive. The blitzkrieg will transform itself into a war of duration. Thus, the enemy will be caught in a dilemma: He has to drag out the war in order to win it, and does not possess, on the other hand, the psychological and political means to fight a long, drawn-out war."

Couldn't have said it better myself about our two wars ongoing. Giap's apt turn of phrase - "the psychological and political means to fight a long, drawn-out war" - is something we overlook completely, both in our foes and in ourselves. We look to the power of our weapons and the prowess of our troops in using them. Giap looked to the soldier's and citizen's hearts, where individual will and patriotism reside, and he defeated us and the French both.

Taber quotes a news article dated 4-21-64, which pointed out that the number of ARVN (our South Vietnamese ally's army) small-unit operations in the preceding week totaled 5190. Only 70 of them made contact with the enemy, and contact meant as little as a single bullet fired at them from a hedgerow. Shows that even back then, the truth was out in the open, if anyone had their eyes open to see it. Can't say as anyone has produced similar statistics from Afghanistan or Iraq - haven't heard of any, and the fact that nobody in the reportorial corps has tried to turn them up, as the percentage of contacts per operation, and the percentage of contacts you, and not the enemy, initiate, are probably THE key statistics in explaining how the war is going - shows what a bunch of military illiterates the fourth estate are, and how they haven't learned anything from Vietnam, either.

Another one from Giap, this, the classic dilemma of an invading foreign army:

"The nature and the very aim of the campaign the (colonialist) enemy is conducting oblige the enemy to split up his forces so as to be able to occupy the invaded territory...the enemy was thus faced with a contradiction: It was impossible for him to occupy the invaded territory without dividing his forces. By their dispersal, he created difficulties for himself. His scattered units thus became an easy prey for our troops and mobile forces."

And one from Bernard B. Fall, from his [*The Two Vietnams*](#):

"For the French, the Indochina War was lost then (after the RC-4 defeats in 1950) and there. That it was allowed to drag on inconclusively for another four years is a testimony to the shortsightedness of the civilian authorities who were charged with drawing the political conclusions from the hopeless military situation."

So there it is. The United States, and our good friends, the Limeys, have a political system more broken than the French Fourth Republic's. We've been fighting more

obviously lost wars for longer, and apparently are doubling down on one of them as we speak. Maybe starting a third one, too.

For all the talk of this book being greatly read in military circles, well, hell, it's time to test the officer corps on their reading comprehension and see if it is up to a sixth-grader's level. Maybe the State Department's, too. If stuff like this not jumping off the page and hitting you square between the eyes - and making you wince at how little we learned from Vietnam then, or since, and how shamefully we are repeating ourselves in self-delusion and contempt for our foes' intelligence, motivation, and bravery - well, hell, whatever bad happens to us, we've got it coming. The almighty might smile on fools and children, but to the best of my knowledge his mercy doesn't extend to the stupid.

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Daniel N. White, has lived in Austin, Texas, much longer than he figured he would. He reads more than most people and a whole lot more than we are all supposed to. He recommends all read his earlier piece in **BC**, [1975 Redux](#), which is still, in his estimation, the best piece on the Iraq surge anybody printed when it started. He is still doing blue-collar work for a living - you can be honest doing it - but is fairly fed up with it right now. He invites all reader comments, and will answer all that aren't too insulting. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. White.



Let your voice be heard
The call is free

Powered By
Google voice

[Click Here](#)

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO **bc** NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT **bc**

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved