

various stages of her career as flyers constantly sought to outdo each other in the headline grabbing stunt and speed competition of the 1920s and 30s.

Amelia Earhart is portrayed as a bright and daring young woman who grew up in a household with a strong and steady mother, but with an alcoholic father who wandered from one job to another. Amelia decided early that she would fly and set about wheedling flying lessons in an age when many men simply refused to teach women flying. Eventually Neta Snook, the first woman to graduate from the Curtiss School of Aviation, gave her lessons and started her off on a dramatic career.

Amelia's life with George Putnam, the prominent New York publisher, is developed in some depth. Her marriage arrangement was again unusual by the standards of the day as she kept her own name, although newspapers often referred to her as Mrs. Putnam. She also pursued her career with great independence. On the other hand, her husband was supportive, and actually helped promote her career. He was her campaign coordinator and publicist as well as her greatest admirer.

The author portrays Earhart as supremely self-confident in her skills and careful about details. Yet in her last fatal trip there were some gaps that are hard to explain. Her navigator, Fred Noonan, was drinking heavily, yet she kept him. Earhart also chose tiny Howland Island as a landing spot despite warnings about the difficulty of locating it given the radio and instrument capacity of the time. Inexplicably she set out on the most dangerous journey of her life without agreement between herself and the navy and coast guard on such crucial items as the radio frequency she would use and the directional equipment she would need. Was it tempting fate, foolish, or supreme self-confidence in her own flying ability?

The author discusses several theories about what went wrong and what happened to Amelia Earhart between Loe, New Guinea, and Howland Island in July 1937, but doesn't make any conclusions. In fact, this is a technique she used often in the work to raise questions but not draw conclusions on Earhart's motives or judgment.

This reviewer would recommend this volume for the young reader or as an introductory work to the topic of women in aviation.

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George Donelson Moss. *Vietnam: An American Ordeal.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990. Pp. xii, 420. Paper \$23.00.

Jeffrey P. Kimball, ed. *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990. Pp. xvii, 355. Paper, \$14.95.

George Moss's *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* is the most thorough, up-to-date, and analytical account of the Vietnam War since George Herring's classic *America's Longest War*. Setting out to provide an "objective" account of the long agony of Vietnam, Moss has made splendid use of a vast variety of sources to provide a balanced and comprehensive history of the American experience.

Some readers may not agree with Moss's central thesis that there was never any realistic prospect for America's goals in Vietnam, but their argument must be with his sources, not with his interpretation. Moss asserts, for example, that at no time from 1954 to the final collapse in 1975 was the South Vietnamese government a viable state. Profound corruption, incompetence, and an unwillingness to reform to win popular support Moss locates in what he calls "the essential South Vietnamese conundrum: How to achieve a stable political order without supporting revolutionary changes." He is equally harsh with his assessment of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). In neither period during which self-defense was the assigned task for the ARVN by the American war managers--1954 to 1965 and "Vietnamization" 1969-1975--was the ARVN more than an illusion. Incompetently led by largely corrupt officers, unlike their revolutionary counterparts, ARVN soldiers were "serving time, not a cause."

When the United States took over the major military effort in 1965 Moss argues that the central flaw in the U.S. approach was the failure to translate U.S. political objectives in South Vietnam into a viable military strategy. General William Westmoreland's choice of the attrition strategy never asked the critically important question of how many of the enemy soldiers had to be killed in order to win? Relying on the self-induced myths of fire power and technology, Westmoreland committed the nation to a war in which "a U.S. military victory was probably never a realistic strategic possibility." It never seemed to occur to U.S. political and military leaders that the North's ability to absorb pain was greater than the U.S.'s ability to inflict pain.

On the home front Moss concludes that the "stab-in-the-back thesis"--that the U.S. lost in Vietnam because of the media (especially television) or the radical left student movement--is wholly unwarranted. In the first case he points out that it did not take television to turn the American people against the war in Korea in 1951-1953, and that even if the media had told the story the U.S. Army wanted told in Vietnam the results would have been no different. The radical left was less instrumental in turning the nation against the war, Moss argues, than the "wide spread opposition of . . . mostly patriotic, law-abiding, and God-fearing mainstream Americans" who came to loathe the war that could not be won.

Moss does not mythicize the enemy in Vietnam. He recognizes that while "the insurgency was a genuine revolt based in the South . . . it was organized and directed from the North." He also points out the many strategic errors made by the North Vietnamese such as the early decision to pursue conventional warfare in the spring 1972 offensive.

Moss also separates the warrior from the war. American soldiers fought with courage and dedication, he argues, and should not be blamed for errors in judgment and policy of their political and military leaders.

In all, Moss's work is recommended for advanced students--high school or college. It is thought-provoking, comprehensive, and well written.

Jeffrey Kimball's *To Reason Why* treats a more narrow aspect of America's involvement in Vietnam: a variety of views on why the U.S. became involved in Vietnam 1945 to 1975. Divided into seven sections that consist of excerpts from primary sources and secondary accounts and analysis, the book would be useful to students who wish to focus on this important aspect of U.S. policy. It would not suffice, however, for a book of readings to supplement either Herring's *America's Longest War* or Moss's *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*. Teachers looking for a companion to either of these fine histories would more likely turn to Moss's *A Vietnam Reader: Sources and Essays* (1991).

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Robin Frame. *The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100-1400.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 256. Cloth, \$39.95; paper, \$12.95.

Frame (University of Durham), an expert on medieval Irish history, attempts to reorient readers' views of later medieval political development in the British Isles. His deceptively simple thesis, that the British Isles have formed a natural unit, not only in terms of geography but also in terms of political organization, provides a powerful challenge to the usual examination of the period and the topic. Frame provides a detailed examination of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, with rich bibliographic sources, with the view of laying the groundwork for studying them as legitimate but regional centers of political power. The author warns that the book is "idiosyncratic" and "experimental," and the thread that holds the fabric together is the expansion of political power, the responses it encountered, and the limits placed upon his organizing themes. The main themes are: (1) the impact on the British isles of the dominant power within them, represented by the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, church, and monarch; and, (2) the successor of the above, the English state. It should be noted that despite the intentions of the author and his different orientation, this book is often rather deterministic as if what happened was probably for the best. Thus, while the book provides, especially for American readers,