

## A Review of *Who the Hell Are We Fighting? The Story of Sam Adams and the Vietnam Intelligence Wars*

C. Michael Hiam, Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press 2006), 326 pages, biblio., index.

Robert Sinclair

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The Sam Adams of C. Michael Hiam's book is neither the hero of the American Revolution nor the beer, but Samuel A. Adams (1933–88), who in his 10-year career as a CIA analyst caused more trouble than any analyst before or since. Sam, a distant relative of his 18th-century namesake, arrived at the Agency in 1963 after a brief spell as a “downwardly mobile WASP” (his term) in the outside world. By his own account, Sam's bosses were calling him “*the outstanding analyst*” in the Agency after he had been there only three years.<sup>1</sup> In another three years, they were badgering him to resign. His story raises important questions about the relationship between intelligence and policy that persist to this day.

Sam was good-looking, brilliant, endlessly curious and inventive, and a glutton for research. He had a wonderfully self-deprecating sense of humor. He was almost childlike in his eagerness to discover things and share his

discoveries with everyone around him. He was also obsessive, stubborn, quixotic, and disheveled to the point of slovenliness. He was incapable of marching to any drummer but his own. Thomas Powers, who edited both Hiam's book and Sam's own memoir (and who wrote *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, the standard biography of CIA Director Richard Helms), describes Sam this way:

*I never knew a man with such an enormous appetite for sheer information. I remember him reading the multiple volumes of the British official intelligence history of WW II — a massive series of tomes which were just pure information, one damn case after another. Sam loved them.*<sup>2</sup>

Sam's first assignment when he arrived at CIA was the Congo, and this is where I got to know him. (I have a cameo role at the beginning of Hiam's book as the nerdy South Africa analyst at the next desk.) Sub-Saharan Africa was on the front burner in the early 60s, and no part of the con-

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Adams, *War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 1994).

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with the author.

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*All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of an article's factual statements and interpretations.*

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continent was getting more attention than the Congo, which seemed to be tearing itself apart and/or going communist. At that moment, not many issues loomed larger for this country than saving the Congolese from themselves and the Soviets.

Starting with little beyond what he might have gleaned from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Sam read everything he could find, talked with anyone who would sit still for him, and filled box after box with three-by-five cards. His phenomenal memory gave him almost total recall, and he quickly became one of Washington's reigning authorities on the Congo.

Sam's specialty was the "Simba" rebels in the eastern Congo. How much of a threat did they pose to the extraordinarily weak central government, and what was the extent of communist influence? We knew the rebels were getting help from the Cubans; Che Guevara himself turned up for a while. But what could we expect from the rebels themselves?

These questions took on operational significance in 1965, when the Simbas captured Stanleyville (now Kisangani) and took hostage several hundred foreigners, including some US officials. The United States and Belgium responded with a military rescue operation, and Sam became a

one-man task force, impressing everyone with his knowledge and analytic skill and earning all sorts of kudos. (Most such Agency task forces have many members, but Sam had more than a bit of the dog in the manger about him. Hiam interviewed his boss from that time, who said that at one point a call had come for a hurry-up briefing. Sam was not around and the boss filled in for him. "Sam," said the boss, "was mad as hell. This was his damn country and, by God, he was going to be the one to talk about it."<sup>3</sup>)

Before long, South African mercenaries pushed back the Simbas, we took the measure of communist prospects in the Congo, black Africa got shoved off the front burner by, among other things, Vietnam, and in 1965, Sam moved over to work on the Asian war. For starters, he applied his insatiable appetite for information to the issue of Viet Cong morale, and his first discovery was the huge number of communists who were deserting. If you combined the desertion rates with after-action body counts, you wondered how long the other side could put up a credible fight. As he dug deeper into captured communist documents, however, he came to the conclusion that the Viet Cong were two or even

three times as numerous as our order-of-battle charts indicated. Measured against those larger numbers, desertions looked like a manageable problem and the Viet Cong looked like a much more redoubtable foe.

Here was the start of Sam's epic battles with MACV (the US command in Vietnam) and, eventually, with his own hierarchy in CIA. Actually, a good many analysts in both CIA and the military agreed that the numbers were far too low, but only Sam kept fighting after 1967, when the issue was defined away in a key national intelligence estimate.

Just a few months after the estimate was issued, the communists launched their Tet offensive. One might assume the offensive vindicated Sam's line of analysis. But although it had an enormous impact on domestic American attitudes, our approach to the war itself changed only incrementally, and Sam remained the proverbial prophet without honor.

He was not one to give up, however. His subsequent actions would have gotten him fired and probably arrested today. Hiam gives a blow-by-blow account of those battles, starting with Sam's demand that CIA essentially find itself guilty of cowardice. He smuggled classified documents out of the Agency and hid them. Some he buried in the woods near his farm; others he hid about in various places, including a neighbor's attic. The buried

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<sup>3</sup> Hiam, 37.

trove was almost unreadable by the time Sam dug it up—the paper worm-eaten and water damaged. Those he could salvage and other hidden copies he passed to the media and to congressional committees;<sup>4</sup> he provided the material for a “60 Minutes” program that skewered General William Westmoreland, our next-to-last commander in Vietnam; and he exhausted himself in Westmoreland’s subsequent defamation suit against Mike Wallace, CBS, and Sam himself. As Hiam tells the story, Sam was on the verge of vindication again and again but never quite achieved it, the last instance being Westmoreland’s withdrawal of his defamation suit without a verdict when it became clear that he was losing.

By the time Sam died at the age of 55, he had divorced, remarried, and moved to Vermont. He was working on a memoir but could not bring it to closure. According to Hiam, he suffered from high blood pressure, arthritis, and gout, and he was eating and drinking too much. One morning in October 1988, his wife discovered his body in their living room, a first-aid book open beside him—one last lonely research effort that didn’t pan out.

Hiam is not a disinterested outsider. His father was Sam’s roommate at Harvard, and Sam was his godfather. One wishes he had acknowledged these

<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Adams e-mail to author, 1 December 2006

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relationships in the book. That said, *Who the Hell Are We Fighting?* still strikes this reader as a clear-sighted account of the man and his era. Hiam did a huge amount of research. (Sam would have been proud.) He interviewed people who dealt with Sam throughout his life (including me) and read everything he could lay his hands on, including Sam’s buried trove (which is now at Boston University) and the voluminous records from the Westmoreland defamation suit.

Concerning Sam himself, Hiam provides revealing contextual information, particularly for the years before Sam arrived at CIA. When you read about Sam’s privileged, lonely childhood (his parents were divorced, and his mother kept him at boarding schools and summer camp most of the year), his later eagerness to share his discoveries comes into better focus. Similarly, his prodigious childhood research on the American Civil War prefigured his later work on the Congolese Simbas and the Viet Cong.

Hiam even offers some glimmers of insight into a question that has always intrigued me: What converted Sam from a directionless Harvard undergraduate and “downwardly

mobile WASP” into a driven intelligence analyst? The answer seems to have been a case of finally breaking the family mold. After a stint in the Navy, Sam followed his father’s wishes and enrolled in Harvard Law School. He decided after two years, however, that the law was not for him, and Hiam says the decision led the father to “take a swing at his son.” At about the same time, his girlfriend, a Wellesley graduate from a well-to-do Alabama family, to whom he had proposed marriage, discovered she was pregnant. This concatenation of occurrences, I believe, brought him over the threshold to independence. Sam and his girlfriend quickly married, Sam quit the New York banking job his father had found for him, and the couple moved to Washington to begin Sam’s meteoric intelligence career.



Hiam provides a rich picture of the Viet Cong numbers debate, the people involved in Sam’s battles, and the controversies that took up the rest of Sam’s life. He includes too much tedious play-by-play when he comes to the Westmoreland trial, but his account of Sam’s earlier struggles is excellent. Reading how Sam badgered his superiors, it is hard not to

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come away with a degree of sympathy for them. They clearly had no idea how to deal with the persistent attacks on this lone, irrepressible idealist.

The turning point in the numbers story came with the 1967 national estimate that settled on a narrow definition of the categories to be included in our order-of-battle estimates.<sup>5</sup>

Hiam, citing documents and interviews, makes the following case: MACV, following implicit or explicit guidance from Westmoreland himself, would not accept a number that exceeded a certain limit. The fundamental tenet of US policy was that we were wearing down the enemy—that at some not-too-distant point, the communists' attrition rates would exceed their replenishment capacity. MACV, in fact, was claiming in 1967 that we might be approaching this "crossover point." Sam's notion that communist numbers should be pegged higher by a factor of two or three was politically out of bounds by several miles. Hiam, quoting a member of Westmore-

land's staff who agonized over the issue, says that at one point Westmoreland's own intelligence chief came up with a higher estimate. Westmoreland allegedly reacted by asking, "What will I tell the president? What will I tell Congress? What will be the reaction of the press to these higher numbers?" The intelligence chief was soon sent packing.

There was also a mind-set issue. Military doctrine as it had emerged from World War II and Korea focused only on regular military formations. There was no place for the guerrillas and political infrastructure that were at the heart of the numbers controversy, and at the heart of Vietnamese communist strategy as well. In his interview on "60 Minutes," Westmoreland acknowledged in essence that one of the reasons he had excluded irregulars from the order of battle was that he didn't think they were really soldiers.

MACV, Hiam continues, was adamant that it have the final say. It was not going to be second-guessed even by the Pentagon, much less by CIA civilians, and CIA was not willing to press the point. In late 1967, CIA Director Richard Helms sent a delegation headed by George Carver, his assistant for Vietnam, to Saigon with orders to resolve the issue. After days of nasty debates, Carver pretty

much accepted MACV's terms. According to Hiam, Helms later said "that because of broader considerations we had to come up with agreed figures, that we had to get this OB question off the board, and that it didn't mean a damn what particular figures we agreed to."<sup>6</sup> Sam (who had been part of the delegation and who had been infuriated by Carver's "cave-in") wrote in his memoir that when his pestering finally got him an audience with Helms, Helms "asked what I would have him do—take on the whole military?" Helms added, "You don't know what it's like in this town. I could have told the White House there were a million more Viet Cong out there, and it wouldn't have made the slightest difference in our policy."<sup>7</sup>



One of the virtues of Hiam's book is the snapshots it provides of the others involved, each burdened by his own priorities and each trying to cope, not just with the Sam Adams phenomenon but with all the pain and uncertainty of that messy war. Two individuals stand out in particular. Both agreed fundamentally with Sam; neither backed him during the struggle over the national estimate in 1967; both testified on his behalf at the Westmoreland trial.

The first is Colonel Gains Hawkins, MACV's chief order-of-battle

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<sup>5</sup> See SNIE 14.3-67, Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam, 13 November 1967. The declassified estimate, along with many other declassified products can be found in *Estimative Products on Vietnam, 1948-1975* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005) and at [www.cia.gov/nic](http://www.cia.gov/nic).

<sup>6</sup> Hiam, 119.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

specialist. A Mississippi teacher before he decided to stay in the Army during the Korean War, a reservist conscious of his inferior standing vis-à-vis West Pointers, Hawkins hit it off immediately with Sam and fully concurred with Sam's analysis. He could not, however, bring himself to go against his sense of military discipline, not to mention risk his career, by challenging his superiors in 1967. According to Hiam, Hawkins told Mary McGrory in 1982, when the preliminaries to the Westmoreland trial were getting under way, that he had rationalized his stance as follows:

*[My bosses] are taking over. It is their war to fight. Maybe [my] higher figures are wrong. Whatever the case, it is their war and the consequences are theirs. Give them what they want, bless them and get your ass out of here. [Insertions and emphasis as in Hiam's book.]*<sup>8</sup>

Hawkins later turned down a promotion to brigadier general rather than accept another assignment dealing with the Vietnamese communist order of battle. In his interview with McGrory, he said of his subsequent decision to speak out:

*Yes, there is...some private annoyance that life in relatively quiet retirement...will never be the same again. But, know, too, Miss Mary, there is a compulsion here, a tardy realization that the tale must come out no matter what the personal pain or annoyance. In truth, the retell-*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104.

*ing is somewhat like the war itself. It hurts, and it is larger than all of us.*<sup>9</sup>

The other individual is George Allen. Allen worked on Vietnam, first for the military and then for CIA, for 30 years, beginning in the 1950s. At the time of the 1967 estimate, he had the dubious distinction of being Sam's nominal boss (as he himself put it, referring with tactful euphemism to Sam's freelancing, Sam was "working under my general supervision"<sup>10</sup>) as well as George Carver's deputy. Like Hawkins, Allen faced a moral dilemma over the 1967 estimate and yielded. He considered resigning but decided against it. According to Hiam, he explained his thinking to CIA historian Harold Ford as follows:

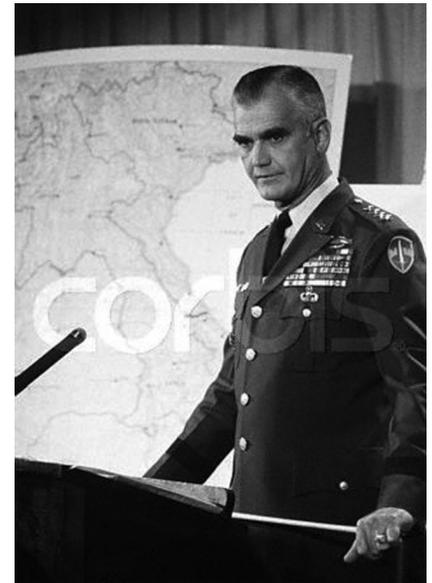
*I had four daughters, one of them [a] sophomore in high school—and three coming up behind—and the only thing I know is intelligence. I persuaded myself, Well, stay and try to win the next battle. But Sam decided to do what he did. [Emphasis in Hiam's text.]*<sup>11</sup>

One of the defense lawyers in the Westmoreland suit told Hiam, "George Allen was crossing a lot of Rubicons by coming and testifying." (Both Hawkins and Allen had retired by the time of the Westmo-

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>10</sup> George Allen, *None So Blind: A Personal Account of Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 244.

<sup>11</sup> Hiam, 121.



Westmoreland briefing reporters in the Pentagon on 22 November 1967. (Photo: © Bettmann/CORBIS)

reland trial; thus career considerations no longer inhibited them.)



Hiam's book is an excellent study of this one important episode in the Vietnam saga. For a sense of the role of intelligence through the whole war, however, one must turn to accounts like George Allen's *None So Blind* and Harold H. Ford's *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968*.<sup>12</sup> To me, it quickly becomes clear that Sam's battles were part of a dialogue of the deaf that had begun long before and continued until the end of the war in 1975—a dialogue in which civilian policymakers, military commanders, and not a few

<sup>12</sup> Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998.

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intelligence professionals worked from serious misperceptions.

For *policymakers*, the US involvement in the war had begun as part of our worldwide struggle against communism, and policymakers never really came to terms with the aspects of the war that did not fit this preconception. They failed until too late, for example, to recognize the strength Hanoi gained from its standing as the embodiment of Vietnamese nationalism, and the powerful force that emerged from the welding of nationalism with communist discipline. The American can-do attitude, and the corollary that American ideals were welcome everywhere, led easily to over-optimism: surely, we could “win the hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese and beat this ragtag bunch of communists. Moreover, we had begun our commitment in Vietnam in the shadow of the “who-lost-China” controversies of the 50s and the trauma of the Korean War, and throughout the war the political costs of defeat in Vietnam remained too high to contemplate. At the same time, policymakers were acutely aware of the political and economic pressures limiting the resources they could commit to the war. As the Pentagon Papers show, their time and attention were consumed in endless debates about how to cope with this array of unsatisfactory choices. They had little time for intelligence, especially if its message just made the choices harder.

The *US military* had fallen into the trap of fighting the last war. For all the lip service to “counter-insurgency,” military doctrine had enormous difficulty looking beyond the main-force combat that had gained the generals their stars. Control—of territory and of population—was more important than the attitudes of ordinary Vietnamese. And just as their civilian bosses underestimated Hanoi’s political staying power, the generals underestimated its ability to absorb enormous losses and keep fighting.

And *intelligence*? First of all, we need to keep in mind that intelligence was only a peripheral player in the policy debates. The focus was on what *our* side should do, not the capabilities or intentions of the other side. As Harold Ford notes, Helms himself had had an object lesson in this cold reality in 1965, just two years before the Viet Cong numbers debate. The CIA director then was John McCone, and Helms was head of the espionage directorate (then called the DDP), just one notch down in the hierarchy. This was the year President Johnson decided on a substantial increase in the US ground-force presence in Vietnam. McCone argued forcefully that only a no-holds-barred US air campaign against the North would turn the tide. Johnson’s response was to shut McCone out of the decisionmaking process, and McCone resigned shortly thereafter.<sup>13</sup> Helms surely carried the scars of that experience two years later.

Viet Cong numbers were far from the only thing on Helms’s plate, moreover. According to Ford, Helms was simultaneously pushing a skeptical appraisal of the US bombing campaign through the system, and he was reluctant to do anything that might make his military counterparts less willing to go along with it.<sup>14</sup> He also had to keep his eye on the rest of the world, notably the Middle East: the Six-Day War (in which CIA analysts had acquitted themselves well) had occurred just a few months earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Second, it seems clear that MACV’s order-of-battle analysts did tailor their estimates to the needs of their consumers. According to Hiam, one lieutenant said he was told, “Lie a little, Mac. Lie a little.” George Allen told Ford that the head of the MACV order-of-battle unit at the time, a hard-charging careerist who later became head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, acknowledged years afterward that “of course” there were many more Viet Cong than MACV’s charts showed, but the numbers on the charts were “the command position.”<sup>16</sup>

As for CIA, Ford cites numerous occasions of skepticism among agency analysts about prospects for the war. The writers of the Pentagon Papers, too, note that CIA’s analysis was often more realistic than that of others. But,

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<sup>13</sup> The incident is the second of Ford’s three episodes. Op. cit., 39–80.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>15</sup> See David Robarge, “Getting It Right: CIA Analysis of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,” *Studies in Intelligence* 49, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Hiam, 248

it is one thing to put forth cogent analysis and another to have an impact on policy. It was not just Helms who was convinced that taking on MACV would be suicidal. Even one of Sam's more sympathetic colleagues told Hiam, "Sam and I had a lot of slinging matches because he had his standards, some of which I knew damn well wouldn't sell."

The problem went deeper than relative bureaucratic clout. Neither Sam nor anyone else ever managed to make it clear to their bosses just why the so-called "numbers" debate was so important. It was much more than a simple matter of numbers: which Viet Cong groups you thought we should count was a function of what kind of war you thought we were fighting, and no question could be more fundamental than that. Not having grasped this point, a senior member of Carver's mission to Saigon could assert that particular numbers did not make much difference,<sup>17</sup> and Carver could tell Helms (in a cable from Saigon that Sam subsequently spirited to his woodland cache), "Major differences lie in realm of conceptual and presentational methodology rather than in genuine disagreement over substantive facts."<sup>18</sup>

Carver's careful handling of the issue is particularly revealing. Carver was at least Helms's equal in bureaucratic astuteness. He had given the White House a précis of Sam's findings

<sup>17</sup> Ford, 95.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Hiam, 118.

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(without telling Sam), and, according to Ford, he supported Sam's analysis at least through the middle of 1967.<sup>19</sup> The depth of his commitment is suspect, however. Ford adds that Carver "generally supported the Johnson administration's view that things were looking up."<sup>20</sup> Having fought the good fight in Saigon, he wound up doing what was necessary "to get this OB question off the board," as Helms wished.

Even in the best of circumstances, intelligence would have faced a monumental task had it challenged the deeply set preconceptions of the country's political and military leaders. And in intelligence matters the circumstances are never the best. Intelligence must always acknowledge a margin of uncertainty, and the uncertainty will almost always lead to disagreements that allow policymakers to push their own preferences. In the Viet Cong numbers case, the willingness, even eagerness, of MACV's order-of-battle unit to mesh its estimates with the command's perceived political imperatives probably made the task insurmountable.

Of course, our side's misperception of what a Leninist would have called the correlation of forces in Vietnam went well beyond the Viet Cong numbers

<sup>19</sup> Ford, 90.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 145.

debate. Hiam, quoting Sam's memoir, recounts what Sam's new boss said on the day in August 1965 Sam arrived to work on Vietnam. The boss, Edward Hauck, had gone into the Army in 1942 at the age of 18. He was fluent in Japanese and Chinese, and he had been part of an American unit attached to Mao Zedong's forces. He became a CIA analyst on Indochina in 1951, well before the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In a few sentences Hauck gave Sam a prescient summary of the true correlation of forces:

*The war's going to last so long we're going to get sick of it. We're an impatient people, we Americans, and you wait and see what happens when our casualties go up, and stay up, for years and years. We'll have riots in the streets, like France had in the 1950s. No, we're not going to "clean it up." The Vietnamese Communists will. Eventually, when we tire of the war, we'll come home. Then they'll take Saigon. I give them ten years, maybe twenty.<sup>21</sup>*

Saigon fell, of course, a few months shy of ten years later. Hauck eventually was transferred from the Vietnam account to a posting in Tokyo that signaled to all that the next step would be retirement. What looks in hindsight like realism looked like defeatism to his superiors.

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One of many ironies in the Sam Adams story is that the Tet offensive rendered the argument over Viet Cong numbers irrelevant: in the course of the fighting, the Viet Cong were eliminated as a military force. Now the key question was not the strength of the Viet Cong but the staying power of North Vietnam. Our side didn't do too well here either. Ed Hauck once told Sam, "Sometimes I think the cables I read now are from that last war [when the Vietnamese Communists defeated the French], only somebody's changed the dates."<sup>22</sup> Through four administrations before Sam and afterward, we Americans—civilian and military policymakers and intelligence analysts—never found a way to change the correlation of forces. Little wonder that when the redoubtable journalist Orianna Fallaci asked Henry Kiss-

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<sup>21</sup> Hiam, 42. This perspective was evident in the following from a Directorate of Intelligence memorandum published in August 1966: "During their nine year struggle [the Franco-Viet Minh War], the Communists successfully used military pressure as a political abrasive. They worked more on French will than on French strategic capabilities and eventually succeeded in making the struggle a politically unsaleable commodity in metropolitan France." See *The Directorate of Intelligence, 1952–2002: Fifty Years of Informing Policy* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Adams, 26.

inger in 1972, "Don't you find, Dr. Kissinger, that it's been a useless war?", Kissinger responded, "On this, I agree."<sup>23</sup>

What made Sam unique was not just his refusal to back off but also his unearthing of genuine information—information that was far from definitive but more solid than most of what emerged from the murk, information that called into question our basic approach to the war. Rightly or wrongly, Sam's superiors decided against challenging the policy consensus. And the war ended as Ed Hauck had predicted.

For this observer, it is hard to see that we have improved much in subsequent years. We still have a problem when strongly held mindsets on the policy side meet an intelligence establishment that lacks definitive information (as it nearly always does), can't achieve agreement internally, doesn't want to get too far out of line with its customers, and is conscious of the limited leverage that comes with its position near the foot of the table.



What can intelligence do? Drawing up a list of prescriptions is easy; putting them to work is a challenge. The following is my

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<sup>23</sup> Cited in Margaret Talbot, "The Agitator," *The New Yorker*, 6 June 2005.

own list. I have tried to measure Sam against it.

First, *know all you possibly can*. In particular, look beyond what everyone else is reading and supplement your reading with talking. Sam's insights came from slogging through piles of material no one else had looked at. Similarly, I have the strong impression that detailed expertise, far beyond what we are likely to learn from official sources, is more critical today than ever before on a whole range of important topics: the workings of Iran's theocracy, the place of Islamic radicalism in both the Muslim world and the West, and political dynamics in the countries of the former Soviet Union come immediately to mind. Basic area knowledge is essential but not sufficient. I am convinced that, on many first-order topics, we cannot gain the knowledge we need without a time-consuming effort to deal directly with people who are immersed in the area of interest. This is much more easily said than done, given the mass of available information and the substantial fragment of that mass which arrives in an analyst's electronic inbox every day. Moreover, the culture often seems to push in the opposite direction: quickness may seem more highly valued than depth, and moving from one assignment to another more career-enhancing than sticking to one topic.

Sam's experience is a case in point. True, when he was working on Vietnam, the list of things he

needed to know was narrower than it is for most analysts. However, he did exemplary work in a broader arena when he worked on the Congo, not just tracking reporting from official US sources but also studying such critical topics as the details of the country's tribal makeup. But even on the Congo, he could do this only because his superiors gave him his head. Freelancing became his standard way of operating when he moved over to Vietnam, and it is both a significant irony and a cautionary lesson for those who practice the craft of intelligence that this was both his chief strength and the main factor in his failure.

Second, *understand what the traffic will bear*. This precept, of course, would have outraged Sam, but it is a fact of analytic life.<sup>24</sup> Intelligence, a staff function, will rarely be the main topic considered by the line officials charged with making the decisions. Thoughtful use of the precepts described here may open the door a little wider, but in the end, as Gains Hawkins observed, both duty and temperament will lead policymakers to treat it as "their war to fight."

What, then, does an intelligence analyst do when confronted with something as egregious as the cooking of the books at MACV? Most analysts will not face such a dilemma, but this is by no means a

<sup>24</sup> For more on this topic, see Jack Davis, "Tensions in Analyst-Policymaker Relations: Opinions, Facts, and Evidence", *Kent Center Occasional Papers*, 2:2-1-13 (January 2003).

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## *Who the Hell Are We Fighting?* brings fundamental questions about the relationship between intelligence and policy into sharp relief.

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unique instance. Every analyst might benefit from posing the following hypothetical question:

*On the one hand, you have Sam, persisting in his quixotic attack no matter what the consequences; on the other, you have Hawkins and Allen, choosing discretion over valor. What would you have done in their shoes?*

Finally, *get all the help you can*. Back when Sam was an analyst, not much thought had been given to how the analytic process worked and how it might be improved. Nowadays, the shortcomings of a solo effort like Sam's are well documented. Every analyst starts from a body of analogies and heuristics based on past experience—elements of earlier events that resonate when we examine a current problem, practical rules of thumb that have proven useful over time. The power of this approach is incontestable, but we are all too easily blinded to its weaknesses.

The evidence is clear: analysis is likely to improve when we look beyond what is going on in our own heads—when we encourage others to challenge our analogies and heuristics with their own, and when we use any of several techniques designed to make explicit the underlying structure of our analytic argument.

This process will bear little resemblance to the time-honored ritual of intelligence coordination. It must be iterative and informal; it

must occur before the analysis is locked into finished prose; and the need for enlightenment must not be sacrificed to the need for an agreed text. This means exploiting the potential of informal electronic communication and, perhaps more important, making continual, comprehensive, collegial dialogue integral to the analytic process.



Not long before Sam resigned, he showed me a matrix:

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1. Analyst Right; Boss Right	2. Analyst Right; Boss Wrong
3. Analyst Wrong; Boss Right	4. Analyst Wrong; Boss Wrong

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The toughest quadrant for the analyst, he said, was number 2; in his case, the "boss" was, in a real sense, the president of the United States. Hiam does a superb job of showing what happens when an idiosyncratic analyst finds himself ensconced in that quadrant. Sam's very uniqueness means that *Who the Hell Are We Fighting?* brings fundamental questions about the relationship between intelligence and policy into sharp relief. Not only will it enlighten the general reader; it is worthy of inclusion as a case study in any curriculum for intelligence analysts.