

fixed-wing aviation from the aircraft carriers reared its ugly head following a misconstrued comment by Kingwell during a media interview. RAF staff at Northward called for his immediate removal from command of the task group and a signal was sent to Kingwell directing him to return to the United Kingdom. Pragmatically Kingwell remained with his task group waiting for his replacement to arrive; but as none did, he continued on in command!

Kingwell's narrative remains polite throughout the book and those who caused him angst are not identified by name. Those considered as capable personnel or mentors are readily identified and praised – perhaps a later version will be more candid. Additionally, the publication seems to have been rushed out as there are a number of spelling mistakes, incorrect usage of words, and overuse of acronyms without explanations – these are minor, but do detract from the overall high quality of the book's content.

I highly recommend this book to all – especially operational planners and those naval officers seeking higher command. If you happen to be commanding a naval task group, either for training or operations, then this is a must read.

Greg Swinden
Canberra, Australia

CDR R.W. Kirtley, USN (Ret.). *The US Naval Advisory Effort in Vietnam, An Inside Perspective*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, www.mcfarlandbooks.com, 2022. 210 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. US \$35.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-4766-8695-0. (E-book available.)

Every war has its scholars and its protagonists. Sometimes, however, the best scholars of each battle are the people who lived, fought, and survived it. Their perspective is often one of the most valuable tools scholarship can have, especially when these authors delve into the nuts and bolts of their war experience, mixing military analysis and memoir. Commodore Kirtley's book perfectly represents this tradition and provides an incredible new addition to the literature on naval operations during the Vietnam War.

Despite the relative brevity of his volume, Kirtley manages to exceed the brightest expectations with an intimate portrayal of a war that still looms over American hearts and minds. The book follows an intriguing pattern. Throughout the chapters, Kirtley reconstructs the evolution of the Vietnam War and intersects it with his progressive involvement in the conflict, from midshipman at the US Naval Academy to ensign, and finally, senior advisor to the Vietnamese forces with the brown water navy. Kirtley employs an intimate, at times ironic, and thoroughly genuine style to convey the intertwining themes of the war and his career. His writing is sometimes informal and confidential,

which is the product of his experience as a motivational speaker. Far from decreasing the importance of his contribution to the study of the Vietnam War, the swing between military jargon and relatable story-telling renders the book even more genuine and truthful to its premise as a memoir. Although Kirtley declares this book is a “personal assessment” (3), he retains an extraordinary and consistent degree of intellectual honesty, which makes the reader reflect on the consequences of the strategic choice of “Vietnamization” of the conflict. Likewise, his introspective analysis of his perception of that strategy and its effects on the American war effort and society adds a layer of realism to the historical account of how the United States intended to pull back from the quicksand of the Vietnam War slowly. In this respect, the last two chapters are crucial to understanding the full development of Kirtley’s position and the genesis of his oeuvre. Revolving around a pivotal career turnabout, Kirtley guides the reader through the highs and downs of his experience as a combatant first and then a veteran in a candid and sincere conversation that seems to be taking place around the friendly halo of a bonfire.

The context of the Vietnam War may trick the reader into thinking this is just a memoir of a dedicated officer during a difficult historical period. Yet, Kirtley’s perspective makes it possible to perceive the actuality of his writings. More than a year after the dramatic Afghanistan pullout, Kirtley’s experience rings as an unheard warning bell. He describes a situation of strategic confusion and on-field frustration that eventually drove the best efforts of people at every level turning into a burning defeat. In this respect, Kirtley’s voice is a reminder that veterans’ perspectives have the fundamental value of experienced insight. While critics of military analysis through memoir could easily dismiss Kirtley’s personal assessment as a lack of objectivity, his thorough description of how the war went down and the bitter aftertaste serve as a powerful reminder of an old truth in military operations. There is no substitute for experience, even in defeat.

Someone who wants to learn about the past in an entertaining and engaging manner, will find *The US Naval Advisory Effort in Vietnam* the right book. Should one want to learn not to repeat history in a cyclic continuation of strategic mistakes with no end in sight, then Kirtley is the ideal author, and his personal assessment should become the effective witness statement of a stale American approach to foreign irregular wars and upending counterinsurgency.

On a last note, I would like to recognize Kirtley’s touching tribute to his US Naval Academy fellows who never made it home. There could not have been a better conclusion to this intimate and honest portrayal of the first American taboo war.

Anna Matilde Bassoli
Lombardy, Italy