

## INTELLIGENCE IN RECENT PUBLIC LITERATURE

WHY VIETNAM?—PRELUDE TO AMERICA'S ALBATROSS. University of California Press, Berkeley. 1980, pp 612.

The central and unique contribution of Archimedes L. A. Patti's book "*Why Vietnam? A Prelude to America's Albatross*" is found in Part III, a highly detailed account of his experiences as an OSS officer during forty days in Hanoi in the summer of 1945. Part II covers his four prior months as the French Indochina desk officer in OSS headquarters in Kunming. He brackets these personal experiences in an historical perspective, the periods before and after these assignments.

The depth of his undertaking is reflected in an albatross of appendices which provide a chronology of events; biographical sketches; sketches of 38 of "only the principal political parties involved in the history of Vietnam during the 1940s"; and, finally notes on his text. The book is intended to help "the concerned American to fill" the "gap in the history of the period" by "presenting objectively America's role . . . through a straightforward presentation of events as they occurred . . . from which the reader can draw his own conclusions." Whereas, the author notes, Presidents, their close advisors, Congress, the French and the Vietnamese are "vague" and "obfuscating."

Patti's sources are his own recollections—reconstructed in considerable detail from OSS records and material drawn from the archives of the Departments of Defense and State and the CIA covering 1942-56. I am not as convinced as Patti that "the decisions of the mid-40s brought us to forget the sentiments so nobly expressed in the Atlantic Charter . . ." or that our country "reverted to a nation of corporate/business/banking elitists . . . protecting American worldwide economic interests against socialist encroachment." We both saw many of the same events from the same vantage point but I viewed them in a somewhat different perspective.

Patti and I met and were part of a small OSS team in Kunming working under Colonel Paul Hallowell. I had joined OSS in November 1944 to parachute into Burma, was reassigned to a psychological warfare unit, dispatched to China as a reports officer and, on arrival in Kunming in March 1945, was assigned to establish a Maritime branch to report shipping on the coast, rivers and canals. Patti's selection and training was more deliberate, permitting him time in Washington to familiarize himself with problems which might arise in the only large European colony in the China theatre. Patti arrived in Kunming in April 1945 to augment the already existing China, Central China, South China and Maritime Branches with a French Indochina branch. On VJ day my marine intelligence duties ceased; Patti went to Hanoi and I took over his desk and the South China desk.

On 30 September, I succeeded him as chief of station Hanoi. Within a month, the station was closed and I moved on to 30 years of other assignments. (I am puzzled as to why Patti says I arrived in May to augment his staff and later "arrived (in Hanoi) to close the station," as neither is true.) I was not the area specialist that Patti was nor have I continued to study Vietnam as he has done. I draw upon my recollections of

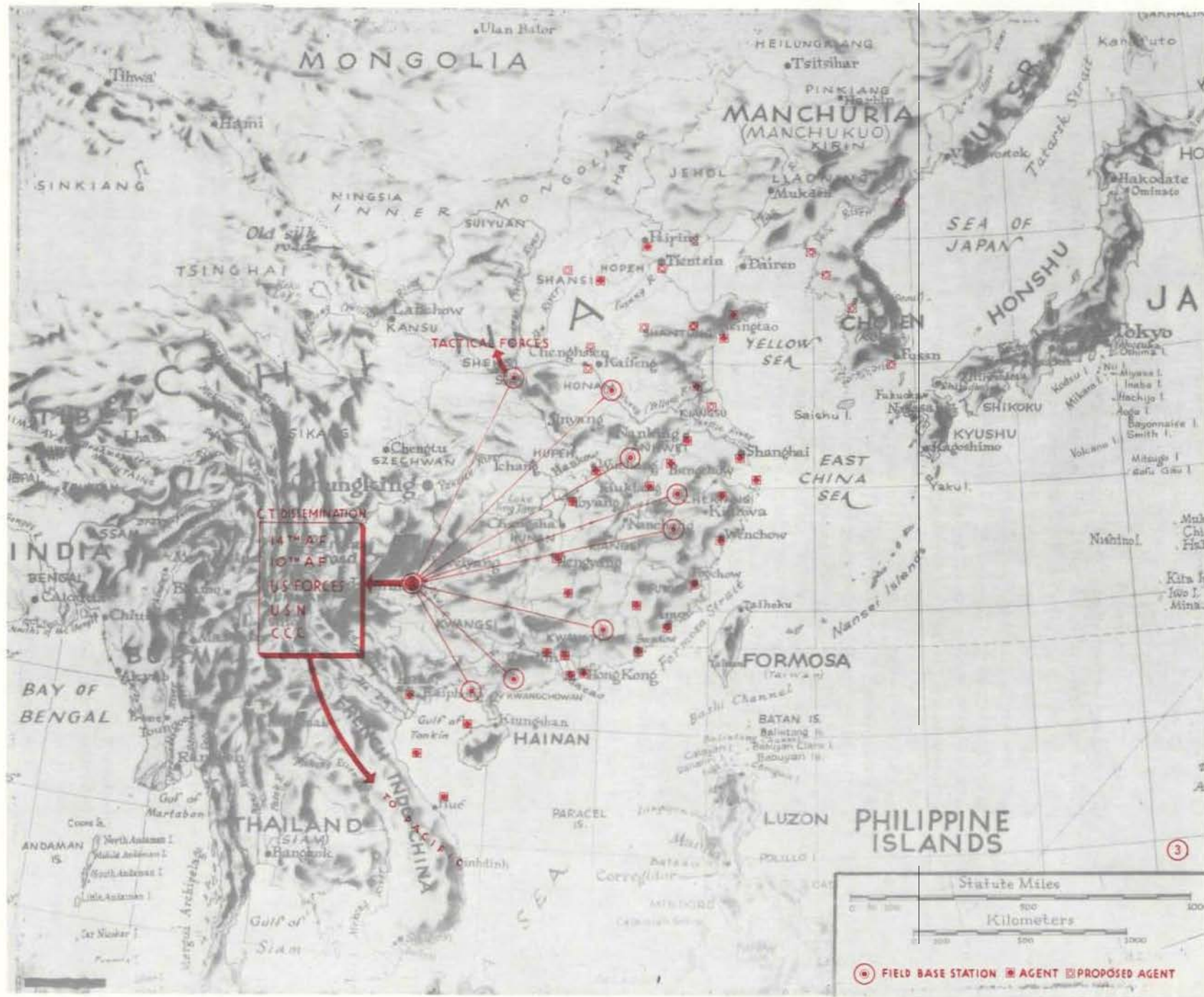
Patti, the world and work as we saw it from our desks in Kunming and subsequent experience as an intelligence officer in order to extend the readers' perspective of Patti's very personal account and so that I may comment on it.

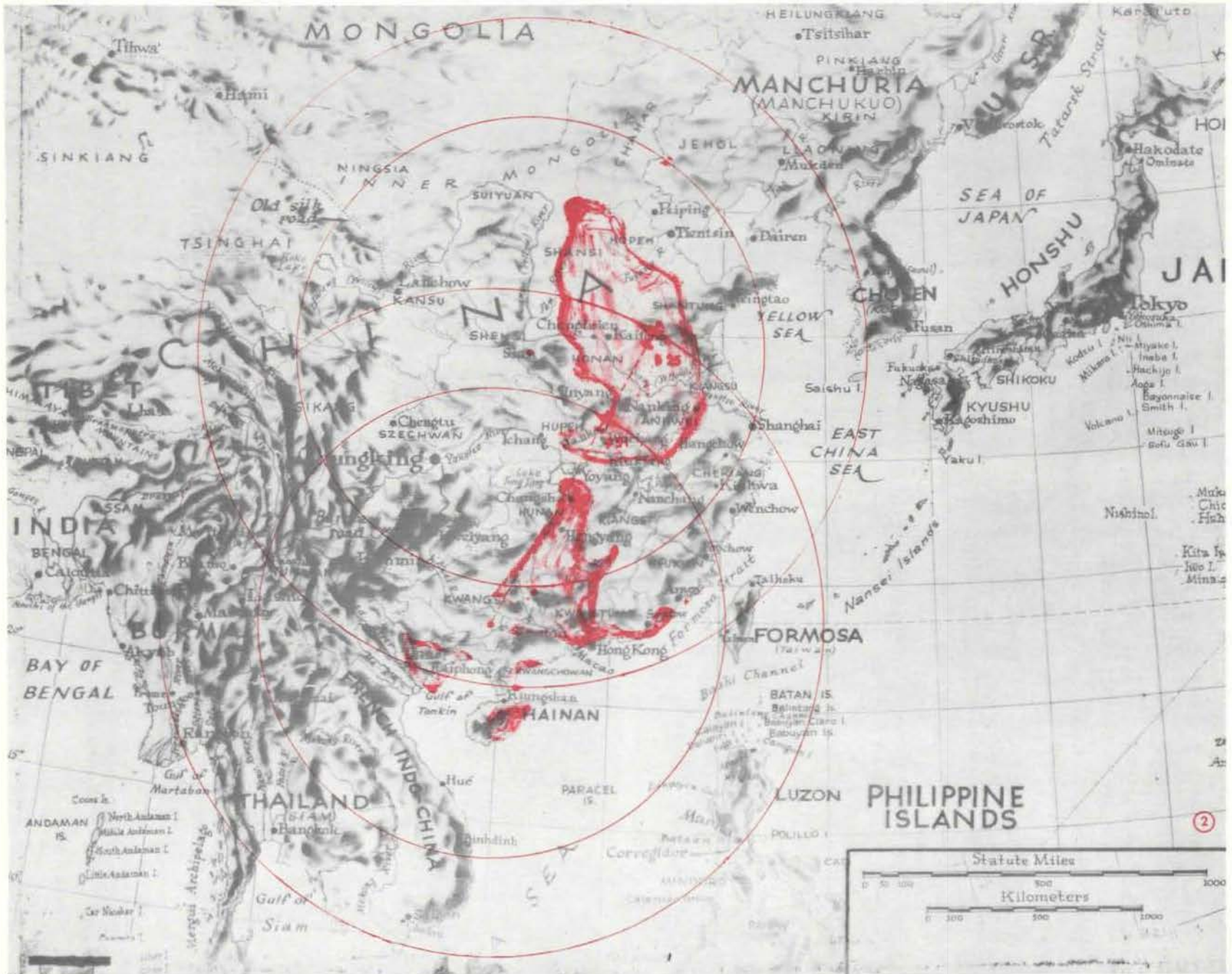
Our French Indochina operations were a part of a larger OSS mission in China. In the spring and summer of 1945, vast American forces were pushing the Japanese back toward their home islands. The Japanese on the Asian mainland were stalemated in China and crumbling in the Southeast Asia periphery. The US was allied with Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist government in a theatre command comprising China, Korea, and French Indochina; and General Joseph W. Stillwell had been the senior American officer and deputy to Chiang. After a falling out with Chiang, he was replaced by General Albert Wedemeyer in the fall of 1944. Many of my colleagues and I were beginning to see the Nationalist-Communist split as only a scene in the turmoil and complexity of an ageless Oriental drama of vastly different premises and values than our Occidental society. Among the divisions for which Chiang sought US material were those of half a dozen regional KMT war lords, the core of the Nationalists drawn together under Chiang in politics and by virtue of his total control of the distribution of US supplies. There also were divisions that had reached an accommodation with the Japanese and were neutral, or fighting as Japanese puppets. Finally there were divisions loyal to or leaning toward Mao Tse-tung over whom Chiang had no control, as well as units that existed only on paper in order to inflate Chiang's requirements for US aid. The capacity of the Nationalist elements to absorb material to serve their primary needs to survive and where possible prosper a bit and to fight the Chinese Communists was immense. Given a bribe or extra material, a division would occasionally make a flint against the Japanese to impress the US observers and secure a continued flow of supplies. Our intelligence indicated that Mao's divisions actually engaged the enemy and would welcome American help but for Chiang they were a greater enemy than the Japanese. Chiang's insistence that we provide Mao little, if any, supplies and have no contact with his forces was readily accepted.

Military, political and economic intelligence was limited and unreliable. There were few sources other than the Chinese Nationalists whose information was suspect. Because it was clear that the US would have to conduct operations on the mainland if there were to be any and because supplies would become available to the Theatre as the war in Europe ended, OSS began to operate early in 1945 as an independent command under General Wedemeyer for the purpose of collecting intelligence and conducting guerrilla operations and black psychological warfare. In six months time, independent of Chiang, we built a small, flexible and fairly effective intelligence structure in Central China. This was achieved not so much by sophisticated espionage as by establishing bases and dispatching mobile OSS teams throughout China. The Japanese were able to maintain only a mosaic of control across the area. The disposition of the main Japanese forces in the Theater are shown in Figure 1. The disposition of the OSS bases and teams in July is shown in Figure 2.

As Patti points out, US plans called for modest amphibious landings in South China as a prelude to a two year campaign northward. The first landing was to take place in August at the French enclave of Kwan Cho Wan on the south coast of China. OSS was instructed to give priority to reporting Japanese Order of Battle in the area and to mounting guerrilla operations on a 200 mile arc around Kwan Cho Wan. At the bottom of this arc (seen in Figure 1) will be seen considerable Japanese forces in north Indochina. Patti's job was to operate against these forces and Part II of the book describes his start.

With the sudden ending of the war in August, the resources that OSS had intended to expend in a longer war against Japan were available to collect intelligence





against post-truce needs. The immediate requirements were to determine the Japanese attitude toward surrender and the safe disposition of their arms, and the mechanics of relieving them of control of areas they occupied. Parkinson's Law that work is found for available sources led OSS to suggest to Wedemeyer that its assets—airplanes, radio communications, language officers, and area knowledge—should be used to rescue American prisoners in Japanese POW camps. This would also permit us to collect intelligence needed on the Japanese; it would also permit us to enter upon a new phase of US government activity—a peace-time foreign intelligence service, the plans for which a number of us had been devising on our own initiative for the Far East. About a dozen "rescue teams" found problems not only with the Japanese (they turned us back only in Korea) but also with the Chinese Nationalist factions including elements who fought for the Japanese, the communists and in Mukden with the Russians. Patti led a team of about 15 to Hanoi with instructions to rescue American POWs and to report what he observed. It went without saying that a good officer did not remain blind to whatever might be of intelligence interest. The US preoccupation with Japan was at least an excuse for postponing the inevitable clash between our support for Self-Determination, as set forth in the Atlantic Charter, and whatever plans the British, French and Dutch had to retrieve their Asian colonies. Patti was going into a sensitive area in this regard and was instructed to keep a low profile.

This team found no American POWs. They reported on the Japanese and the disposition of most of their arms. The Japanese had enticed some Vietnamese to support their notion of a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere; how they might seek to preserve its benefits for Japan was a subtler intelligence problem. The observer was soon struck by the gulf between the few French colonists still in Hanoi, Vichy supporters and Free French loyalists all bent on re-establishing colonial control, on the one hand, and Vietnamese elements of many shades and description, determined to establish a new, more dignified order, on the other.

Hoping for recognition and support, Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh had made contact with the US. He had agreed to help rescue downed US Airmen. Patti found him willing as well to develop information on the Japanese order of battle and to assist in preventing the Japanese from descending on the US beachhead in Kwan Cho Wan. Hence, an OSS team was with Ho at the time of surrender.

As mentioned earlier, in one of his appendices, Patti identifies 38 Vietnamese parties which he characterizes as "only the principal parties involved." A report from the station when I took over from Patti in October identified 26 of these, ranging from nationalists (monarchists) to various shades of socialists and communists, although these distinctions were not entirely clear. Some had been struggling against the French for decades. Ho and his Viet Minh shared with many of the educated urbanites we met in Hanoi an excitement and hope, stemming from an idealized view of the United States and what they knew of the history of the Philippines, that the US would somehow abet their aspirations for freedom. There were also Vietnamese factions closely associated with the Chinese Nationalists. The Chinese were taking the surrender and would naturally seek to exploit a weakened neighbor. The British had a finger in the pot—and so did the Russians. Patti and his team energetically reported on this amorphous melange.

The circumstances were such that Patti and his team were drawn beyond a purely intelligence reporting role into representing American interests on the scene, a role that often fell to OSS. The mere presence of Americans willing to listen was a stimulation to the Vietnamese and proved anathema to the French. To reduce the station's visibility Patti was withdrawn on 30 September and I took his place. Within the month, however, the US yielded to French pressure (the Quai d'Orsay claimed we

were “inciting revolution”) and the OSS mission was withdrawn. Patti postulates, and I know of no one to disagree, that it was in this cauldron that the Vietnam War was brewed. This is the core of the book, the scope of which Patti reports well.

Patti’s account is very much his own view of things. His access to old records clearly was helpful in reconstructing such narrative. I am disappointed that he so rarely includes the observations and views of his staff. Many of them had capabilities, including the Vietnamese language, which he did not share. Nor does he contrast or compare his judgments with others who also had contact with those he writes about. The care taken in assuring that the reader grasps every nuance of his views occasionally is tiresome. The unidentified and unaccredited raconteur of personal experiences who proffers “history” tempts his readers to evaluate the storyteller.

Patti is stingy in this regard. He offers no curriculum vitae or indication of personal orientation or bias. Nor does he forthrightly include his personal reaction to events he reports. He may feel this reserve serves his desire to be objective; yet, I would be more persuaded of the accuracy of his detailed observations if he shared his feelings with the reader. A value structure reposes in the skull of every reporter, even the most rigorously disciplined professional historian—a title Patti would not claim. Judgmental adjectives and perhaps unconscious personalizing nonetheless lard the text.

I see him reporting from the viewpoint of the American liberal idealist. He is strongly soured by the indignities and excesses of French colonialism, impressed by the idealism of Ho and offended by the venality of the Chinese. He is proud of the Atlantic Charter, disappointed in what he takes to be the ignorance of the well-intended Americans and contemptuous of US corporate-business-banking elitists. Perhaps he is unable to bring into balance his liberal idealistic principles with the pragmatic use of power he observes. At any rate, he confines his formal judgments to one and one half pages, reflecting a diffidence in addressing complex foreign affairs.

The book is in the form of a chronology of events—as if drawn from a diary. But what Patti presents in the form and rhetoric of his reconstruction sounds more authoritative, comprehensive and intelligible than any journal kept by a professional could possibly have been (had he been allowed to keep one). Thus the historical, political, and economic contexts in which he places events are based on hindsight and how the author now sees the events of 1945.

In those parts of the text recounting his personal experiences I find a certain inflation of events, a notion of himself as important, wise, powerful and decisive, some puffery, and scant sense of humor. These distort and misrepresent events and situations I recollect—but not so seriously as to damage the validity of his thrust. “I noted for General Donovan obvious fallacies. . . .” “My mission to Hanoi,” “my role” with the Japanese, French, etc., are not balanced with mention of the role of others. I have no great objection to his titling these pages “CHAOS” but the word loses its impact for me when I remember that almost every other activity undertaken by OSS was in about the same sorry condition.

There was camaraderie among the small OSS staff and I recall Patti at least on the edge of it as we took our late afternoon break of C rations, lemon juice powder and medicinal alcohol (very occasionally a bottle of Harwood’s Bombay gin). Soon we would be back to work on the team radio, deciphering messages that came in the evening. Patti shared the 0400 run to deliver our reports about town.

Our talents were varied—Paul Helliwell associated with Donovan’s law firm, Ray Cromley of *The Wall Street Journal*, Earnest Brown of Harvard Law School, etc.

Others were beginning their careers. Julia McWilliams was a savvy registry officer who married photographer Paul Childs and later gained fame as a television chef.

Patti endeavored to impress us with the mystique of his special mission—traceable he inferred, if not to Roosevelt himself, at least to Donovan. This tinge of self-importance and humorlessness kept him a bit aloof. (I find something of the same bent to impress in his frequent textual references to his “mission,” the scope of which he defines in different ways.) Some humor was invaluable, for the small OSS command with entree at theatre level made us privy to vast misunderstandings that seemed easily correctible but when uncorrected, totally inappropriate actions over which we had no control and dreadful injustices. Indeed the situation was “CHAOS,” often ridiculous, bizarre, absurd, outrageous and incredible. However, therein lay much of the charm of the OSS. I felt lucky to be fighting a miserable war from such a stimulating vantage point.

To write a long but lively personal account of 40 days in Hanoi, to build on this core with archival research and then claim the whole to be History seems unscholarly. It is not the style of historians. However, there is no stable of historians steeped in Indochina as there are Wheeler-Bennetts and A.J.P. Taylors pursuing the origins of the war with Germany. Clearly Patti dredges up details from sources not readily available. But his extended assemblage seem more a collation of selective data than original scholarly research which arrives at new conclusions. I cannot escape a feeling of Patti’s presence through the language he uses to express what the archives tell him. Scholars who are most comfortable with rigorous prose will not be ill-at-ease with his text. The hard-to-come-by data are there, however, and extend the pool of reference materials.

In all of this material I find nothing that contributes conceptually to our understanding of American involvement in Vietnam. He says nothing whatever about Viet Minh ties to the Soviets.

In a broad perspective, the sacrifice of American lives and treasure were made in the belief they were essential to protect our open society and the community of the West. Without a deep tie to the Soviets, no conceivable form of Vietnam society presented a threat warranting that kind of sacrifice. I would be interested in the well-spring of psychic energy for the Viet Minh movement. A famine in which 2 million die is traumatic; with only starvation as an alternative, one’s commitment to change can be intense. The North Vietnamese peasantry, by nature conservative, saw the Japanese, also Orientals, break French colonial rule, an imperium the Vietnamese had feared to challenge directly. For a brief time, in the spring of 1945 they had a taste of directing their own affairs and they managed. Might not both developments be significant in “*Why Vietnam?*” There is more to be said—yet it may never be written.

I believe Parts II and III offer both case officers and the analysts an opportunity to participate vicariously as intelligence officers on-the-scene. I offer some questions and judgments which occurred to me at the time.

A case officer can say “There but by the Grace of the year I was born go I.” Patti’s assignment was not untypical of middle level officers in OSS. Case officers, put yourself in his place as you turn the pages. What would you do in the various situations he reports? You may be ordered to Africa, the Middle East or Latin America and face similar situations. When Patti was ordered to take the French to Hanoi under his control was it wise? Were they really under his control? Enough to say yes? Did Patti’s use of Ho for intelligence collection have political significance? Certainly some. The risk had to be weighed against the value of the intelligence he might produce. The immediate requirement was to determine whether there were large movements of

Japanese forces toward Kwan Chowan. Their disposition had been stable for months and it was unlikely they would make major moves unless they had wind of the coming US landings.

Ho's men were ill equipped to report Japanese Order of Battle. The Japanese carefully coded their units which they openly referred to by the name of the commanding officer. Reports from a jungle team had to be hand encyphered and sent in the dark while someone laboriously cranked a generator to power the transmitter. A hundred words per week was a good return. Teams usually "heard" or possibly "saw" Japanese soldiers, at best "Takahasi's Butai" which the Order of Battle section in Kunming (two people) might be able to associate with a known unit. I question whether Ho's men produced "very important intelligence" beyond confirming, or possibly building out in a minor way, the identification of units of the 22nd Independent Mobile Battalion that we knew was based at Langson. No theater tactics or strategy were modified. Altogether, using Ho for intelligence reporting on the Japanese was worth a little risk. Moreover, Ho could be counted on to do a little fighting if the Japanese moved toward Kwan Chowan. There was another reason to keep contact with Ho—his Viet Minh movement might become a significant political force and it was OSS's job to estimate the capabilities and plumb the intentions of any such movements. Patti's instincts were right here and it serves as a valuable example. Ho was our agent in reporting on the Japanese; he ceased to be an agent and was serving his own interests in revealing information about the Viet Minh. He controlled what we learned and reported for the most part. To associate with Ho and not provide at least some psychological support was impossible. So Ho got from the OSS a little material support as well as some psychological propping up which was important to him in return for pursuing our Japanese requirements. We garnered some information on a significant political movement; and Patti was criticized for being anti-French. I believe Patti as a case officer struck a good balance. It is irrelevant that he may have personally been pro Ho.

In my brief tour as COS Hanoi, Undersecretary Dean Acheson offered publicly in early October to mediate between the French and Annamites. Ho learned of this through us and proposed to stage large public demonstrations in favor of American mediation. I cabled to ask whether the US wanted to encourage such demonstrations. I would have liked to have done so, but to have acted on my own would have exceeded my instructions to limit station activity to intelligence reporting. In spite of urgent follow-ups, I received no instructions and thus could give no encouragement to Ho. Months later in Washington Don Garden, the Chief of Southeast Asia told me "We wanted you to give positive encouragement to Ho but could not cable you to do so. You should have gone ahead." He did not enlarge on why, but I presumed it was because OSS analysts were beginning to see Ho as a nationalist warranting some support. But policy with regard to the French was sufficiently well established at State and White House levels that it could not have been changed so abruptly. It is my personal view that had I gone ahead, the French would have reacted so strongly that an embarrassed US would have had to back peddle. But I am treading on the dangerous ground of "what ifs." Also we saw the issue of dealing with leftists in the French Indochina backdrop of US reluctance to give OSS much elbow room in dealing with the Chinese communists. A few State Department officers were measuring leftists in China the way we were measuring them in French Indochina and the consequences for John Service and his colleagues are a matter of history.

A few reviews of Patti's book have suggested how valuable it would have been to policymakers had it been published earlier. Had it been available in preparing a Special National Intelligence Estimate in, say, the 1950s, how would anyone have used it?



The subtitle "A Prelude to America's Albatross" draws upon Coleridge's *rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* who inhospitably kills an albatross which seafarers consider a pious bird of good omen. The mariner then suffers the bird about his neck as part of an agonizing penance. The simile would seem to be that the US acted inhospitably toward Ho, a pious leader of favorable portent, and thus suffers the Vietnam War as a penance. "America's albatross" is a sign of America's crime. And by the way, what is a prelude to an albatross? Either Patti reveals here his strong personal convictions in a book he claims is "objective" history or he has used the title inappropriately.

Those in contact with Ho were to be favorably impressed with him and, sometimes reluctantly, gave some weight to his nationalistic protestations. Patti was impressed; in fact he says nothing unfavorable about Ho. So was I impressed, although trained to be suspicious and fearful of the international communist movement. Yet Ho's social and political ideas were couched only in the broad and idealistic terms of a charismatic leader. It was not impossible to view them as cliches. Pol Pot who frequented the Seine's left bank some 30 years ago, after Ho, used some of the same language. The OSS team reported some harsh treatment of the peasantry outside Hanoi but such teams were not tasked to find out how Ho's glowing principles were implemented in areas under Viet Minh control. We were able in October 1945 to identify the political affiliations of about 15 members of the cabinet, how accurately I'm not sure, but we tagged only Vo Nguyen Giap and Pham Van Dong as hard line communists. Might not these two strong communists have the capability to dominate the party using Ho as a front? Were they the *Gletkins* and Ho *Commissar Rubashov* in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*?

Case officers sometimes "fall in love" with their agents. In spite of Patti's efforts to be objective, does he maintain total balance in this regard?

I would not want a reader of "history" to be left with the impression that Truman's order to close down OSS had any impact whatsoever on intelligence collection in the Far East because it did not. Guerrilla operations and psychological warfare operations ceased but intelligence collection loomed large and more complicated. Plans were in the air and on paper for a peacetime US intelligence service and we appointed ourselves to be its architects and builders in the Far East. When OSS was dissolved, the intelligence flow to the Strategic Services Unit under the War Department and substantial intelligence collection continued.

There was no question in the minds of the intelligence officers in China that the KMT would fall apart and that the consequences for the US would be grave. The Soviet entrance into the Far East War produced ominous forebodings. U.S. idealism already was in serious conflict with the British, Dutch, and French colonial aspirations in Southeast Asia, although it seemed likely that the US would turn a blind eye to them.

I am favorably impressed with Patti's story as a first-hand account of a front-line intelligence officer—albeit one who is self-centered and overly wordy. Substantively, I believe his reporting reflects good coverage of the myriad of forces in Hanoi. While fairly accurate as one man's experience, it lacks the breadth of experience and impressions of others. The inference of a relationship of especial significance between Patti and Ho we hear only through Patti. I'm reluctant to accept Patti's personal experiences as good history. I'm suspicious of post hoc additions derived over 15 years of delving in official archives—though his drawing together of difficult-to-get material will be useful reference for historians.

Patti considered titling his book "Proconsul in Hanoi." The book is an exercise in apologetics, a vindication that he has been an important person.

(Unclassified)

CARLETON A. SWIFT

WHY VIETNAM?—PRELUDE TO AMERICA'S ALBATROSS. By *Archimedes L. A. Patti*.

This thoroughly researched and admirably documented book by Archimedes Patti makes a significant contribution to the historiography of American foreign relations. Practitioners in the field of national security will find in it a number of well-drawn moral lessons, including the often-demonstrated truism that a foreign policy becomes uninformed and irrelevant to the same degree that it ignores its professional observers abroad.

But before I scare off potential readers, let me add that this is more than a short history of how America conceived its misbegotten political involvement in Vietnam. It is also an eminently readable first-person account of real-life foreign intrigue, and as such is more satisfying than the half-baked spy novels that seem to have provided the foreign affairs education of all too many people.

Then Major Archimedes L. A. Patti led the Indochina section of the Office of Strategic Services during the crucial 12 months bracketing the end of World War II. During that time he probably spent more time with Ho Chi Minh than any other American, and he came to respect and admire the man who for a quarter of a century had been at the forefront of the native Vietnamese struggle against French colonial rule. Patti was only one of a mixed handful of Allied officials in Kunming, Hanoi and Saigon trying to sort out the conflicting interests of Indochinese nationalists, French colonialists, and Chinese opportunists as the Japanese empire collapsed. But he seems to have had a clearer view than most of basic American objectives and their affinity with those of the Vietnamese nationalists, despite the Marxist coloration the latter had acquired. And, bless him, he seems to have kept notes and copies of his dispatches to Kunming and Washington, to which he has now added months of research into State Department, War Department, and OSS files.

The result is an amplified account of Colonel Patti's day-to-day experiences with the Indochina intrigues of 1945, set within a clearly articulated history of the anti-colonial struggle in Vietnam from 1942 to April 1956 when the French High Commission in Saigon was disestablished and the last units of the French Foreign Legion paraded past the American Embassy to board ship for Algeria.

I watched that last, disdainful parade by a beaten colonial army, and in my youth and innocence thought that now the Vietnamese would sort out their independence problems for themselves. At that time there were fewer than 500 U.S. military personnel in Saigon, hardly any of them in uniform. Twenty years and 56,000 American lives later I and every other American had learned how costly can be the price of ignorance.

For the answer to "*Why Vietnam?*" is, simply, "ignorance" as Colonel Patti recounts how America made France's "dirty war" its own against more than a hundred years of tradition and policy, and in the face of ample evidence that the struggle for Indochina was a deeply rooted war of independence that ultimately could have only one outcome. Like others who were there at the time, the author asserts—but does not dwell on—the thesis that America had the opportunity to steer Indochina to almost instant, possibly bloodless, independence in 1945, but carelessly let the opportunity drop. He recounts, with details and documentation, how the French underhandedly outmaneuvered Americans and Vietnamese to reimpose in blood their

discredited colonial regime, then brainwashed American policymakers into the needless casting of this colonial conflict into the mold of worldwide anti-communism.

“Kremlin-directed conspiracy,” Patti points out, “was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam” in the late 1940s. “The Soviet Union not only failed to support Ho through his early struggles for independence but also refused to recognize the DRV until several years later” in January 1950. Yet, in Patti’s view, the US, swayed by French overt and covert pressures and propaganda, chose from 1946 on to make a judgment that Ho Chi Minh and the bulk of the Vietnamese independence movement were not just Marxian Socialists but Moscow-controlled Communists. Reporting and analysis to the contrary was never lacking in those early years—though some of it had disappeared from State Department files by the time Colonel Patti came to write his book. (Nor was it available to researchers in the 1960s, as this reviewer knows from personal experience.)

There is another school of thought on this subject which should be noted here, a school which differs from both Patti’s position and the conventional wisdom. This view holds that, while Ho Chi Minh was undoubtedly a veteran cadre of the Comintern who had joined the French Communist Party at the time of its formation (both documented facts), he was primarily a nationalist, a potential Asian Tito, whose movement (like Tito’s) received no help or recognition from the Soviet Union until it was well on the road to success. With the proper policy and offer of support, the US might have induced a public split between Ho and the Soviet Union and China and thus avoided all the turmoil and trauma that resulted from the actual policy we pursued.

In any event, Colonel Patti and the University of California have produced a unique document in textbook form that is both scholarly and readable and organized for easy reference. This book ought to be required reading in diplomatic courses and the various war colleges. It can be read with profit by the general reader, the undergraduate student of history, and the graduate researcher seeking primary sources for this critical episode in international affairs. It’s just too bad that something like “*Why Vietnam?*” wasn’t generally available in the 1960s when the United States Government was still trying to understand an enemy that once had tried to become its friend.

RICHARD D. KOVAR



## Books

### WHY VIETNAM?—PRELUDE TO AMERICA'S ALBATROSS. By *Archimedes L. A. Patti*.

This is a book with many gem-like qualities and a few flaws. In essence, it is a history of United States involvement in Indochina near the end of World War II through the agency of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), as told by the on-the-scene representative of OSS. That historical review is supplemented by a description and analysis of French efforts to regain control of their former colony in the postwar period, ending with the French withdrawal from Indochina in 1956.

From a technical standpoint, the book is outstanding. The author has labored long and effectively to make it as intelligible as possible by including numerous descriptive appendices, detailed annotations and a glossary of terms and abbreviations. Detracting slightly from the book's otherwise considerable luster is its length (449 pages of closely-written text in a total length of 612 pages) and great detail with respect to almost daily occurrences during the summer of 1945. Also, the author's style of providing flashbacks to previous action requires a certain degree of concentration on the part of the reader.

Some five-sixths of the main body of the work is taken up with a superb account of OSS activity relating to Indochina, particularly OSS operations in Indochina during the spring and summer of 1945. The remaining sixth, or Aftermath portion, of the book, deals with events in Indochina from the end of World War II to the end of the official French presence there following Dien Bien Phu. Here, the author allows his own viewpoint to come through somewhat as he examines and comments on the course of historical events. His main personal message, however, is saved for a one page wrap-up statement at the end of the text. All in all, one could scarcely expect a more objective presentation of material in a book entitled: *Why Vietnam?*

Before proceeding further, it seems advisable to provide the reader with some idea of the problems which faced just-promoted Major Patti as de facto United States representative in Hanoi in August 1945, and to suggest the difficulty he must have experienced in 1973 when he tried to reconstruct what had happened nearly thirty years before.\* The complexity of the situation may be judged from the number of competing interests present on the scene. Apart from the United States, as represented by the OSS, there were numerous French factions in evidence. These ranged all the way from the official Free French representation (not yet recognized by China Theater) to elements that had collaborated with the Japanese throughout the war. Moreover, the Japanese were still present in overwhelming force.

Ho Chi Minh and his followers represented only a small proportion of the many competing indigenous Indochinese groups drawn from a wide range of political and religious persuasions. The Chinese, as the main Allied military force in the vicinity, were hastening toward Hanoi in order to receive the formal surrender of the Japanese. Other minor factions included South Chinese warlords, bandit groups, and the Russians. Other groups were present in the southern part of Indochina, where the British military provided an additional complication, representing as it did Lord Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command.

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\* Patti admits that when he took up his writing task again, he had almost forgotten many of the essential details and that, without access to detailed documentation, he would not have been able to reconstruct events (private communication to reviewer).

To top it off, many of the factions were represented by clandestine intelligence and political action groups. Given the possibilities for conflict and misunderstanding in such a situation, coupled with a complete lack of policy direction from Washington, it seems remarkable that Patti, who was, after all, rather junior in rank, was able to get anything at all done, let alone setting up an efficient intelligence-gathering operation, as he did.

Aside from its main thrust as a very competent history of OSS Indochina activities, this book is, in a very real sense, a litany of unfulfilled wishful thinking: by Ho Chi Minh, by the French, by FDR and American policymakers, by the author, and even by the reader. Ho, for example, had the vision of creating a viable, independent Indochina with the assistance of the United States after World War II. Patti seems to have shared this vision at the time and perhaps, even today, thinks it might have been possible; he does, however, indicate that he understands why it did not happen. The French thought that it was both right and possible for them to resume their role as colonial administrators of Indochina. Passing quickly over FDR's vision of trusteeship status for Indochina as a means of preventing resumption of French colonial rule,\* the United States acted after World War II as though it could ignore the matter of Indochina's status and leave it to the French and the Indochinese to settle among themselves.

Following the debacle at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent departure of the French, the United States moved gradually to military intervention in order, some said, to "stem the threat of a Communist takeover of Southeast Asia." Then United States policymakers apparently deceived themselves into believing that they could win a largely political war with mainly military means. Patti's ultimate wishful thought, born of frustration with what he sees as a consistent lack of success of United States policies in the developing world, calls for abandonment of the futile role of anti-communist crusaders in favor of what he believes to be a winnable economic competition (through selective trade and aid) with the Soviet Union in the world.

Finally, the reader (at least this one) is left with the wistful speculation that if Patti's book had appeared in the mid-1950s, even in abbreviated form and with Army disapproval, common sense just might have prevailed in United States foreign policy circles. Then, what many (this reviewer included) have always regarded as the bureaucratic stupidity of United States military involvement in Southeast Asia might have been averted, or, if not averted, at least brought to a more satisfactory conclusion.

To the extent that Patti brings out the above-cited elements of wishful thinking (even if he does not always recognize them as such) and follows them through in his narrative, particularly in the Aftermath section, he performs a very valuable service. To the extent that he permits his own visions to obtrude on the story without alerting the reader as to his own point of view, his otherwise admirable presentation must be considered to be at least mildly flawed. It must be left to the reader to judge for himself the degree to which this has occurred. This reader feels that Patti has performed in an acceptable manner in this regard. It is possible, however, that in his desire to appear objective he has been insufficiently careful in the presentation of supporting evidence for his arguments. Thus, while Patti claims to be neither a liberal nor an isolationist, some of his recommendations can easily be misinterpreted as representing one or the other of these points of view.

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\* Patti cites FDR's view that colonialism was a major factor in the outbreak of World War II.

Patti is much more explicit in delineating his personal views in his public presentations and discussions, one of which this reviewer has attended. It then becomes quite evident that he really has no practical solution to the generally recognized problem of United States incapacity in making and executing foreign policy with respect to the developing world. His approach seems to be to simply finesse the situation by staying as far away from foreign entanglements as possible. Since he claims not to be an isolationist, he really owes it to his reader to draw the line concerning an acceptable degree of involvement. This he does not do, however, beyond noting some points of similarity between Indochina, Iran and El Salvador.

Despite the "iffy" character which these many threads of "wishful thinking" impart to Patti's story, this work must be regarded as a real contribution to the literature of intelligence, particularly as it concerns the World War II scene in Indochina. While a purist, academic historian might find much to criticize in the somewhat personalized presentation of the last sixth of the story, one can see a certain amount of justification for Patti's approach. Perhaps, it is about time for some practical people with real on-the-scene experience to get into the history game and present what has happened in the light of possible motivations of the players, rather than striving for sterile academic objectivity.\* That is, of course, as long as such people honestly strive to keep their readers informed as to where fact leaves off and opinion takes over. This, Patti seems to have made a considerable effort to do.

In examining the question of Patti's objectivity (or, as some would say, his lack thereof), it would seem useful to examine the charge that he had an anti-French bias when he was in Indochina and retains it to this day. In support of this characterization are cited his constant frustration of their efforts to set up shop in Hanoi and his negative analysis of their role in the post-war period. Actually, there is no reason to view Patti as anti-French (for one thing, he had a French-Italian upbringing). He certainly was able to satisfy General Donovan on this score when closely examined by that worthy prior to being given the Indochina assignment. Whence, therefore, does this impression arise?

Actually, one need look no further than the matter of Patti's basic mission in Indochina for the answer. He was charged with carrying out both SI (secret intelligence) and SO (special operations) activities against the Japanese prior to the end of the war and with gathering intelligence under cover of a prisoner of war (POW) liberation mission after the end of the fighting. He had received instructions prior to leaving Washington, six months earlier, that the United States (i.e., the OSS) was to cooperate with the French against the Japanese, but was to do absolutely nothing to help the French to regain their former colonial position. These instructions were frequently reenforced through discussions with Colonel Whitaker, chief of SI-OSS, China Theater. Patti regarded Colonel Whitaker as his mentor in these matters and as representing General Donovan's current thinking on the subject. General Donovan, in turn, was reflecting FDR's clearly stated policy against a return to colonialism.

By refusing to provide more than nominal support to the French after the return of the latter to Hanoi without independent means in August of 1945, Patti was naturally seen as a hostile element. This view of Patti was reenforced by the latter's close association with local Indochinese elements, mainly Ho Chi Minh and his followers.\*\*

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\* An effective example of such an approach, by a team which combines academic, journalistic and foreign policy experience, has just appeared—*Debacle: The American Failure in Iran*. By Michael Ledeen and William Lewis (Knopf, New York, 1981).

\*\* In fact, later historical accounts by French writers tend to emphasize the point that association of Americans with particular Indochinese, such as Ho, would tend to be interpreted by the populace as acceptance and approval. The French, naturally, saw this as undermining their authority.

Patti explains this by noting that he had attempted, during the previous months, to outfit French SI and SO elements and send them into Indochina in the expectation that they would carry out actions against the Japanese and provide him with useful information. In this he was greatly disappointed. What little information that filtered back often proved inaccurate or even deliberately misleading. Ho, on the other hand, with a minimum of United States support, was soon providing Patti with a steady flow of good, useful information. On purely practical grounds, then, Patti felt impelled to continue a relationship which he found congenial for other reasons as well.

The resentful mood of the French representation in Hanoi was not improved by the fact that the Chinese delegation which received the surrender of the Japanese forces did not acknowledge the official presence of the French. Moreover, appeals by the French to Patti to intervene on their behalf were ignored by him. When, shortly thereafter, the Chinese were ordered by China Theater Headquarters to recognize the existence of the French, the latter accelerated their already considerable efforts to build up their influence and their propagandizing against the Americans, particularly Patti. When, at the end of September, it became time for Patti to leave Hanoi (the OSS was to go out of existence on 1 October 1945), French propaganda attempted to make it appear that he had been withdrawn in disgrace.\*

In fact, Patti claims to have a recording of a clandestine French radio broadcast from Brazzaville, West Africa, stating that he had been court martialled and shot for his performance in Hanoi. Actually, Patti was returned to the States and promoted to lieutenant colonel. His successor in Hanoi for the two to three weeks that it took to close out the operation, Lt. Cdr. Carleton Swift, Jr. of the OSS, was subjected to the same kind of abuse by the French that Patti had received.\*\*

Considering the highly critical treatment that Patti has received from the French in historical reviews of the Hanoi period,\*\*\* it would be surprising if he did not harbor some resentments toward them. However, his own descriptions of subsequent French action in Indochina reveal little of this. Moreover, he says that he has 40-50 other books from a variety of sources that generally purvey the French view. Actually, Patti was caught in the middle of a situation far from home that was of little interest to Washington policymakers at the moment. As Patti has said and others have verified, OSS-Kunming's requests for guidance from Washington on policy matters brought no response, as was the case for more than half a dozen communications from Ho Chi Minh to the United States Government at that time. The situation was simply allowed to drift and the French were permitted to act as they saw fit, provided that no direct United States support was given to them.

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\* Patti's exact standing with his superiors in China Theater at this time is a matter of some conjecture. He acknowledges in the book that OSS-Kunming had become worried about the controversy surrounding him, as reflected in cautionary messages to him in early September. R. Harris Smith, in his history of the OSS (*OSS*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972), indicates that Patti was withdrawn because "he was too closely identified with the past days of ill-feeling." Patti's OSS successor, Lt. Cdr. Swift, also thinks that Patti was withdrawn for having become controversial (private communication with the reviewer). Patti, of course, denies all this. In any event, we are only talking about a matter of a couple of weeks and what may or may not have been a diplomatic action.

\*\* Private communication to author.

\*\*\* See, for example: Jean Sainteny's *Face A Ho Chi Minh* (Editions Seghers, Paris, 1970) and *Histoire d'une Paix Manque* (Editions Amiot-Dumont, Paris, 1953)—Sainteny was the French counterpart of Patti in northern Indochina and the source of most of the unfavorable reporting to higher headquarters—as well as S. L. Mayer's *Indo-China and the French* (Part 121 of *History of the Second World War*, BPC Publishing Ltd., London, 1966).



All through the post-war period, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was willing to take an open stand against France with respect to Indochina. The United States was primarily concerned with the rehabilitation of France as a member of the Western Alliance and a bulwark against communism in western Europe. The Russians, on the other hand, were striving to capture leftist support for the subversion of France and feared any action counter to the latter's colonial aspirations which might have tended to offend French national pride, even among leftist Frenchmen. As a consequence, matters drifted from bad to worse in Indochina with results that are now apparent to all. Actually, 1950 marked the first overt support related to Indochina by either the Russians or the Americans. The former officially recognized Ho Chi Minh and the latter began giving military assistance to France for use in Indochina.

One seldom encounters a book on such a significant subject by an author with such apparently sound credentials. Colonel (then captain and major) Patti was the on-the-scene representative of the United States during the Hanoi period. He headed an OSS team charged with gathering intelligence under cover of a mission to safeguard Allied prisoners of war of the Japanese prior to and after the latter's official surrender. He wrote a brief summary of events following his return to the United States late in 1945. In the early 1950s, he prepared a more extensive summary of his experiences with the aid of official documentation (OSS messages retrieved by the CIA, for the most part), but the Army refused him permission to publish it in 1956.

Patti subsequently retired from the Army and spent the period from 1959 to 1971 as a civilian member of the Executive Branch, doing mainly emergency planning work. During this period, he participated frequently in government and academic discussions and seminars on the subject of Vietnam. Largely, to set the record straight on what had actually happened in Indochina in 1945, and as a preface to later events in Vietnam, Patti set about writing his book again in 1973. Without help from the Army, he was able to reassemble pertinent documentation by circulating copies of the document list from his 1954 effort among friends in Washington. Of the 800 or so OSS reports he had seen during his official research in 1954, the CIA released about 300 to him in sanitized form in 1974. He was denied access to necessary White House and State Department interoffice memoranda and position papers in the National Archives until 1977. The Library of Congress and the Army Map Service provided essential cartographic assistance, even to finding some of his original OSS maps.

It may be useful to interject here a note on the completeness with which Patti treats his subject matter, despite the acknowledged great detail of presentation. Certainly, Patti's preoccupation with accuracy has caused him to focus rather heavily on those events in Indochina in which he was personally involved or concerning which he had direct knowledge.\* As a consequence, his treatment of happenings in the southern part of Indochina is quite limited, occupying about 20 pages of text, and highlighted by the tragic loss of the OSS chief there, Lt. Col. Peter Dewey, by sniper fire on 26 September.

Patti brings out one other interesting point with respect to southern Indochina relative to the origins of the controversial 16th Parallel, which eventually became the boundary between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. It was initially intended as a purely temporary administrative convenience to divide the areas of responsibility of the Allied forces in the north from those in the south. Thus, the forces occupying the south and centered in Saigon came under Lord Mountbatten's Southeast Asia

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\* For example, R. Harris Smith, *op. cit.*, in the very short and sketchy section which he devotes to OSS operations in northern Indochina, gives slightly broader perspective on the scope of United States activities.

Command. They were mainly British and emphasized British colonial policies, which, incidentally, if not completely sympathetic, were at least not antipathetic to French colonial aspirations. Northern Indochina, on the other hand, was opened up by forces from China Command, in which the United States was heavily represented.

Patti is, therefore, presenting us mainly with the situation in the north relative to Ho Chi Minh and the French as a basis for the problems which later beset the whole of Vietnam. Since Ho proved to be the sparkplug of the independence movement, Patti's focus of interest and emphasis probably does little damage to the story.

All in all, Patti has tried to turn out a "brass-bound" product, based on exhaustive research and reflection on the events of the time, as well as on observation of their historical consequences. The result is a polished, semi-scholarly study written, as he says, "for the shelf," scrupulously factual to the degree that the author was able to make it. In fact, Patti admits that he deliberately omitted quite a few things simply because he was not quite sure of his documentation and, thereby, may have done a small disservice to history. He held back his own views to a considerable extent, particularly with regard to events during the summer of 1945. Objections may arise when Patti attempts to suggest what should have been done in the past or what ought to be done in the future. However, beyond serving to illuminate the point of view of the author, these do not detract significantly from the basic value of the work.

In sum, then, this book really is a gem. Despite the author's known strong and somewhat provocative views on Vietnam and United States foreign entanglements in general he has managed to produce an admirable reference work of OSS activities in Indochina during the late summer of 1945. Moreover, he has placed that period in the context of events leading up to it from 1940 and following it through the French collapse at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and official departure from the scene in 1956.

While not hesitating to trace the meanderings of United States policy on Indochina, or the lack thereof, and to present his own honest appraisal of cause and effect, the author has struggled, successfully it would appear, to separate what he believes to be the true story from his opinion of what United States policy should have been then and in the future. The latter he gives us in a single-page wrap-up at the end, take-it-or-leave-it.\* The author's admiration for Ho Chi Minh, reminiscent of Sir Fitzroy Maclean's high regard for Tito, and Maclean's belief that Tito was also basically a nationalist, if nominally a communist, comes through frequently.\*\* However, Patti is saving his full story of Ho Chi Minh for a biography which he hopes to have published in 1984.

(Unclassified)

RUSSEL J. BOWEN

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\* While the author never gives an explicit answer to the question contained in his title, "*Why Vietnam*" (leaving us to judge for ourselves from the facts he presents), he has done so in other fora, namely, his public appearances. This reviewer has heard Patti advance the view that the United States tends to drift into situations like Vietnam mainly through bureaucratic ignorance and public unawareness of what is being planned in secret, rather than through conscious design. Patti's suggested remedy is more openness in decisionmaking and greater public sophistication concerning issues. He does not, however, say how this is to be achieved.

\*\* Tito's and Ho's record as old-time Comintern agents is presented in Phyllis Auty's *Tito: A Biography* (Longman, London, 1970) and F. W. Deakin and G. R. Storry's *The Case of Richard Sorge* (Chatto and Windus, London 1966). Fitzroy Maclean's view of Tito is presented in *The Heretic* (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1957).