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'Fighting to Leave' Cont. from Page 9

basically, the Americans had been ordered out of country. We had the obligation, however, to support the Vietnamese in defending against invasion.

Another example of thickheaded thinking: General John D. Lavelle, Commander, Seventh Air Force, located at Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon, decided that the SAM missiles located in the DMZ (demilitarized zone) were firing and capable of destroying our aircraft, so they should be taken out. He ordered F4 Phantoms in to take them out. Just what a logical, well-trained, commander would do. Destroy the enemy before he destroys you or your men and materiel.

General Lavelle was relieved of command and demoted. He should have been saluted and honored for doing his job.

This message was not lost on other commanders. They had to follow orders, no matter how dumb, or sacrifice their military careers.

In spite of the limited ability to take direct action against the enemy, our forces aided the Vietnamese in taking out a substantial number of troops, tanks and artillery, thanks to our naval bombardments and the occasional air strikes, when weather would permit. There were overwhelming numbers against us . . . but we made a valiant defensive effort. Had we had top military commanders, instead of grey flannel suits running the war, we would have made preemptive strikes and killed the North Vietnamese ability to invade the south.

During this invasion there were many, many heroic actions

taken.

One example: An electronics warfare plane was shot down - code name Bat21. Of the crew, only one lone airman was able to eject. He survived on the ground for 11 days. In the ongoing attempts to rescue Bat 21, eleven Americans were killed, two captured, two were wounded, six aircraft were shot down, many others wounded. More than 800 strike sorties, including B-52 strikes, were flown in direct support of the mission. And, just as in the takedown of our recent pirate incident, it took a Navy SEAL, Lt. Tom Norris, to rescue Air Force Lt. Col. Icaal Hambleton. We Americans had paid a terrible price to rescue one US airman, but we got him home. We did not abandon him.

For his actions, President Gerald Ford would later award the Medal of Honor to Lt. Tom Norris, US Navy SEALs.

Colonel Stoffey has done a bang-up job of telling this story. He names names, supports the stories with names of the various operations, cites the military personnel that conducted the operations as well as those that ordered them.

Anyone who has an interest in military history should run, not walk, to the nearest book store and grab a copy of *"Fighting To Leave."* It's that good.

Military men from that era love Bob Stoffey. Why? Because he clearly points out the sacrifices made by thousands of our servicemen as America sought to extract itself from a war the politicians had lost. *Fighting to Leave*, \$25.95 US, \$28.95 Canada. Available at local book stores or amazon.com.



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