INTRODUCTION

Counterinsurgency and the Uses of History

ON WEDNESDAY MAY 23, 1962, Major General Victor Krulak, special assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for counterinsurgency and special operations, addressed the students and staff of the US Army War College. Krulak's subject was the "Tactics and Techniques of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," and he began his lecture by quoting a passage from *Alice in Wonderland*, recounting that when Alice asked the White Queen what a word meant, the Queen replied: "What does it mean? Why, it means what I mean it to mean."[1] To Krulak, this illustrated the difficulty of defining *counterinsurgency*: "Each of us has a mental picture of the term, and each picture is different—either as to foreground, background, subject matter, color, or texture. This is one of our real problems."[2] If Krulak admitted that the definition of *counterinsurgency* was complicated, then a similar dilemma soon extended to the lessons of the ongoing war in Vietnam, which proved even more difficult to characterize and harder to simplify into something that could be meaningfully understood as a lesson. This book concerns itself with understanding how the US Army comprehended the lessons of the war in Vietnam and the concept of counterinsurgency that Krulak struggled to define. It is interested in what the US Army meant both *Vietnam* and *counterinsurgency* to mean—that is, the combination of ideology, memory, and identity at work in shaping the Army's constructed understandings of these terms. These various meanings grew out of efforts to process and make sense of the failures in Vietnam.

The lessons of Vietnam have been intensely contested, with disputes over which lessons should be heeded emerging even before the end of American involvement in the war in 1973. Indeed, the struggle over the lessons of Vietnam has been a defining feature of the politics of intervention within the United States, surviving repeated declarations by various presidents that the ghosts of Vietnam had been buried.[3]

This book evolved from an interest in repeated references to Vietnam in narratives of the U.S. war in Iraq. While the analogies could certainly be overwrought and were often overused, the wars in Vietnam and Iraq are linked both through the history of counterinsurgency doctrine within the US Army and the evolving manner in which the US Army understood the Vietnam War in the aftermath of the US retreat from Indochina.[4]

Defeat in Vietnam led the Army to consciously turn away from its experience there and discard what it had learned about counterinsurgency. But the Army could escape neither Vietnam nor counterinsurgency and had to deal with new missions such as low-intensity conflict and peacekeeping that modified its understanding of the lessons of Vietnam. Despite these new missions, the Army's post-Vietnam distaste for counterinsurgency endured. This aversion led to major problems when confronted with insurgency in Iraq. The reasons for both the Army's struggle to deal with this insurgency and its subsequent construction of an entirely new doctrine to address the problems posed by Iraq were deeply rooted in the Vietnam War's competing lessons. The Army's experience in Iraq is a fascinating case study of how an organization can reshape historical memory in an attempt to make it more useful to present challenges.

The use of Vietnam as lesson and analogy, particularly within the US Army, highlights the interplay between military doctrine and the construction of historical narrative. To echo Mikkel Vedby Rassmussen, what is interesting is not necessarily the lessons of history themselves, but rather the "history of the lesson."[5] The Vietnam War not only had a profound effect on Army attitudes toward counterinsurgency, but, as this book will demonstrate, the Army's consensus on the lessons of Vietnam shifted as the needs of contemporary operations dictated: The lessons themselves changed with exigencies of the moment. This book is concerned not only with specific questions of the US Army's relationship with counterinsurgency and the Vietnam War but also with the broader issue of how histories can be constructed and reinterpreted. Historical analogy can influence policy not only in the immediate moment of decision but in setting the broader context for those decisions—the creation of formal and informal doctrine. By studying the evolution of doctrine, this book addresses the question of how these analogies are constructed and used, a question that speaks to how histories are created and why.

By looking at the evolution of doctrine over an extended period, this book will demonstrate that the Army's lessons of Vietnam were fluid, contested, and changeable. It will outline how the construction of lessons is tied to the production of historical memory and describe the interplay between the two processes. It will examine how terms such as *counterinsurgency* and *nation building* have been debated within the US military and describe how agreed-on lessons informed both policy and doctrine and how the realities of war highlighted the malleability of historical memory, how "useful" histories were constructed to serve the needs of the present.

THE US ARMY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

The US Army's changing understanding of counterinsurgency reflected the processes of collective memory and the evolution of the "lessons of history" in a way that suggests how the past can be used in service of present needs. For while counterinsurgency was and is a malleable concept, the manner in which its meaning and significance within the US Army changed suggests that it was a particularly loaded term within that organization. Russell Weigley's commentary on the matter reflects much of the consensus on the relationship:

> Guerrilla warfare is so incongruous to the natural methods and habits of a stable and well-to-do society that the American Army has tended to regard it as abnormal and to forget about it whenever possible. Each new experience with irregular warfare has required, then, that appropriate techniques be learned all over again.[6]

The literature on the US Army and counterinsurgency indicates that the Army has had a difficult relationship with counterinsurgency; several studies have depicted it as an organization deeply ambivalent toward that form of warfare. Perhaps the most influential work on the US Army and counterinsurgency is John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Nagl argues that the British Army succeeded in Malaya where the US Army failed in Vietnam because it possessed a learning culture and a flexibility that allowed it to quickly adapt to the realities of counterinsurgency warfare to defeat the communist insurgents.[7] No such learning culture existed in the US Army. According to Nagl, the lessons the

United States drew from Vietnam did nothing to address its shortcomings in counterinsurgency warfare.

This argument appears throughout the literature on the US Army and counterinsurgency. Authors such as Robert Cassidy, Richard Downie, and Conrad Crane all point to a military that retreated from counterinsurgency in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.[8] David Ucko offers an updated version of this thesis in *The New Counterinsurgency Era*,[9] echoing criticism of the US Army's historical attitudes toward counterinsurgency. Ucko, although he is more optimistic about the way in which the post-2003 Army adapted itself to counterinsurgency operations, asserts that the United States suffered from a "counterinsurgency syndrome" whereby they persistently marginalized counterinsurgency operations.

Others argue that the Army has a long history of engagement in counterinsurgency-style operations and never really lost its understanding of counterinsurgency. Andrew J. Birtle's *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976*, perhaps the most carefully researched work on the US Army and counterinsurgency, describes the continuity in US doctrine.[10] Birtle contends that the Army *did* in fact pay attention to counterinsurgency historically and that failure in Vietnam and elsewhere had more to do with strategic choices about intervention rather than any operational failures on the part of the US Army. His study traces the evolution of doctrine in impressive detail and questions many of the assumptions behind "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency, instead arguing that coercion and use of force were responsible for most of the US Army's successes and that many of these successes—particularly in Vietnam—were divorced from strategic goals.

Other authors describe a long tradition of American intervention in small wars as a phenomenon rich enough—and important enough—to be considered a major, if often neglected, part of the Army's identity. These authors differ on their attitudes to counterinsurgency and US intervention more broadly; some, like Max Boot and Robert Kaplan, see counterinsurgency as another American way of war, one that needs to be celebrated and promoted.[11] More critical scholars, such as D. Michael Shafer and Michael McClintock, see US involvement in counterinsurgency operations in a more negative light, arguing that optimism about modernization theory and US counterinsurgency capabilities led to disaster in Vietnam and support for repressive regimes throughout the developing world.[12] Both those critical and those supportive of US involvement in counterinsurgency agree that the United States has a long tradition of involvement in small wars—from the conflict with Barbary pirates to the banana wars in Central America to the American war in Vietnam to Reagan's support for the Contras in Nicaragua.

There are, then, two contending narratives of the US Army's relationship with counterinsurgency. One school of thought emphasizes the Army's long involvement in such wars and credits the Army with an enthusiastic embrace of counterinsurgency in the 1960s, while the other calls attention to the Army's constant need to *relearn* counterinsurgency and its habit of forgetting the importance of its fundamental tenets. The disjuncture between the two narratives—the tension between neglect of counterinsurgency and a long tradition of small wars—requires further examination. For although there has been a long tradition within the Army of fighting small wars, it is also true that these wars have not lingered in the organization's historical memory. The experiences of the Civil War, World War I, and World War II have all left a more lasting impact on the Army's identity. This book will explore this process of forgetting counterinsurgency in the post-Vietnam era and show it was closely tied to the Vietnam experience itself. Part of this ability to forget—of which Vietnam is the most compelling example—must be related to aspects of American strategic culture, for which a rich literature already exists.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND STRATEGIC CULTURES

There has been a considerable amount of research on how institutional preferences are formed and the ways in which organizations adapt themselves to change. The first wave of military innovation scholars argued that changes in military doctrine are due to outside pressures, from the insistence of civilian policy makers that the military reorient themselves in a certain way.[13] This school of thought, drawing on Graham Allison's work on bureaucratic politics,[14] argues that military officers are strongly resistant to change, preferring instead to maintain the status quo and to rely on successful past experience as a guide to the future. A dissenting school of thought, led by Samuel Huntington, sees change coming from within the military, not from without.[15] This school privileges military knowledge of warfare over the wisdom of civilian policy makers, contradicting Georges Clemenceau's dictum that war was too important to be left to the generals. Huntington, along with other scholars such as Stephen Peter Rosen and Deborah Avant, argued that military officers, whose first loyalty is to the state, will react to external threats, however imperfectly, rather than institutional prerogatives.

Certainly, the experience of the US Army in Iraq has offered more evidence of innovation coming from within the military. Chad Serena and James Russell have analyzed how midranking and junior Army officers in Iraq were often quick to adapt to their tactical and operational environment.[16] While useful, this focus on tactical innovation ignores the question of how such lessons are institutionalized in both doctrine and education and indeed the ways in which senior officers facilitate or even champion change. For innovation to be meaningful, it must be adapted across an organization. In that sense, these new studies of bottom-up innovation do not necessarily resolve the tension between those who argue that militaries react to external threats and those who see civilian pressure as a more effective driver of change.

There is a third school that balances these two points of view by contending that militaries *do* respond to external threats but often in ways likely to enhance their prestige, status, or funding. In many ways, such a conclusion is obvious: Military leaders are bound to consider the actions of potential adversaries—Kimberly Marten Zisk demonstrates this by observing that Soviet military doctrine was quite responsive to changes in its American counterpart throughout the Cold War—and equally likely to want to maximize institutional prestige wherever possible.[17] However, such simplification obscures a key strength of this literature: its strong focus on cultural explanations for change. At its best, such an approach avoids the mechanistic tendencies of some models and the false dichotomy between interest and culture. As Elizabeth Kier has argued, "One's interest is a function of the cultural context."[18] Certainly, the American treatment of counterinsurgency in the post-Vietnam era was deeply rooted in cultural preferences as well as institutional interests.

This "cultural context" has been another rich area of study, one closely related to the creation of doctrine. For, if doctrine is a repository for the agreed-on lessons of history, it is also created in—and helps shape—the culture of the organization that produced it. The literature on the relationship between strategy and culture has grown exponentially since the cultural turn in academia, and both historians and political scientists have begun to study "strategic culture" in some detail.[19] Colin Gray postulates the existence of an American strategic culture consisting of "modes of thought and action with respect to force, derive[d] from perceptions of the national historical experience, aspirations for cultural conformity . . . and from all of the many distinctively American experiences (of geography, political philosophy and practice [that is, civic culture], and way of life) that determine an American culture."[20]

Jeremy Black, however, makes the vital point that the cultural turn in military history is essentially a reaction to the technological determinism displayed by scholars of the revolution in military affairs. As with any reaction, it is crucial that this pushback does not become an *over*reaction and that cultural determinism does not simply replace technological determinism as the dominant mode of understanding. Black, along with scholars such as Adrian Lewis, is uneasy about any approach to strategic culture that denies agency and contingency.[21] Therefore, if we are to successfully consider not only issues of agency and contingency but also the sometimes contested nature of strategic cultures, we must examine a subfield of strategic culture: that of *organizational* culture, those institutional peculiarities and prerogatives that shape how an organization behaves and what it believes.[22] In the case of the US Army (as opposed to the corporations that are the subjects of much of the literature), it is important to note that its own organizational culture, while certainly narrower in scope and built on long-formed habits and customs, is strongly intertwined with the overall features of American strategic culture. Michael Howard's observation that "the military system of a nation is not an independent section of the social system but an aspect of it in its totality"[23] points to the context in which we should consider military organizational culture.

The notion of a peculiarly American strategic culture is inextricably linked with Russell Weigley's work, *The American Way of War*, which still stands as one of the key works on the subject forty years after its publication.[24] Weigley argues that American military strategy has been characterized by a strategy of overwhelming force and annihilation since the Civil War. The objective was always the destruction of the enemy's main force without much regard for maneuver. During the "Forty Days," General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Potomac often attempted to outflank the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and failed at each attempt. However, the Napoleonic brilliance of General Robert E. Lee could not deal with the overwhelming federal superiority of numbers and material and was decisively defeated by head-on grappling. World War II was the epitome of such an approach, characterized by John Ellis as "brute force."[25] Even General George S. Patton, supposedly the most dashing and maneuver-oriented American commander, stated that:

> Americans as a race are the most adept in the use of machinery of any people on earth, and . . . the most adept at the production of machines on a mass-production basis. It costs about $40,000 for a man to get killed. If we can keep him from getting killed by a few extra dollars, it is cheap expenditure.[26]

This approach to war has shifted substantially since Vietnam, and the literature on the US Army's organizational culture reflects that change. A key work is Richard Lock-Pullan's study of US intervention strategy since the Vietnam War.[27] Focusing on strategic culture and military innovation, Lock-Pullan persuasively argues that the US Army was heavily influenced by Vietnam and shifted away from a culture of a mobilized mass army that was firepower heavy but essentially a blunt instrument to a smaller, professional all-volunteer force that inculcated a previously nonexistent culture of operational excellence embodied in the AirLand battle doctrine.[28]

Many authors, such as Carl Builder in *The Masks of War*, argue that the Army saw itself as the nation's loyal military servant—a notion derived from its origins as a volunteer militia, as a *people's* army.[29] Lock-Pullan sees a rupture caused by defeat, contending that "fundamentally, the social alienation that the Army suffered after the Vietnam War meant that its identity could not be mechanistically determined by the broader national culture which had turned against it."[30] He rightly points to the Army's agency in changing its own organizational culture and shows us that the move toward an all-volunteer force caused senior Army leaders to radically reshape the Army's identity and doctrine. Lock-Pullan's narrative of a post-Vietnam army obsessed with maneuver warfare and operational brilliance is also advanced by Robert Tomes and Stuart Kinross.[31] All three of these works offer valuable insights into the changing nature of the post-Vietnam US Army. But they all start from the premise that, once the Army internalized lessons from that war, those lessons remained fixed, immutable, and unchallenged facts. To understand the evolution of the Army's organizational culture, we must also understand how the lessons themselves evolve and are constantly contested and negotiated.

Interservice rivalries have been well studied, but internal Army struggles over culture and identity have tended to receive comparatively less attention. The value of focusing on these internal tensions is highlighted in Brian McAllister Linn's *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War*. Linn challenges Russell Weigley's notion of a monolithic American strategic culture by carefully outlining the strongly contested nature of the Army's organizational culture. Linn argues that "the wars the United States has actually fought are important less for what happened than for what military intellectuals believed they had learned from them after the shooting stops,"[32] but he identifies some confusion over both these lessons and the definition of some basic terms:

> Army officers and military historians, past and present, assume that the service shares a common definition of war. Indeed, this assumption is central to the regular army's institutional self-identity . . . [but] far from displaying the rigid organizational unanimity often ascribed to the "military mind," the army has been engaged in prolonged and often acrimonious debate over the nature of both war and national defense.[33]

Linn complicates the argument of Weigley's *American Way of War*[34] by demonstrating that there are three distinct intellectual traditions within the Army: the "guardians," who define the Army's role in a strongly defensive fashion and rely on technocratic solutions (from the designers of nineteenth-century coastal defenses to Colin Powell); the "heroes," who emphasize the centrality of battle and courage on both the physical and moral planes (George Patton being the classic example); and the "managers," a relatively rare breed who see war as an outgrowth of political and economic factors and something that often requires complete national mobilization (George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower). These three schools of thought complicate Weigley's notion that the American way of war has centered on annihilation.

Linn's argument about the contested and fluid nature of American strategic culture echoes a broader point about culture: that we must consider the phenomenon as a continuing process, constantly being performed and modified, rather than simply an object.[35] *The Echo of Battle* points to potentially rewarding directions for future scholarship by complicating the idea that the Army's culture was monolithic in nature and opening up questions about the contingent and performative qualities of an American "way of war." This book will build on Linn's description of an Army organizational culture constantly contested and made anew by considering how historical memory helps to construct that culture and how the Army's changing lessons of Vietnam affected not only their counterinsurgency doctrine but also their broader institutional culture.

Nowhere is the fluid and contested nature of culture more apparent than in American society's long debate over the lessons of Vietnam. The variety of lessons drawn from that war range from criticisms of the fundamentals of the American society[36] to Earl Tilford's sarcastic remark that "the United States must never again become involved in a civil war in support of a nationalist cause against communist insurgents supplied by allies with contiguous borders in a former French colony located in a tropical climate halfway around the world."[37] There are those who argue for what Earl Ravenal[38] calls the "instrumental" lessons of Vietnam—on how the war was fought and what could be done better next time.[39] There are those who emphasize the "proportional" lesson that Vietnam was a "tragic folly," in which the United States saw interests in Vietnam where it had none and misread the nature of both its opponents and ostensible South Vietnamese allies.[40] Finally, there are those who take what Ravenal calls "strategic" lessons from the war, who argue that Vietnam showed that the United States must adapt to a second-best world, accept that there are limits to its military power, and work within domestic and international constraints by focusing on more limited and achievable foreign policy goals.[41]

What is clear from this disparate set of lessons is that Vietnam shattered what had been a relatively stable foreign policy consensus in the United States. Richard Melanson has characterized much of the history of US foreign policy since then as the attempt to reconstruct the Cold War consensus that unified American society until the 1960s.[42] The "history of the lesson" of Vietnam is as much about attempting to rebuild this consensus as it is about the explicit drawing of lessons from the war. Indeed, Arnold Isaacs, Robert McMahon, David Ryan, Robert D. Schulzinger, and Charles Neu have all explored the way in which Americans reshaped historical memory as they attempted to deal with the fractures caused by the war.[43] These scholars suggest a way of addressing the Army's relationship with the lessons of Vietnam rooted in how memories are constructed. Rather than simply describing the evolution of the Army's lessons of Vietnam, this book will attempt to understand the social and cultural processes that created them; in so doing, it will be possible to understand how the lessons changed as contemporary needs dictated and how they influenced the Army's attitudes toward counterinsurgency.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY

Utilizing the past in the service of the present is a problematic concept, raising the issue of how and why histories are created and indeed how they are used by policy makers and strategists. There are a number of processes at work, from the way actors select analogies from which to derive "lessons," to the manner in which collective memories are formed and negotiated, to the broader issue of how institutional culture shapes the construction of those historical lessons and memories. These questions intersect several related fields, including literatures on policy makers and the lessons of history, social constructivism, and organizational culture.

Early work on the "the lessons of history" argued that policy makers and strategists tend to misinterpret lessons and reach for the wrong analogy. Ernest May's groundbreaking work, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*,[44] argued that "framers of foreign policy are often influenced by beliefs about what history teaches or portends" but that they also have a tendency to use history badly. May writes:

> When resorting to an analogy, they tend to seize upon the first that comes to mind. They do not search more widely. Nor do they pause to analyze the case, test its fitness, or even ask in what ways it might be misleading. Seeing a trend running toward the present, they tend to assume that it will continue into the future, not stopping to consider what produced it or why a linear projection might prove to be mistaken.[45]

According to May, policy makers and strategists are notoriously poor historians and have demonstrated this inadequacy through their use of inappropriate analogies in countless crises. Writers such as Alexander George, Richard Neustadt, and Jeffrey Record[46] have all arrived at broadly similar conclusions: that the use of history by decision makers is an area fraught with potential difficulty. In his seminal work *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Robert Jervis outlined why analogies, however poorly employed, were popular devices for reasoning among policy makers:

> What one learns from key events in international history is an important factor in determining the images that shape the interpretation of incoming information . . . previous international events provide the statesman with a range of imaginable situations and allow him to detect patterns and causal links that can help him understand his world.[47]

More recent work by Yueng Foong Khong reinforces the importance of analogies as a cognitive shortcut in reasoning.[48] Khong argued that "new events tend to be assimilated into pre-existing structures in the mind [of the receiver] because of the limited cognitive capabilities of human beings." These limited cognitive capacities mean that decision makers, particularly in moments of crisis when they are under pressure and acting with incomplete information, are likely to fall back on past experiences to assist in making decisions. Obviously, the more powerful the experience, the stronger the influence it will have on the decision. For example, Harry Truman perceived strong echoes of Hitler's aggression when contemplating intervention in Korea in 1950, while forty years later George H. W. Bush still saw Hitler when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

It is possible for decision makers to make good use of history, however severe the pressure—famously, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, John F. Kennedy was strongly influenced by Barbara Tuchman's account of Europe's 1914 slide into war in *The Guns of August*.[49] Whether they employ them wisely or otherwise, it is indisputable that policy makers do use historical analogies to aid decision making. Michael Howard argues that military strategists are even more liable to rely heavily on historical analogies to inform decision making because the soldier's profession "is almost unique in that he may have to exercise it only once in a lifetime, if indeed that often. It is as if a surgeon had to practice throughout his life on dummies for one real operation, or a barrister appeared only once or twice in court towards the close of his career."[50] Given these limitations, it is no surprise that military leaders rely so heavily on the lessons of the past for guidance or that these lessons are then so strongly contested.

Building on Khong's work, Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen's article "The Social Construction of the Past"[51] looks at the "lessons literature" and its attempts to find the appropriate analogies from a constructivist perspective. Rasmussen is largely dismissive of "self-help books" for "those who govern" on how to use the "right" analogies and instead offers a more limited role for the "lessons of history";[52] he observes that "the present asks us what to do. Perhaps history offers us an answer. According to the lessons literature, a careful study of history provides answers that suit the present; according to constructivism the answer is history itself."[53] Rasmussen, then, is calling for a literature that deals not with the "lesson of history" but rather attempts to examine "the history of the lesson," by looking at the evolution of the lesson in cultural discourse and political use and its changing meaning over time. He argues that a reliance on cognitive psychology undermines the usefulness of the lessons literature because:

> Cognitive psychology deals with the way individuals learn lessons and shows how learning lessons fills up the *tabula rasa* of an individual mind. The history of states is different from the history of individuals, and therefore states construct lessons differently from individuals. States do not live lives the way

> individuals do, and therefore their past is a social product quite different from the psychological product that constitutes individual identity. In other words, governments do not live the results of their state's past the way individuals, trapped in their body, live the results of their past. A state does not have cognition the way individuals do, and therefore cognitive psychology cannot explain the actions of a state.[54]

If we are to take up Rasmussen's challenge to write a "history of the lesson," how can we do so without conflating Harry Truman or Lyndon Johnson's experience of Munich with the broader "lesson of Munich" as internalized by the US national security institutions? The answer must partly lie with the perspectives offered by much of the literature on historical collective memory.[55] David Thelen notes that the process in which collective memories are formed has—like the use of historical analogies by policy makers—as much to do with the present as the past, arguing that "the struggle for possession and interpretation of memory is rooted in the conflict and interplay among social, political, and cultural interests and values in the present."[56] Jay Winter offers both a caution and a potentially useful approach when he argues that "collective memory may be understood as a set of signifying practices linking authorial encoding with audience decoding of messages about the past inscribed in film, or indeed in other sources."[57] When considering collective memory, we must consider both the agency behind the message *and* how multiple audiences receive that same message.

Part of this consideration must involve undoing what Alon Confino has described as the "separation of the construction of memory from either its reception or contestation."[58] While we should certainly trace the construction of a narrative, the "history of the lesson" must include how it is received, disputed, and mediated. After all, even where collective remembrance seems static and uncontested, Jeffrey Olick reminds us of collective memory's fluidity by quoting Montaigne: "Stability is nothing more than a languid motion."[59] Susan Sontag not only argues that collective memories are always contested and contingent but challenges the notion of collective memory itself, claiming instead that "what is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important." For Sontag, "There is no such thing as collective memory . . . But there is collective instruction."[60] Preferring to talk about "remembrance" rather than "collective memory," Winter has suggested that not only do we need to start thinking more about agency and reception but that we need to move beyond a simple binary of "memory" and "forgetting"; instead he argues that the social construction of silence plays a crucial role in remembrance.[61] Winter calls for a study of "performative" silences that have political and even liturgical importance. Certainly, the US Army's long institutional silence on Vietnam could be regarded as performative.

Even if we accept Sontag's and Winter's strictures on abusing the term *collective memory*, there is still a place for consideration of *lessons*. But if we are to identify who constructs these lessons, how they are contested and received, what they say and where they are silent, then we must identify where such lessons are formed. Theo Farrell, like Rasmussen, argues that a constructivist framework can help to locate these sources.[62] After all, constructivism—the examination of how knowledge is constructed in a social context—is an approach that, in its essence, takes ideas and beliefs very seriously.[63] While acknowledging that "getting inside the heads of actors and knowing their beliefs is a formidable challenge for scholars," Farrell argues that "constructivists are not interested in the beliefs actors hold so much as the beliefs actors share" and that, by definition, "beliefs must be expressed, if not codified and recorded, to be shared. In this way, shared beliefs often leave physical residues."[64] This book will examine those physical residues of memory by exploring how the cultural construction of memory manifested itself in the intersection of counterinsurgency and the lessons of Vietnam.

In the case of the Army, these physical residues are most likely to be found in formal and informal doctrine. After all, historical analogies play a role not only in decision making in crises but in the longer-term formulation of policy. Larry Cable's description is a useful way to illustrate just how important doctrine is to the Army:

> Military doctrine . . . constitute[s] the conceptual skeletons upon which are mounted the sinews of material, the muscles of battalions and brigades and the nervous system of planning and policy decision. At the risk of slight oversimplification, it is useful to understand doctrine as being the officially sanctioned theory of victory outlining the conduct of war on all levels, from the broadest aspects of operational planning down through tactics and standard operating procedures to the most minor details of squad patrolling.[65]

Given how important doctrine is to the Army's mission and identity, it offers a very useful repository of the institution's memory and of historical lessons. Not only that, but doctrine is often one of the key terrains over which battles over identity and memory are fought. Even so, Winter's point about agency and reception still stands. Andrew Krepinevich has demonstrated that the US Army in the 1960s produced a significant quantity of counterinsurgency doctrine without the institution ever internalizing it or taking the concept seriously.[66] Field manuals can be used as a smoke screen to persuade political masters that a military is making desired changes without actually necessitating real change. In an effort to avoid such a trap, this book considers what Keith Bickel defines as formal and informal doctrine.[67] *Formal doctrine* is defined as officially sanctioned documents such as Army strategy statements, field manuals, circulars, and pamphlets and the course curricula at service schools. These strategy statements and field manuals are how the Army defines both its terms of art and its mission and purpose. Indeed, some manuals such as Field Manual (FM) 100-5/FM 3-0 *Operations* effectively contain the Army's conception of war and how it intends to fight war. The ebb and flow—and indeed the constant relabeling—of the Army's manuals on counterinsurgency give some indication of the changing relevance of the concept. The changing course curricula at the Army's various service schools also give us a clear illustration of the institution's shifting priorities; what the Army did and did not teach about Vietnam and counterinsurgency says much about how they perceived both.

Informal doctrine, which relates more to student papers and discourse between more junior officers in professional military journals, is worthy of attention because it is here that lessons are most vibrantly contested. In journals such as *Military Review* and *Parameters*, the issues that most preoccupied the Army were debated and considered in depth, and dissenting articles challenged the consensus. For example, the Army's long institutional silence on Vietnam and counterinsurgency was occasionally broken in the 1970s and early 1980s by articles in *Military Review* by officers dismayed at the lessons the Army was drawing from Vietnam. Similarly, at times where the consensus on the lessons of Vietnam either wavered or changed, there was a rush of articles in these journals by officers seeking to outline new lessons.

This formal and informal doctrine is supplemented by the Army's "lessons learned" literature. These sources include "lessons learned" pamphlets, official historical monographs designed to instruct on the lessons of history, the products of the Combined Arms Center (CAC) and its subordinate organizations such as the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) and, most obviously, the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). Official monographs on the

Army's experiences in various conflicts have been a key source of Army lessons as they effectively write the Army's draft of history. These monographs often contain telling criticisms of how the Army applied the lessons of Vietnam to contemporary situations. Taken together, the processes of doctrinal formulation and lesson learning offer a unique way of looking at both how historical narratives can shape the Army's culture and identity and how that very culture can affect the way in which narratives are constructed.

These sources have been supplemented wherever possible by archival materials. To better understand the Army's performance in Vietnam, this book has used the records of the Vietnam-era organization Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), the files of the Army's historical unit in Vietnam, and the oral histories and personal papers of senior officers who served in the war. These personal papers offer an invaluable way of examining what these senior officers, many of whom went on to command and reform the post-Vietnam Army, considered to be the lessons of Vietnam. Lastly, although their availability is only partial, this book has drawn on the unit histories of the various organizations responsible for the development of the Army's doctrine, such as the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth and the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. The papers of one of the few organizations for whom complete records are available, the Army–Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict, have been a rich source on the internal deliberations behind the publication of doctrine and an indication of just how much more excellent material will be available to scholars once more collections become declassified.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 examines the Vietnam War itself, how the Army's attitude toward counterinsurgency evolved throughout the war, and the extent to which Army leaders in both Vietnam and Washington recognized the importance of counterinsurgency. It is particularly concerned with the latter phase of the American involvement, after the Tet Offensive of 1968, when new approaches to the war gained prominence and the pacification of the Vietnamese countryside stepped up. This new campaign was an improvement on what preceded it but one that fell short of its objective and that was full of flaws that postwar counterinsurgency proponents were often slow to acknowledge.

Chapter 2 discusses the post-Vietnam turn away from counterinsurgency and looks at how the Vietnam experience reshaped core aspects of the Army's identity—its operational doctrine and its education system—and how that identity itself affected reception and study of the Vietnam War. Specifically, it examines how the Army's focus shifted toward its NATO mission of confronting Warsaw Pact armies in conventional, armored battles on the plains of Northern Europe and how this new focus meant that the lessons of the Vietnam War were constructed in a way that would not so much improve the Army's ability to conduct counterinsurgency as ensure that the Army would never again be called on to fight such wars.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how the Army handled the challenges of the 1980s and 1990s respectively, decades in which the major uses of US military power were ones that the Army's preferred model of conventional warfare was ill suited to handle. Chapter 3 looks at how renewed US involvement in counterinsurgency and insurgency in Central America meant that a reconsideration of the Army's preferred way of war was needed, even as the lessons of Vietnam were coalescing around a strong tendency to avoid commitment of Army forces wherever possible. The rise of "low-intensity conflict" (LIC) meant that the debate was reopened to some extent, and the chapter considers how changes in doctrine, education, and force structure reflected both the resurgence of counterinsurgency proponents within the Army and their ultimate failure to overcome the lessons of Vietnam outlined in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 explores the Army's reaction to the end of the Cold War and the growth of ill-defined conflicts that no longer had a superpower rivalry to give them meaning. These conflicts occasionally necessitated US intervention in the form of peacekeeping missions, but the Army's leadership paradoxically both strongly supported the Powell Doctrine as a way of preventing another Vietnam while also recognizing the inevitability, if not the desirability, of Army involvement in what were now termed "operations other than war." The practice of deploying troops on peacekeeping missions but then operating in such a way that the actual accomplishment of the mission had a lower priority than the prevention of American casualties shows just how unimportant (and far from the Army's core role) these missions were to many in the Army.

The second half of the book examines the Army's reconsideration of the importance of counterinsurgency and the lessons of Vietnam in light of the Iraq War. Chapter 5 looks at the initial invasion and the inadequacy of the plans for postwar stabilization in light of not only the lack of counterinsurgency doctrine and understanding within the Army but also the culmination of the technocentric lessons of Vietnam, those that spurred the "revolution in military affairs" of which the Army had become an enthusiastic proponent. Planning for the invasion of Iraq was also refracted through the experience of the peacekeeping operations detailed in Chapter 4, both in terms of the obsession with force protection above all else and the relatively positive measures taken by some to ensure there would be no humanitarian disaster. Chapter 6 considers the period from 2003 to 2006, an awkward transition period in which the Army recognized that its lack of knowledge of counterinsurgency was a severe problem and when narratives of the Vietnam War emerged with full force to influence conduct of the war in Iraq. This period was one in which the lessons of Vietnam were again contested and the Army began to change its consensus on those lessons to create something that was usable in the conflict in which they now found themselves.

This reimagining of the history of the Vietnam War suggested the beginnings of a major change in the Army's institutional culture, one that is further explored in Chapter 7. This chapter examines the profound shift that took place between 2006 and 2008 in the Army's understanding both of counterinsurgency and of the Vietnam War. It looks at how this shift played out both in Iraq—where the 2007–2008 "surge" validated the efficacy of counterinsurgency in Iraq and encouraged a narrative of the US war in Vietnam that redeemed much of the Army's effort there—and in the United States, where new counterinsurgency doctrine, one that drew heavily on the Vietnam experience, was constructed. These new lessons of Vietnam looked on that war not as an example of why the Army should not attempt to conduct counterinsurgency but as a source of lessons as to *how* to conduct such wars. Chapter 8 considers how these lessons were refracted through the experience of the troop "surge" in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011. This final chapter will look at how the newly established consensus on counterinsurgency was challenged during the McChrystal-Petraeus era in Afghanistan; the limitations of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan led to a reopening of the debate on the lessons of Vietnam. That the debate over the lessons was still taking place over thirty years after the end of US involvement there is testimony not only to the controversy the war still inspires but also to its enduring influence on the American military mind.