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Forum (40) on the Importance of the Scholarship of George C. Herring

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 Introduction by Richard H. Immerman, Temple University, emeritus

“George C. Herring: Teacher, Scholar, Role Model”

It was 1979, or maybe 1980. I was a relatively newly-minted PhD who had arrived at Princeton not long before as a research associate. I would work with and for Fred Greenstein in what was then called the Woodrow Wilson School. Fred had received a grant to compare and contrast the leadership styles and advisory systems of presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Harry S. Truman. Only months into the project, however, we decided a comparison of Eisenhower to President Lyndon Johnson would be more engaging and illuminating. This would be particularly the case if we followed Alexander George’s method of “structured, focused” case studies,¹ and we had very specific ones in mind: Eisenhower’s rejection of the French request to commit US forces to assist France’s besieged forces at Dienbienphu in 1954, and Lyndon Johnson’s agreeing to General William Westmoreland’s so-called “Forty-four battalion” request in 1965 to prevent a Republic of Vietnam defeat in Indochina.

The plan was for me to lay the foundation for the project’s Dienbienphu component by drafting a working paper. I had explored Eisenhower’s foreign policy, and that exploration included examining the policymaking process. So this division was logical. But I had concentrated on the CIA operation in Guatemala, an episode that was different in almost every way from the Dienbienphu crisis. As for the policymaking process, Fred’s and my research had already turned up evidence that not only challenged but also in fundamental respects overturned the judgments I had reached. On a research trip to the Eisenhower Library that was connected to our project, I had photocopied hundreds of pages of documents on Dienbienphu (this was several years before the first part of the 1952-1954 FRUS volume on Vietnam came out).² I needed expert help to make sense of them.

In 1979, just as I was turning my attention to Vietnam, George Herring published *America’s Longest War*.³ For obvious reasons it had yet to become a classic, and acknowledged by almost all historians of the Vietnam War (including those who contribute below to this forum) as the “best” survey and destined to go through six editions. Moreover, George himself was not at the time quite the luminary who is familiar to today’s readers of H-Diplo.⁴ He was certainly well respected, but at least for young historians like myself, he was known as the author of a book on lend-lease, *Aid to Russia*, and the co-editor of the Edward Stettinius diaries.⁵ Neither, to be honest, was a page turner or perhaps even a must-read.

That all changed with his publication of *America’s Longest War*, I was bowled over by reading it. As an undergraduate I had studied with George Kahin and read his and John Lewis’s *The United States and Vietnam*.⁶ What I knew about Vietnam was largely a product of him, it, my parallel coursework with Walter LaFeber, and what any student like myself who was immersed in the antiwar protests of the 1960s and 1970s learned through reading and osmosis. But George’s survey pulled the myriad dimensions of the war, and US policy, together like nothing I had ever read. Crafting phrases such as the “logical culmination of the containment

¹ Alexander L. George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (NY: Free Press, 1979), 43-68.

² Neil H. Peterson ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: XIII, Part 1: Indochina*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982).

³ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States in Vietnam, 1950-1975* (NY: John C. Wiley, 1979).

⁴ In his fascinating contribution to H-Diplo’s “Learning the Scholar’s Craft” series, George recounts his journey and explains why his “career far exceeded the vague and modest ambitions I brought to graduate school.” Herring, “Becoming a Historian,” *H-Diplo*, June 24, 2022, <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E444.pdf>.

⁵ Herring, *Aid to Russia: Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Origins of the Cold War* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1973); and Thomas Campbell and George C. Herring, *The Diaries of Edward Stettinius, Jr.*, (NY: New Viewpoints, 1975).

⁶ George McT. Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (NY: Dial Press, 1967).

policy,”⁷ which he held was the underlying cause of the tragedy, he put forth arguments that were as simple and intelligible as they were elegant and compelling. His prose was fluid, jargon-free, passionate yet not polemical. I knew immediately to whom to turn for help. I didn’t write George. I called him.

I had never met George or had even the most casual interaction with him. Thus I won’t claim that he answered the phone as if I were a long-lost friend. But he was most gracious and welcoming—a trait which all who knew George recognize as encoded in his DNA. I was relieved. Then I was surprised. We had barely had time to delve into the many questions I had about Dienbienphu when George invited me to visit him in Lexington to go through his files of documents, his own personal photocopies. I could stay at his home, he told me.

It probably took me a millisecond to accept. And not long after, I walked out of the Lexington airport to find George leaning back against his car, a broad grin on his face. He had picked me up, another sign of George’s lack of pretense or concern with hierarchy. We were soon at his home with his family, where everyone immediately made me comfortable. We spent the next several days, much of the time one-on-one, in his office sifting through his files. He let me copy anything I wanted (I’m still not sure if it was on his or the University of Kentucky History Department’s dime). He also made explicit that his account Dienbienphu involved the few pages in the book that he struggled with the most. He was far from confident that he got it “right,” and he looked forward to my take on it. I was flattered. But George didn’t flatter. He simply manifested a humility all too rare in our profession.

We kept up a regular correspondence after I returned to Princeton, and I took the first opportunity that arose to invite George up to give a talk—on Dienbienphu, of course. This time he stayed at my house—this was 1981 or 1982. He arrived as I was bringing in the mail. It included some documents from the Eisenhower Library that I had successfully declassified. Among them was a draft resolution, dated April 2, 1954, aimed at providing Eisenhower with a blank check to employ air and/or sea power to prevent dominoes from falling in Southeast Asia—and beyond. George and I read it together, and he grinned that grin that I so enjoyed witnessing. Everyone who knew him knows exactly what that grin looked like. He then went into his briefcase and took out the text of his lecture that I had scheduled him to deliver that evening. He pointed to the line that read something like, “It’s not as if on April 3 [Chalmers Roberts’s famous “The Day We Didn’t Go to War”⁸] Dulles had in his vest pocket a Formosa-like resolution he was prepared to present to the congressional leaders.”

George changed that line when he spoke that evening, for which he gave me credit. Moreover, before he returned to Lexington, he asked, I repeat he asked, if I wanted to co-author an article on Dienbienphu. If we combined forces, I recall him saying, we might just get it right. I immediately agreed. We had now been discussing and comparing notes about Dienbienphu for close to a year. Still, I could not get over that George Herring was inviting me to co-author an article with him, as if I was his peer. That was so George Herring, however.

In 1984 we published “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: ‘The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited.”⁹ It was a watershed in my career trajectory. But in retrospect, more significantly, it was the beginning of a decades-long friendship and collaboration that ended only with George’s passing. By the time of our article’s publication, I had moved to the University of Hawaii. George not only visited me there, but he was also pivotal in bringing me into a Franco-American project on Indochina that Larry Kaplan assembled. As a

⁷ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, vii.

⁸ Chalmers M. Roberts, “The Day We Didn’t Go to War,” *Reporter* 11, September 14, 1954, 31-34.

⁹ Herring and Richard H. Immerman, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: ‘The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited,” *Journal of American History* 71 (September 1984): 343-363.

result, George, Larry, Gary Hess, and I combined to produce a history that enabled us to work, eat, and play in London, Paris, Honolulu, and yes, Kent, Ohio.

Over the years we continued to combine work with pleasure—frequently in the reverse order. That, too, was George. He was a serious scholar who knew that there was a lot more to life. So when he came to Princeton we played what I called ‘Diplomatic Doubles’: the two of us along with Lloyd Gardner and Warren Kimball engaged in take-no-prisoners tennis. When I went to Lexington, he took my young daughter on a tractor ride and, later, introduced me to “designer bourbon.” And I’ll never forget the joy on George’s face when he careened down a water slide at a PCB conference on Hawaii’s Big Island. I’m eternally grateful that he flew up to Philadelphia to help ‘celebrate’ my retirement.

Even as he experienced so much joy and brought so much to others, made so many friends, and devoted so much of his time to Dottie and his family, George excelled as an undergraduate teacher and a graduate mentor. He served SHAFR as president and editor of *Diplomatic History*, represented us all on both the Department of State’s Historical Advisory Committee and the CIA’s Historical Review Panel, and he took on the burden of chairing his department at UK—twice! All the while his scholarship evolved and his reputation grew. He was *the* historian of the Vietnam War, following up *America’s Longest War* with another classic, *LBJ and Vietnam*, editing the Pentagon Papers so-called negotiating volumes, and writing more articles and giving more lectures than one could count.¹⁰ He wrote about other subjects as well, and capped it all off with the magisterial *From Colony to Superpower*.¹¹ Bringing to bear on it his unsurpassed expertise and the entire spectrum of his gifts, analytic and expository, it won SHAFR’s Ferrell Prize and in my judgment should have won many more. That he was the “chosen” one for this volume in the Oxford History of the United States series was in itself a prize and unambiguous evidence to where George stood in the pantheon of our discipline’s greats. You’d never know that by talking to him, however.

This forum allows seven students, colleagues, and friends with unique perspectives speak for George—about his scholarship, about his teaching and mentorship, and about what made him, to borrow from Lloyd Gardner, such a “gentleman.” The first three contributors—Gardner, Warren Kimball, and John Carland, are George’s contemporaries and reflect what George meant to them and our entire profession over his rich and productive lifetime. Lloyd’s title, “A Scholar and Gentleman,” speaks volumes about what made George so special. George was “never anything less in either role,” he explains. He uses personal anecdotes to illustrate why we are all so “grateful” George “passed our way.”

No one knew George longer, or better, than Warren Kimball. Their lifelong friendship and profound mutual admiration reflects the very definition of the Hebrew word *bashart*—destiny must have played a role. They met in the archives, as is only appropriate, while both were conducting research on lend-lease. They could have become rivals; instead, also as is only appropriate, they became friends. Or, as Warren wrote me when accepting my invitation to contribute to this forum, they became family. He writes about how gentle George became fierce George when battling the CIA’s secrecy. But he also writes how George, so identifiable in his “inimitable blue blazer and khakis,” shared a compartment with two smugglers on a train ride from Kiev to Yalta (hard to imagine such a train ride today). Kimball, like Gardner, focuses on the many sides of George that enveloped but transcended his teaching and scholarship. In “the demanding world of academe,” he concludes, George Herring “flourished, with penetrating humor, quiet intensity, and love for those close to him.”

¹⁰ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); and Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983).

¹¹ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

John Carland's life intersected with George's beginning when they were young colleagues at the University of Kentucky in the late 1970s and early 1980s and extending to the decades that John spent later as government historian, first with the Department of Defense and then with the Department of State. George was John's friend—he was likewise John's advocate and advisor, roles that George fulfilled so admirably that Carland, drawing on his personal archive of emails, does not hold back in recounting how vital in so many ways George was to his life, career, and happiness. The common denominator throughout most of their time together was their respective commitments to understanding, and understanding more about, the Vietnam War. Yet as with every one of the essayists, John writes about a multi-faceted relationship whose rewards far transcended the written page.

That is the case as well with the next two contributors, Bob Brigham and Kyle Longley, two of the many students who received their PhDs studying under “the Chief.” Bob arrived at the University of Kentucky with an MA in hand and the intention to study the Vietnam War. He explains why he chose George as his mentor. The most compelling reason, of course, was George's scholarship. Published not long after his arrival in Lexington (and the fall of Saigon), *America's Longest War*, Bob writes, “immediately captured the public's attention with its stunning synthesis of diplomatic, military, and political history.” George's “balanced and nuanced narrative “critiqued” US policy “without malice” and manifested his “extraordinary gifts as a writer.” He goes on to similarly praise *LBJ and Vietnam* and *From Colony to Superpower*. Bob could not have found a better model.

As a teacher and advisor, George taught Bob to “think big.” He taught him the value of humility as well. Bob does not recall George mentioning his own books in a seminar—not once. He “had absolutely no ego.” He offered his graduate students unconditional support—and faith in their abilities. He had time for each of them, no matter their need. He was, in short, “the perfect PhD mentor” who became “a dear friend.”

Kyle Longley agrees with every word that Bob wrote. They were members of the same cohort, but Kyle ultimately chose to write on Latin America (later of course he would also write about the Vietnam War). That made no difference to George. He had “subject dexterity.” George “was the consummate role model,” Longley echoes Brigham, “humble and accommodating yet tough when needed.” George's strategy was to point his graduate students “in the right direction,” provide “guidance when needed,” and then encourage them “to think on [their] own.”

Longley stresses how George's mentorship, and his friendship, continued long after he hooded his graduate students. Over the subsequent decades they spoke or corresponded probably once a month, and George read in advance, commented on, and even edited almost all of Kyle's books. And there were a lot of them. He made a special effort to meet up with Longley at conferences even though he was not a conference-goer. To repeat, George found time for everyone.

The last two contributors were a “generation” later than Brigham and Longley, and neither were George's students. Yet George found time for them, too, and each was influenced by him almost as much. Historians of US foreign relations tend to overuse the term ‘special relationship.’ But I can think of no better way to describe what George came to mean to Lien-Hang T. Nguyen. He was her inspiration and mentor, Hang writes. He was also her colleague and dear friend.

Hang explains that she first “met” George by reading his *America's Longest War* as junior in college. Voted by the class “the best history of the war,” this masterpiece in her words “founded a field.” Hang of course went on to make her own mark in that field, for which, like his students such as Bob Brigham and Kyle Longley, she expresses her gratitude to George for educating her, her generation, and generations to follow. Hang's good fortune was to be hired at the University of Kentucky, in theory as George's successor but in practice as his colleague and “partner-in-crime.” She underscores how privileged she was to have someone like George take her under his wing. One might make the case that George spent his entire career preparing for that role.

Although less directly, Kathryn Statler received this same “George Herring treatment.” She recalls when, as a graduate student and budding scholar of the Vietnam War, she was delivering her first paper at a SHAFR conference. There was George, and she was understandably intimidated by his presence. Quickly she learned how misguided that was. George offered her only words of encouragement, characteristic of the support he always provided, and she repeats “always,” emerging scholars.

The support George provided Statler grew into a relationship, and that relationship took a turn that she did not expect but which meant the world to her. In 2012, along with Andy Johns, she and George became the editors of the University of Kentucky Press’ “Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace” series. This is among George’s less-sung contributions to our field, yet it is an association with George that Kathryn is rightly and singularly proud of. The series now includes thirty-eight books, and she lists each one of them. She identifies the many of George’s writings that profoundly influenced both her scholarship and her teaching. Yet the takeaway from her essay is that his collaborating with her on the book series is his most enduring legacy to her.

George Herring left an enduring legacy for all of us—a legacy of scholarship, of teaching, of professionalism, of friendship. He was a role model to us all, no matter our age. The essays that follow pay tribute to him, but they also summon us to do better—to write better, to teach better, and most importantly, to care better. He lived a rich life, and we are richer because he did.

Participants:

Richard H. Immerman is Emeritus Professor and Edward Buthusium Distinguished Faculty Fellow in History and Marvin Wachman Emeritus Director of the Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy at Temple University. He is currently co-editing a festschrift in honor of Walter LaFeber that is forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

Robert K. Brigham is Shirley Ecker Boskey Professor of History and International Relations at Vassar College. A University of Kentucky PhD, he is the author or editor of nine books on the Vietnam War, among them *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (PublicAffairs Press, 2018) and *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* (PublicAffairs Press, 2006).

John M. Carland is a longtime historian of the Vietnam War, focusing on the role of force and diplomacy in that conflict. He is the author of the official history of the Army’s first 18 months of combat in Vietnam—*Combat Operations: Stemming the Tide, May 1965–October 1966*. He is also the editor/compiler of three documentary histories of America’s Vietnam War policy: *Vietnam: January–October 1972*; *Vietnam: October 1972–January 1973*; and *Vietnam: The Kissinger-Le Duc Tho Negotiations, August 1969–December 1973*.

Lloyd C. Gardner is Professor Emeritus of History at Rutgers University. A Wisconsin PhD, he is the author or editor of more than fifteen books on American foreign policy, including *Safe for Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 1984), *Approaching Vietnam* (W.W. Norton, 1988), *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Ivan R. Dee, 1995), and *The War on Leakers* (The New Press, 2016). He has been president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Affairs

Warren F. Kimball is Robert Treat Professor of History emeritus at Rutgers University. He is the author of *Forged in War* (William Morrow & Co., and Harper Collins, 1997), *The Juggler* (Princeton University Press, 1984), and books on the Morgenthau Plan and the origins of Lend-Lease, edited the three volume collection of the Churchill-Roosevelt correspondence (with commentaries, Princeton University Press, 1984). He has published over 50 essays on Churchill, Roosevelt and the era of the Second World War.

Kyle Longley is a Professor of History and Director of the War, Diplomacy, and Society Program at Chapman University as well as the Executive Director of the Society for Military History. He received his PhD in History at the University of Kentucky in 1993. He is the author or editor of ten books including *In the Eagle's Shadow: The United States and Latin America* (2nd edition, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam* (2nd edition, Routledge 2019), *LBJ's 1968: Power, Politics, and the Presidency in America's Year of Upheaval* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and currently he is completing *The Forever Soldiers: Americans at War in Afghanistan and Iraq* (University of North Carolina Press, 2024). He is the past president of the Pacific Coast Branch of the AHA and member of the SHAFR Council.

Lien-Hang T. Nguyen is the Dorothy Borg Chair in the History of the United States and East Asia, Director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, and co-founder of Vietnamese Studies at Columbia University. She is the author of *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and general editor of *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War* (3 vols). Dr. Nguyen is currently working on a comprehensive history of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Kathryn C. Statler is Professor of History at the University of San Diego, where she teaches courses on the Vietnam Wars, US Foreign Relations, World War I and World War II, and Armed Conflict and American Society. She is the author of *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (the University Press of Kentucky, 2007) and co-editor (with Andrew Johns) of *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series, Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

 Essay by Robert K. Brigham, Vassar College

A slight smile came over George's face when I showed him a well-worn photocopy of his *America's Longest War* in my favorite bookstore on Hai Ba Trung Street in Hanoi, Vietnam.¹ The shop keeper told us that it was his most popular book on the Vietnam War, and that readers rented it out by the week. I explained that George was the author. A huge smile came over the shop keeper's face, and he asked me to take a photograph of the two of them together. George was so embarrassed. Humility was one of the many reasons George C. Herring was a wonderful PhD adviser. George had absolutely no ego. In our graduate seminars, I never once heard him say "in my book." Few scholars have been as associated with a book as George. After *America's Longest War* was published in 1979, he quickly earned the reputation as the dean of US academics on the war. Historian Fred Logevall has correctly suggested that *America's Longest War* "has taught more Americans about the war than any other book."² George never mentioned this seminal book to his graduate students, not once. This was incredibly helpful as we all tried to find our way in the field.

Written shortly after Saigon's fall, *America's Longest War* immediately captured the public's attention with its stunning synthesis of diplomatic, military, and political history. Herring described America's involvement and ultimate failure in Vietnam without malice. In sharp contrast to much of the existing scholarship on the war, *America's Longest War* was free of the ideological debates that helped animate the period. Instead, George's approach was balanced and nuanced. He claimed that US intervention in Vietnam was misguided, not evil. He argued that US policy makers were wrong, however, to believe that success was vital to maintain America's credibility and world position.

In a compelling narrative that drew on George's extraordinary gifts as a writer, he explained that US intervention in Vietnam was not the result of overzealous national security advisers blindly leading presidents into a quagmire. Nor did he think hubris or ignorance alone could explain America's commitment to Vietnam. Instead, he argued that each administration was aware of the pitfalls and dangers in Vietnam, but the potential domestic fallout for abandoning Saigon was too great to change course. Anti-Communism had such a stranglehold on public debates about America's place in the world that finding the right balance in Vietnam was impossible. From counterinsurgency, to pacification, to a war for peace, successive administrations failed to find a formula for victory in Vietnam. George concluded that victory was illusive because "there was no moral or material price Americans would—or should—have been willing to pay."³ The war could not have been won at acceptable risks and costs.

George delighted in the success of *America's Longest War*, but he did not want to be limited by it. He told me repeatedly while writing *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War*, that this was going to be his last Vietnam monograph.⁴ At mid-career, he was fearful of being pigeon-holed and thought of as *just* a Vietnam War historian. For some, George's candor might have been upsetting. For me, it was liberating. George was not afraid to share his doubts and worries with me, an older graduate student. He was secure enough in his own abilities to be vulnerable. He deflected the confession with his legendary sly sense of humor, but I could tell that he was serious. He desperately wanted to flex his intellectual muscles outside of the Vietnam War and put his considerable narrative skills to the test. He showed us hints of his new intellectual pursuits in *LBJ and Vietnam*, focusing on the powerful personalities that shaped and controlled US policy.

¹ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 1st Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

² Quoted in Emily Langer, "George Herring, scholar of US diplomacy and Vietnam War, dies at 86," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2022/12/06/george-herring-vietnam-war-historian-dead>.

³ Herring, *America's Longest War* xiii.

⁴ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

George offered readers of *LBJ and Vietnam* an expert analysis of the growing crisis in civil-military relations in the Johnson years. He argued that monumental bureaucratic infighting led to the dual problem of US strategic confusion in Vietnam and President Lyndon Johnson's micro-management of the war. Part of the dilemma rested with Johnson, who was sure that his national security team knew nothing about politics. Johnson thought he had to manage the war from the White House, the center of his political universe. Accordingly, the president wanted to fight the war without ire and in cold blood. But Johnson greatly miscalculated the American public's willingness to support a war of attrition that might take decades to win, or at least not lose. George also blamed postwar intellectuals and their pet theories on modernization and limited war for the tragedy in Vietnam. He provided powerful biographical sketches in *LBJ and Vietnam* that allowed appreciation for the ways in which these academics and policy makers were products of their times. Individuals mattered in George's master narratives, and human agency was at the center of them. George ultimately concluded that the Johnson administration's "ignorance of Vietnam and the Vietnamese... thickened the fog of war, contributing to the mistaken decision to intervene, mismanagement of the conflict, and ultimate failure."⁵ Elegant and deft prose.

When George sent *LBJ and Vietnam* off to the press, you could feel his sense of relief all over the seventeenth floor of Patterson Office Tower. He could now turn his attention to his much-delayed magnum opus, *From Colony to Superpower*.⁶ Sheldon Meyer, the long-time editor at Oxford University Press, had contracted George to write the US foreign policy volume for the press's History of the United States series. George's other projects and two stints as department chair had delayed the book. In my last years of graduate school, George returned to it. I had never seen him happier at work. We spoke everyday about his progress. He delighted in his new discoveries. His enthusiasm and excitement about the Oxford book were contagious. "I like painting on this broad canvas," George told me one night when he and his wife, Dottie Leathers, came to our house on Merino Street in Lexington for dinner. My wife, Monica Church, is an artist, and George was staring at one of her large paintings hanging in our living room.

From Colony to Superpower was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in non-fiction. It also received the 2008 Robert Ferrell Award given by the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) for the best book in the field. Few of us were surprised. George's incredible narrative abilities were on full display in this book of nearly a thousand pages. But so too were his impressive interpretative insights. He challenged many conventional tropes in the history of US foreign policy, especially the idea that the United States was an innocent nation in a cruel world. The US was never isolationist, George argued, and it often acted unilaterally on a global stage, even in the early nineteenth century. America's rise to power in the 1890s was not accidental, George explained. Instead, US policy makers had acted purposefully to secure their growing economic and political interests abroad through the application of military power. In the twentieth century, US leaders thought the entire globe was in America's sphere and they designed policies to reflect that conclusion. At the core of *From Colony to Superpower* was the belief that to understand American history one had to study the history of US foreign policy. No one has explained this better. As one reviewer wrote, George displayed a "Herculean power of synthesis," and he captured "a quarter millennium of American foreign policy with fluidity and felicity."⁷ George had done what he set out to do, paint on a large canvas with bold brush strokes.

From George's notes on my research papers and dissertation chapters, it is evident that he wanted me to think big too. In an era of increasing specialization, he implored me to be conscious of the global dimensions of the Vietnam War as well as the influences of domestic politics on the formulation of US foreign policy. He was also a wordsmith, demanding draft after draft until my prose hit the mark. No one in my graduate cohort would have tried to emulate George as a writer. Like Flannery O'Connor, he had a knack for finding just the

⁵ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 184.

⁶ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ Josef Joffe, *New York Times*, October 31, 2008.

right words to convey oceans of meaning. He pushed us, though, to find *our* right words. He had tremendous faith in us, and we felt that support and interest in our work daily.

George had about dozen PhD students when I studied with him. He gave each of us the same amount of time and attention. He always had time for us. He never refused to write a letter of recommendation, read a draft, or reassure us that all was not lost. The burden must have been tremendous. But George never complained. He was genuinely happy to help us achieve our highest aspirations. One anecdote sums up all that you need to know about George Herring as a PhD adviser. George had no plans to attend the AHA annual conference in 1994. He was a visiting professor at West Point that year and was going to stay in New York to work on his many projects. But once he found out that Kyle Longley, who was another of his graduate students, and I had job interviews, he changed his plans and made reservations for San Francisco. George met with us each morning before our interviews. He took us out for dinner each night to debrief. He was there for us in San Francisco, and he was there for us whenever we needed him. This kind, generous, humble, thoughtful, and gifted Virginian was the perfect PhD mentor. He was also a dear friend and I miss him terribly.

“My Friend George C. Herring, Jr.”

Others will examine and assess George Herring’s considerable contributions to history. In this essay I focus on our friendship—a friendship that began in 1977 and ended with George’s death late last year. At the same time, I should hasten to add that because George was, and I am, a historian, and because his subject—or the subject we most associate him with professionally, the United States and the Vietnam War—ended up being mine, inevitably our conversations and our correspondence did explore aspects of that war, as well as, to be sure, many other subjects.

In August 2013 I looked forward to retiring soon from my contractor/consultant post at the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense. There was a *déjà vu* quality here as I had previously retired in 2011 from the State Department’s Office of the Historian (OH). At OH I had compiled and edited volumes on the Vietnam War in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series. During this second and what I expected to be final retirement I planned to complete, and in short order, a project barely begun when I left State—to compile, edit, and publish in the FRUS series a volume composed of the transcripts of the 68 negotiating sessions National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had with the North Vietnamese between August 1969 and December 1973.

When I told George about this project via email, one of hundreds we exchanged over the years,¹ he replied: “Like every other project the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho ‘conversations’ [as I had called the transcripts] will take more time and work than you assume at the outset.”² George was on the mark about the volume, which was finally published as an e-book in December 2017, and his wise words have also been applicable to the preparation of this paper.

Friendship can have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is especially vulnerable to time and/or distance. Neither, together or separately, for that matter, is inherently fatal. As long as friendship is nourished, for example, through frequent correspondence on mutually interesting topics, and, when possible, through in-person get-togethers, friendship can overcome the limits imposed by the above. In our friendship I believe that George and I did exactly that and over time became and remained close friends until his death. Friendship also gets a decided boost, I hasten to add, if those who call themselves friends actually like one another.

Becoming Friends

George and I were colleagues at the University of Kentucky, 1977-1984. It’s where we met. Our offices were on the 17th floor of an 18-story building, the tallest on campus.

Around 1980-81 George and I advanced our friendship from friendly colleagues to collegial friends. I believe it had something to do with my finally asking George why he frequently walked past my door in late afternoon obviously lost in thought. As it turned out, George was working through the writing of an article, “The 1st Cavalry and Ia Drang Valley, 18 October -24 November 1965,” to be published as a chapter in a

¹ And there would have been many more had not unfortunate internet events lost most of my email traffic before March 2011. Additionally, there were many exchanges on my State Department account that I no longer could access after retiring.

² George Herring, email to author, 4 August 2013. All the emails cited in this paper are in the author’s possession.

book, *America's First Battles, 1776-1965*.³ George told me in all seriousness that walking the hallway helped resolve some of the knotty problems associated with writing about combat history—not the usual milieu of the diplomatic historian. Years later, reminiscing about the past, I wrote to George that: “I still remember those days when you were in the Patterson Tower corner office and late in the afternoon, while I was struggling with revision of British Empire thesis [my field before becoming an American military and later diplomatic historian], you would come my way and comment that writing [Vietnam War] combat history ... was more complicated than you thought it would be.”⁴ There’s a wonderful irony here in that years later, when I had joined the US Army Center of Military History (CMH), and had been assigned to write a combat history of the early years of the war, I would discover in spades the complicated challenge of writing combat history referred to by George. In any case, after our initial conversation about strolling down the hallway, and on a regular basis from then on, I would around 4:00/4:30 p.m. head for George’s coveted corner office or he to mine near the elevator. There we would spend a few minutes solving the world’s problems, talking about the British Empire and the Vietnam War (as two discrete topics, not one!), and gossiping about historians.

To use the radio announcer Paul Harvey’s catchphrase, worth telling here is the rest of the story about George’s *America’s First Battles* essay/article referenced above. The manuscript in which George’s piece resided was to be published by the Center of Military History. However, word got out to retired Lieutenant General Harry Kinnard—who had commanded the 1st Cavalry Division in the battles George wrote about—about the Center’s intention. What concerned Kinnard was that George’s Ia Drang article raised serious questions about the battle at Landing Zone Albany. Early accounts had touted the preceding battle in the campaign at Landing Zone X-Ray as the central event of the campaign and as a victory. These accounts, however, failed to mention what George called “the disastrous ambush [of an American battalion] at Landing Zone Albany...”⁵ George not only mentioned it, he also wrote about it in detail in the article. Kinnard then raised such a ruckus about CMH publishing the book that CMH agreed to review the manuscript and reconsider publication. That review resulted in the Center, led by Chief of Military History retired Brigadier General Douglas Kinnard, backing away from publishing the book.

In an August 1984 letter George wrote of this and seemed more amused by the kerfuffle than anything else. “I have become,” he told me, “a celebrity in some parts of the army.” George continued: “The word is that [Douglas] Kinnard showed it to a general [Lieutenant General Harry Kinnard, retired] who was involved in the story, the man threatened to raise hell throughout the army if the Center of Military History published it (which was the plan), and [Douglas] Kinnard bowed to expediency. I have had no official word on all of this, only what I pick up through the rumor mill. The book is now to be published by U. of Kansas Press from what I can gather”⁶ Kansas Press got the book because Kansas military history professor Theodore “Ted” Wilson overheard at a conference, as he later told the story, that CMH would not publish the manuscript. Wilson immediately proposed that Kansas do it, which it did. *America’s First Battles* then became a best seller for Kansas Press.

George’s Support During My Tenure Time

The years 1982-84 were difficult and challenging for me. I came up for tenure at the University of Kentucky (UK) in the 1982-83 academic year. With a book contract in hand from Macmillan in England and the Hoover Institution Press in the US to publish my thesis, plus good teaching evaluations and a solid endorsement from the History Department, I thought my chances were good. However, the dean turned

³ George C. Herring, “The 1st Cavalry and the Ia Drang Valley, 18 October – 24 November,” in Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., *America’s First Battles, 1776-1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 300-326.

⁴ Author, email to George Herring, 7 October 2013.

⁵ Herring to author, 24 January 1986, Carland Papers.

⁶ Herring to author, 5 August 1984, Carland Papers.

down my application. Under UK regulations I could and did apply once more during the academic year 1983-84. On top of what I believed were the favorable factors just mentioned, friends, supporters, and students within the department and university had also written to and petitioned the dean to say yes to my tenure application. George was key to organizing this effort, along with two other of my History Department friends/colleagues.⁷ In a 2016 email, George wrote “I still recall quite vividly Jeremy [Popkin] and Nancy Dye and I huddled in my basement office on Bristol Rd. drafting a letter to Dean Baer about your situation.”⁸ Such meetings produced letters, meetings, and petitions referred to above, and in doing these things George and the others demonstrated courage as well as friendship in taking the stand they did. However, the dean was adamant, and again turned down my request for tenure.

Our Move to Washington, and Job Hunting, 1984-86

The dean’s decision in early 1984 brought an abrupt end to our Lexington years. Consequently, I made job hunting trips in March and May to New York, my wife Maria’s home town, and Washington. As it turned out, Washington seemed to hold the best chance for me to find work in the federal government as a historian. Maria, a seasoned administrator in museums and universities, was more immediately employable, so we opted to move to Washington and did so in August 1984.

My job search began in earnest in the fall. George, without being asked, had shifted gears from helping in the tenure fight to advising about work in Washington. In fact, he began to talk to friends and acquaintances about positions I might apply for in coming months. For example, at the 1984 SHAFR (Society for Historians of Foreign Relations) meeting, he talked with the Central Intelligence Agency’s chief historian about jobs there. The chief historian, George wrote, “seemed reasonably optimistic about some kind of job opening up, and seemed eager to talk to me about you. Perhaps something will come of it.”⁹ I did talk to the chief historian later and, though the CIA history shop was well run and thought of, the job wasn’t for me. At the time I had a contact at the US Army Center of Military History who had mentioned a possible history job opening in 1985. I told George about it and his response was the one I had come to expect. “Who is handling the SEA [Southeast Asia] position? Let me know and also let me know if you would like me to write a letter or make a phone call. I know a number of people in that branch and it might help a little bit.”¹⁰

As it turned out the history position didn’t open until autumn 1985. (I later learned that this was not the federal government hiring process moving slowly but rather the federal government hiring process moving at speed.) Throughout the year, while Maria and I took temp jobs to put food on the table for ourselves and our children, boys aged 9 and 12, I had informational interviews with folks in several official history shops and on occasion found jobs to which I could apply. On each occasion, George wrote a reference letter attesting to my ability as a historian. Finally, when the long awaited CMH history slot in the Southeast Asia (read Vietnam War) Branch came open in the fall, I applied and was interviewed in November. Then, shortly thereafter, in what I came to discover was typical federal procedure, I received a call from a CMH human resources person asking me this: if I were offered the position of writing historian, Southeast Asia Branch, would I accept it? I said yes and she told me that in a day or so a formal offer from the branch chief would come my way. And it did, and I accepted. My start date was 30 December 1985.

At this time, I wanted to give George what we would today call a “shout-out.” “Thank you,” I wrote a few weeks before the job began, “for your advice and assistance since April 1984 (yes, it was that long ago) when you said I could use your name in writing to the Center of Military History. I very much appreciate your going

⁷ The two were Jeremy Popkin, a distinguished historian of French and European history, and Nancy Dye, later president of Oberlin College, now deceased.

⁸ Herring, email to author, 23 October 2016.

⁹ Herring to author, 5 August 1984, Carland Papers.

¹⁰ Herring to Carland, 3 January 1985, Carland Papers. Herring dated the letter 3 January 1984 but the context and content clearly make it 1985.

out of your way to talk to people—at the CMH, at the Office of Air Force History, and at the CIA—about my talent and potential. It obviously helped. Indeed, you must take some credit for my being hired by the Southeast Asia Branch, CMH.”¹¹ I would only add here that having a friend like George in my corner not only helped me find work, it also helped me stay centered and focused at a difficult time.

Nourishing Our Friendship: In-person Get-togethers and Correspondence, 1986-2017

Beginning in mid-1986 and continuing until 2017, George and I regularly got together for lunch or dinner when he came to Washington for a conference, meeting, or to do research. On many of these occasions I would pick up George at National Airport, whisk him to his hotel, and then we would head out for drinks and dinner. At other times I or my wife and I would meet him in the District after he had attended to his business and take him to dinner. We did this one evening in late May 1986. George described the evening as “delightful” and added: “The dinner and ice cream on DuPont Circle were great....”¹²

In the early and mid-1990s, when George came to Washington several times a year for the State Department’s Historical Advisory Committee (HAC) meeting, we would arrange a post-meeting dinner. Since my wife worked at Georgetown University I, working then at CMH, would pick up George at the State Department and then meet Maria at a favorite Georgetown eatery. “You and I,” I reminisced later to George, “tended to start those evenings with Martinis at Aditi Indian Restaurant (now, alas, closed) and thus lubricated would become even more profound about that Southeast Asian War.”¹³ George’s response: “I also have such fond memories of our get togethers at Aditi’s with martinis, beer, good food and wonderful conversation among friends. This is truly one of the best things that life has to offer.”¹⁴ On these occasions George would regale us with tales of the HAC meetings and the Historian’s Office, which I would join in 2002.

And I remember another occasion, probably in the late 1990s, when George had given a talk at Georgetown University about, what else, the Vietnam War. After the talk we drove George to National Airport to catch a late flight to Lexington. During our drive, I later reminded George, “we had a great discussion on how the mindsets of Bundy, Rusk, and McNamara (WWII and Cold War) had predisposed them to take Johnson into the war.”¹⁵

In general, I could usually count on seeing George in Washington or northern Virginia once or twice a year. Occasionally, his wife, Dottie Leathers, also a good friend, would accompany him, and Maria and I and Dottie and George would get together and eat well, drink sufficiently, and laugh a lot. We did it for the last time, though we did not know that then, in June 2017, when George and Dottie came to northern Virginia for a SHAFR conference. When back in Lexington, George (an expert at saying the nicest things) wrote that: “It was so much fun to have dinner with you and Maria last week. Thanks for picking us up and taking us, and thanks especially for your good company. I always enjoy Guapo’s, and I love the fish tacos. But I must confess Dottie’s enchilada’s looked so good that next time I will try them.”¹⁶ In passing, I might add that I could never understand George’s affection for fish tacos.

Usually, however, in these get togethers George and I were on our own. We became especially fond of Mexican food and beer at the restaurant in northern Virginia just referenced. In late 2017 George committed to another trip to the District early in the new year to take part in a panel I had organized. Of course, we intended to have dinner afterward to get caught up. However, his wife’s illness made the trip impossible

¹¹ Carland to Herring, 13 December 1985, Carland Papers.

¹² Herring to Carland, 2 June 1986, Carland Papers.

¹³ Author, email to Herring, 7 October 2013.

¹⁴ Herring, email to author, 7 October 2013.

¹⁵ Author, email to Herring, 7 October 2013.

¹⁶ Herring, email to author, 27 June 2017.

(though a telephone hook-up enabled George to participate from Lexington). Although after this event we talked now and then about George alone or with Dottie coming to the Washington area, it didn't happen. I do believe that the June 2017 trip was George's last to the area.

Our email exchanges, however, continued to flow back and forth through the ether between Lexington and northern Virginia in substantial numbers as they had for years. Many subjects were on tap: family—especially the antics of grandchildren, whom George called “the little ones;” friends; health ailments—of which there were many afflicting each of us; aging—the good, bad, and ugly of it; TV to watch—especially British police procedurals such as *Shetland*, *Gently*, *Lewis*, *Morse*, *Vera*, and *New Tricks*, to name a few; architecture—we both liked modern and both on separate occasions visited Fallingwater and then discussed it over several email exchanges; recipes to try—we gave George a pork tenderloin recipe that he and Dottie enjoyed; books—novels by Wallace Stegner discussed, and George reading *True Grit* and *Crime and Punishment* and me, finally, reading *War and Peace*, and biographies—George reading one on Lord Palmerston, whom he greatly admired, and me one on Dashiell Hammett. Politics came up frequently, especially after the 2016 election, as did international affairs.

And of course, the Vietnam War, especially during revisions of *American's Longest War* and his *From Colony to Superpower*, frequently figured in our emails. Through a family friend of my wife's I was able to provide the photograph of Ho Chi Minh that adorns the 3rd, 5th, and 6th editions of *American's Longest War*. And at George's request I read draft chapters in the 5th and 6th editions. In 2013, George observed: “How crazy after all these years that we should be working in the same area. I have thoroughly enjoyed this new part of our longstanding friendship.”¹⁷

We almost always prefaced our emails with a brief mention of the weather: “brutally hot” in Lexington, “rain and wind” making life miserable in northern Virginia, “snow in DC” snarling traffic, and so on. This might be a tribute to the fact that we both grew up in the South where generations of mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, and even elderly cousins, told us to avoid talking about politics, race, and war, but to feel free to talk about the weather and food.

One more email topic. In mid-2016, George mentioned that he was running out of things to write about. I suggested he tell us how he became a historian. To encourage him, I sent an article by British historian A.J.P. Taylor on how he became a historian (“Accident Prone, or What Happened Next: An Historian's Credo”). But pressing work revising *American's Longest War* and *From Colony to Superpower* again took over George's life. In 2019, the problem of what to do plagued him again. He wrote on the 19th of June “I am in the odd position now of having nothing to do in terms of work for the first time since 1960. Can't decide whether I like it or not. Have several ideas about things to do, but some [of] them sound sufficiently difficult that I am reluctant to undertake them. And yet I can't imagine that I will enjoy doing nothing. We will see what happens.”¹⁸ Thus provided another opportunity to push him to write about becoming a historian, I took it. In response, George allowed that the project “is tempting if for no other reason than simply to think back, reminisce, and put one's life in some kind of perspective.”¹⁹ Once again, nothing came from my urgings. In March 2022 I returned to the charge and once more urged him to take on this task. Maybe there's something to the old maxim: “third time's the charm.” In any case, on this occasion it seemed to have some effect. George wrote the essay, a first-rate account titled “Becoming a Historian,” which was published in June 2022 on the H-Diplo site.²⁰ I believe this was George's last publication.

¹⁷ Herring, email to author, 7 October 2013.

¹⁸ Herring, email to author, 19 June 2019.

¹⁹ Herring, email to author, 22 June 2019.

²⁰ George C. Herring, “Becoming a Historian,” Learning the Scholar's Craft Series, H-Diplo, June 23, 2022 <https://hdiplo.org/to/E444>

The point of this section is that George and I nourished our friendship through many personal get-togethers in Washington, DC, and northern Virginia, and through frequent email exchanges on a variety of topics mutually interesting. In this way we beat back time and distance as enemies of friendship, and so our friendship continued strong and steady through the decades.

George as the Helpful Friend

To me, and I suspect to many others—be they his colleagues, other historians, graduate students, or Vietnam vets, George Herring was the always helpful friend. I've told above how he helped me during the tenure story and while I job-hunted. As might be expected, there were other occasions throughout the years. Let me mention a few.

In 1998 I had (finally) completed a draft of what was to become when published two years later, *Stemming the Tide*, the Army's official account of its entry into and first year in Vietnam War combat.²¹ Publishing in the federal official history world is a complex process. In the Army Center of Military History at the time, a manuscript might be revised more than once before being seen by outsiders. Once to that point, the Center would organize a panel to review the manuscript, the panel made up of Center historians, senior Army officers, usually generals who had participated in the story being told, and outside experts, generally academics or others who had published in the field. In short, a lot of folks, owned or thought they owned pieces of the pie, the manuscript. After the panel the Center's chief historian would summarize all comments in a directive to the historian to carry out the manuscript's revision. Before this process began, the author of the manuscript could recommend readers, and I recommended George. Through previous discussions George knew my manuscript and through his own publications could not have been better placed to review it. George turned in, as did others, a good deal of useful material and recommendations for the next revision. Ultimately, the recommendations, again from George and others, carried me through more revisions to the point that it was ready to go to the printers in the spring of 2000 and copies were available for distribution in June. To be sure, George was one of many examining the manuscript but I knew from him I would get positive recommendations to improve the manuscript, and I did.

In 2002, I moved to the Department of States' Office of the Historian, or OH. As previously noted, my assignment was to compile and edit two volumes to cover President Richard Nixon's policy in Vietnam from January 1972 to January 1973. These were the years, as I frequently told my OH colleagues, when something (the Easter Offensive and the Paris Peace Accords) actually happened. By the spring of 2009, I had completed my work and the two volumes were slowly making their way through declassification and thence to publication. The two remaining Nixon volumes—one covering the period July 1970 to January 1972, the other January 1973 to July 1975—were close to completion. However, their editors had left OH for other jobs. I took on the task of moving them along to completion and publication.

In the midst of doing these things I realized that the Historian's Office would soon complete in the FRUS series its longest coverage of a single event in a single area—conflict in Southeast Asia, 1946 to 1975. In those years the office had published the rough equivalent of 24-25 FRUS volumes containing about 24,000 pages of documents. To me, this provided the perfect opportunity to celebrate the achievement and to review the history of our policy. In June 2009, I proposed a two day conference to focus on these two goals. I was put in charge of the conference which took place on 29-30 September 2010. Though we put out a call for papers, I was in charge of the program and decided that selection of panelists for our Senior Scholars' Panel would stay in my hands. I could not see such a panel without George Herring.

So I asked George to consider being on this special panel, prepared to make all sorts of arguments as to why he should do it, including that the State Department would pay his way. His response was a quick "of course,

²¹ John M. Carland, *Stemming the Tide: May 1965-October 1966* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2000).

I'll do it. Glad to help.” To that panel I added David Elliott, Pomona College, and John Prados, National Security Archive, and persuaded Tom Schwartz, Vanderbilt University, to chair. Readers might recall that John and George died within a few days of one another.²² The panel was a great success. All panelists did a bang-up job. Those interested in the panelists’ presentations, and in what other conference presenters said, can see, hear, and read it all by going to the State Department website.²³

George’s talk was, as above, well done. One of his conclusions, though not exactly on point with this paper’s purpose, is still worth repeating. It’s about how foreign policy pooh-bahs employ history in their work. “Policymakers use history intuitively,” he said, “[and] select references that reinforce their predispositions or suit their purposes du jour. They might not even want to be bothered by history that emphasizes the nuances, the complexity, the ambiguity, the singularity of historical lessons, the perils of using such lessons in the first place.” Something to think about.

There’s a postscript to George’s coming to Washington, not one that reflects well on the State Department. Because he knew I was dealing with numerous concerns about running the conference, in particular to do with the program, he didn’t tell me about this until several months later. The State Department money people who were supposed to take care of George’s travel and hotel charges had not done it. In consequence, George came to Washington, to the conference, on his own dime. When I learned of this later I was embarrassed and apologetic but George just laughed it off and said he had had good time.

In 2011 I retired from State and became contractor at the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense. One of my first tasks was to organize a book-launch of the recently published volume of the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–1969*, by Edward J. Drea.²⁴ My concept was straightforward. I wanted a well-known academic historian to analyze/review Drea’s book, a senior official at Defense who had worked with Robert McNamara at DOD to speak to that experience, Dr. Drea to respond to the historian’s paper and whatever the official might say; and a senior official in the Historical Office to chair the session.

The above is essentially what happened. George seemed singularly fit for that academic historian role. As I told George about the upcoming event and considered how to ask him to be on the panel, he beat me to the punch. On 6 August 2011 he wrote: “If you need a participant for the McNamara/Clifford volume, I might be interested, provided it isn’t in February or March.”²⁵ Although initially scheduled for 25 January 2012, this slipped to 10 April. Thus, George was on board. The senior official I wanted was Harold Brown who had been Secretary of the Air Force under McNamara and later secretary of defense himself. When I got in touch with Brown he initially turned me down. When I asked him why, he said he didn’t want to write a paper. I immediately said you don’t have to, just tell us how it was to work with McNamara, tell us about your personal connection to him, throw a few anecdotes into the mix. He paused, and then said he would do it. Drea, as author was already committed since it was his book we were examining. The Historical Office’s Deputy Chief Historian, Jon Hoffman, would chair the panel.

The panel went well. George—the always helpful friend—did his usual superb job, placing Drea’s book into the forefront of official history Vietnam War publications, as well as in the larger bibliography of the war. The next day he wrote: “I immensely enjoyed my time in Washington.... I thought the program went very well, good turnout, good questions and discussion, and a very nice reception.”²⁶ In a way, Secretary Brown was the

²² See the 3 March 2023 H-Diplo tribute to John Prados, at <https://issforum.org/to/jf38>

²³ The transcript for George’s remarks as well as the entire conference can be accessed at <https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia>.

²⁴ Edward J. Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–1969* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011).

²⁵ Herring, email to author, 6 August 2011.

²⁶ Herring, email to author, 11 April 2012.

surprise star of the show. Known as a cold, intellectual with little small talk, he took my suggestions to heart, and presented a believable and all too human portrait of McNamara. For example, he told us that when McNamara in public had to defend a view that he disagreed with he would bend over and pull up his socks. We got a kick out of that. A few days later George told me that the expense voucher from Defense had arrived, allowing me to breathe a little easier. I remembered how State had in 2010 failed to provide promised expenses and didn't want that to happen again.²⁷

By 2015 I had, as a retiree-contractor, completed for the Historian's Office at State the previously mentioned documentary history of the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho negotiations. Initially, the head of the Historian's Office, Dr. Stephen Randolph (who retired at the end of 2017), and I expected the volume to be published as hard copy. Once it became clear that the transcripts plus my footnotes, many drafted as extensive mini-essays, added up to a little over 1,800 pages, hard copy was not an option. Printing even a small number of copies would severely threaten OH's budget. Our fallback position was to publish the volume as an e-book. This had its advantages, the two most important being that the volume would be available worldwide to anyone—officials, historians, and the public—who had computer access, and would be word searchable, a real boon to researchers. And that's how *Vietnam: The Kissinger-Le Duc Tho Negotiations, August 1969–December 1973* saw the light of day.

After considering other event venues, and after conferring with officials at the Wilson Center, we decided that the latter's Washington History Seminar would be a good venue and the launch was scheduled for 15 February 2018. It was left to me to organize the program. I had expected this and had already informally sounded out possible candidates for a panel to introduce the volume. That said, money was a problem. Neither OH nor the Washington History Seminar had money for speakers. This seemed to mean that speakers would have to come from the Washington area which limited possibilities.

I decided the best model was that of the Drea book launch of 2012. Steve Randolph would chair the panel. Winston Lord would be the policy participant and talk about working with Kissinger. I had met Ambassador Lord at a conference in 2016 and had since kept in touch. He was interested in the project and then became interested in being a participant. I told him frankly that he would have to fund his trip from New York City, where he lived, to the nation's capital for our event. He said yes to participation, and that he would fund his way. My candidate for historian was obviously George. Still, I was hesitant to ask him because of the money situation, especially after the trouble he had had with State Department financial arrangement in 2010. Instead, I first asked him for suggestions, noting that "the scholar speaker poses a problem for us. ... [W]e can't ask anyone to come to DC on their own dime—so I am looking around at local universities."²⁸ In his frequent role as the always-helpful-friend, George replied a week later. He did so along the lines I had hoped he would but didn't feel free to ask him to: "Let's say I will do the program in January [later re-scheduled for 15 February]. I like the idea of doing it for a friend without compensation and the program should be interesting, and it will be fun as always to see you all."²⁹ To help defray his expenses, we insisted George stay with us in Annandale. The third speaker, of course, would be me, the editor-compiler of the volume. I would offer the audience a practical guide to the volume.

As the launch date, 15 February, came in sight, we ran into a hitch. George's wife Dottie was ill, and George didn't feel he could leave Lexington then. We scrambled to arrange a speaker telephone hookup from Lexington to the Wilson Center. After that the program went on as planned; well attended, performed, and received. Steve placed the volume in the context of OH's work as producer of the volume, Lord did a superb job focusing on Kissinger and the negotiations, and George expertly established the larger policy context of the negotiations. My presentation provided, as I said in my talk, "a series of examples and suggestions of how

²⁷ Author, email to Herring, and Herring, email to Author, both 12 April 2012.

²⁸ Author, email to Herring, 18 August 2017.

²⁹ Herring, email to author, 26 August 2017.

historians, indeed anyone interested in this subject, can enter the book and engage productively with its material.” As it turned out, George, though he had committed to doing so, did not have to come to Washington on his own dime. But his enthusiastic willingness to jump into the breach to help a friend was typical.

One last example of that behavior. A little more than two years after the online publication of *Vietnam: The Kissinger-Le Duc Tho Negotiations, August 1969–December 1973*, few historians had availed themselves of the volume’s rich collection of documents. I was certain that the “rich collection” could be used, should be used, to great advantage in scholarship. And I had received from George in late May 2018 an unsolicited but appreciated endorsement confirming the volume’s value: “I have gone through enough of the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho material to have great admiration for what you accomplished. The introductory essays [the mini-essays as footnotes], if that’s what they are called, are excellent. Again, congrats on a huge accomplishment and for producing a document of immense value. can't think of anything quite like it on other negotiations.”³⁰

Given my concerns, George thought the volume would benefit from wider publicity. He recommended I contact a friend of his, Professor Andrew Johns of Brigham Young University. Johns was editor of *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review*, and George believed that he would listen sympathetically to a proposal to publicize the volume. I contacted Johns on 10 January 2020 and things then moved quickly. Johns read the paper I had delivered and decided *Passport* should publish it. He made a useful suggestion, too. I should ask the two historians that I knew had used documents from the volume in their writings, Robert Brigham of Vassar College and Thomas Schwartz of Vanderbilt University, to explain briefly what they had done. Both quickly agreed and soon sent their comments directly to Johns. Professor Johns pulled it all together in time to meet the newsletter’s 1 February deadline. My paper—“A Practical Guide to the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho Negotiations Volume,” and Brigham’s and Schwartz’s brief and positive comments as to its utility, appeared in the April 2020 issue.³¹ I’m not sure what effect, if any, my article had on moving scholars to use the volume but we had done what we could. I do know that the pandemic was at that time closing in on all of us and impeding all sorts of endeavors. That said, it was so typical of George to bring two friends of his together to accomplish a worthwhile purpose.

Last Words

This paper is not about George’s death but his life, about George as a friend, about friendship. Still, what brought about H-Diplo’s tribute is George’s death so something might be said about it. What started as a cough in early spring of 2021, supposedly brought on by allergies, and subsequently and briefly diagnosed as bronchitis and then pneumonia, became shortly thereafter, lung cancer.³² From then on as evidenced in his correspondence, tests, check-ups, and anti-cancer regimens became a big part of his life until his death in November 2022. But cancer didn’t define him. After his diagnosis, our correspondence continued pretty much as before; family, friends, history, politics, books, wine, beer, and other topics remained front and center. However, George now included frank discussions of his treatment and its results, negative and positive. Through it all, he remained the George I met in 1977—hopeful, honest, realistic, intelligent, helpful, considerate, engaging, and curious about life. His last email came in late September 2022.³³ Although he wrote that “I’m so tired much of the time” he also mentioned that he and Dottie, both devotees of mystery shows as am I, had found a new episode of “Shetland” to watch and were then viewing an Australian mystery, “Darby and Joan.” Happy days.

³⁰ Herring, email to author, 27 May 2018.

³¹ John M. Carland, Robert Brigham, and Thomas A. Schwartz, “A Practical Guide to the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho Negotiations Volume, *Passport: the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 51 (April 2020): 40-42.

³² Herring, email to author, 26 May 2022.

³³ Herring, email to author, 19 September 2022.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989 edition, defines a friend this way: “A person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy.” These words neatly capture the heart of what it was like to be a friend of George Herring, and certainly reflect the way I felt about him. As argued throughout this essay our friendship could have grown old and stale but we nourished it through our mutual interest in a variety of subjects (and people) and through an extensive correspondence and through frequent, as frequent as we could do it, in-person get-togethers.

But though the above is true, the simple fact is that George is gone. I and many other will miss this friend, and miss him for a long, long time.

Essay by Lloyd Gardner, Rutgers University, emeritus

“A Gentleman and a Scholar”

As I thought about what to write in this tribute my father’s voice came back to me. A very few times he spoke of someone as “a gentleman and a scholar.” George Herring was such a person. Over the years I knew him George never was anything less in either role. His fine scholarship from his early work through his undertaking a challenge to write a full account of the Vietnam War to his sweeping history of American foreign policy has long earned him the plaudits of fellow workers in the field.

What I want to write about is really very compact, but illustrative of other qualities. Years ago George introduced me at a luncheon with the sly comment about differences of interpretation that had arisen in the “schools” of Diplomatic History. George said to much laughter that my work had turned him into a “Flaming Moderate.”

My second comment is a private aside George made at our last person-to-person meeting in 2019 at Lubbock, Texas, where we were together on a panel about our experiences as early teachers of full courses on the Vietnam War. George leaned over to me and whispered that when he had asked Robert Divine, the editor of a famed series of books on American foreign policy if he could submit a manuscript on the Vietnam War, he had gotten a negative response. It took him several exchanges to convince Bob to consider his work. The result, of course, was *America’s Longest War*.¹

We miss him greatly. Good-bye George. We are all grateful you passed our way.

¹ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 1st Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

“My True Friend”

George Herring was a gentle, measured man, loyal to friends, committed to his wife, Dottie, and his children, and to his profession. Others found him “easy,” but a fire smoldered beneath his inimitable blue blazer and khakis. Many may have missed that fire, but two examples stand out. One was horses (in general, though one earned a personal denunciation—“sh*thead”); another was the Central Intelligence Agency, which also earned it.

Why do I start out with George the assertive? Because for me, that’s why I loved him. He was assertive about many things, but always (almost) in a gentle, positive way. You don’t turn out excellent graduate students without being demanding. You don’t write important history without having the fiery desire to understand better, and to pass on that understanding to others. He was a great listener, and I (and my wife, Sally) remember walking with him on a long trail outside Abington, Virginia, on a lovely early autumn day. We asked George a question about his family and life, and in that soft Tidewater twang he held the floor for over an hour—talking softly about himself, and what made him happy.

Early in our pre-career days, George and I were stumbling on the same winding path. “I have often reflected,” he wrote, “that through some stroke of good fortune I drifted rather aimlessly into a career that has been rewarding and immensely satisfying. As a student at Roanoke College, 1953-1957, I could have been a poster boy for the so-called Silent Generation: apolitical, devoid of ambition and sense of purpose, floating with an uncertain tide...In my defense, I knew I would go into the military after graduation and that gave me reason not to think too seriously about a career.”

Seeking to avoid life decisions, in summer 1958 we both ended up at the Navy’s officer training school, in Newport, Rhode Island, but never met since we were in different classes.

George described our first joint episode: “When I first arrived at the archives [in 1966], I encountered another young researcher, a graduate student at Georgetown University. Horror of horrors, I learned that he too was working on lend-lease. For a time, as he later described it, we “walked around stiff-legged like two dogs that hadn’t met.” As it turned out, we were working on two halves of the same walnut, lend-lease; he, the lend-lease story during the Second World War—me, the prelude. “That revelation marked the beginning of a very special friendship that endures to the present.”¹ How true.

George’s calm presence and wicked grin made his intensity all the more powerful. The CIA story comes from his service on the Agency’s “Historical Review Panel”; a curiously careful label that avoided any indication of oversight responsibilities. In the mid-1990s, faced with the CIA’s shaky relationship with truth and honesty, George was fed up. But he avoided a Tom Cruise-style “liar, liar, pants on fire” attack. Instead he noted that “the Agency had done such a brilliant public relations snow job” about “moving toward openness, that it created a carefully nurtured myth that was not at all easy for me to dispel”; grimly acknowledging that he “was being used to cover the agency’s ass while having no influence.” The CIA hunched down, took incoming fire from the news media, and suddenly realized that they needed term limits on their Historical Review Panel. They replaced George (and some others). His willingness to go loudly public, so unlike him, was a much

¹ George C. Herring, “Becoming a Historian,” Learning the Scholar’s Craft Series, H-Diplo, June 23, 2022; <https://hdiplo.org/to/E444>.

needed alarum that, twenty-some years after Vietnam and the Church Committee, government secrecy needed some sunshine.²

E-mails and historical society meetings had kept us in touch, with occasional visits during tough times. But as retirement got closer, and George finished his masterly study, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, [2008], we were together a good deal more.³

His sense of humor and ease with others, made travel with him a joy. For the decade before Covid, he and Dottie, JoAnn and Charles Alexander (a colleague at Ohio Univ.), and I and my wife, met annually for a long weekend at some country inn, just to swap stories. More ambitious travels to Provence and Capri only tightened the bonds.

When he was part of a group of historians getting together in Yalta to discuss the famous wartime conference there, the 26-hour train trip from Kiev to Yalta (Simferopol) gave him an inexhaustible storehouse of anecdotes; just two: when our taxi stalled coming from Kiev airport to our hotel, thanks to the weighty presence of one couple, all had to get out and push the coughing car up the hill. As for the train, we were unable to obtain private compartments for all the participants, and George drew the shortest straw since he traveled alone. His experiences sharing a compartment with the “odd couple,” two Russian smugglers who used train journeys to transport their goods, left us all in stitches. I should have taken notes, or pushed him to write it up.

It seems my journey through life has long been with George in quiet accompaniment. No wonder the memories are so personal and vivid. Somewhere along the line he arranged for me to become a genuine Kentucky Colonel. We laughed at that whenever we got together.

In what I’m sure was George’s final writing, he used his father’s diaries to tell the story of his Dad’s time in the trenches during The Great War. George wrote of his father that “He endured hardships that most cannot begin to imagine and witnessed unspeakable horrors with courage and stoicism. Much like Pvt. Charles Post of Spanish-American War fame, who quipped, “I...survived,” so too had George Herring, Sr. He had fought in the “War to End All Wars” and had survived.”⁴

George, Jr., did more than just survive in the demanding world of academe, he flourished, with penetrating humor, quiet intensity, and love for those close to him. But if I had asked him to sum up his professional life, he’d have grinned, then quipped, “I survived.”

I’d add—with style and grace.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/20/us/cia-s-openness-derided-as-a-snow-job.html>; <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1997/05/20/192406.html?pageNumber=16>; “My Years with the CIA,” presented at a January 1997 meeting of the American Historical Association and published in the May 1997 newsletter of the Organization of American Historians. <https://sgp.fas.org/eprint/herring.html>

³ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴ Herring, Jr., “Glad I was In It: An Iowa Doughboy in The Great War, 1918-1919” *Army History* (Spring 2017), pp. 7-23. http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/pdf/bio_g_herring.pdf

Essay by Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, Columbia University

“A Southern Gentleman Scholar and a Friend for Life”

I was in Vietnam when I learned of George Herring’s passing. Being in country allowed me some solace to process the death of a scholar who served as an inspiration, a mentor in the field, a partner-in-crime while I was in Lexington, Kentucky, and most importantly, a dear friend. As I walked past familiar sites of the war era, like the Caravelle Hotel and the Independence Palace, I thought of George and his legacy, and thanked him for educating me and generations of students of that war with his unparalleled study that founded a field, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*.¹

I first ‘met’ George through *America’s Longest War* as a junior in college in 1995. The class, which voted George’s book the best history of the war, was blown away that a scholar could write a history of the Vietnam War only four years after its conclusion that remained the definitive study of US decisionmaking two decades on. Now a half-century later, with an additional thousands of books on the Vietnam War, the prize still goes to George. He has, in turn, inspired so many of us to try to do the same from our scholarly perches. I tried to write “Vietnam’s longest war” with George’s path-breaking scholarship in mind.

Fast-forward to graduate school (though I was not yet finished with “Vietnam’s Longest War”) when I found myself compelled to go on the job market in 2005, the year that the University of Kentucky (UK) held a search for a US diplomatic historian. But this was no normal position. UK hoped to replace George, who had retired after decades of stellar service to the institution. As one of the finalists in that search, I was nervous not only because I wanted gainful employment at a prestigious research university for *the* position in my field, but also because I wondered if I would finally get to meet the George Herring on my campus visit. While I cannot remember how my job talk went, I do vividly remember George.

He was everything I had hoped he would be. Although he was the most accomplished Vietnam War historian and leading scholar in the field of US diplomatic history, he was one of the most down-to-earth, big-hearted, and gentle people—with a great sense of humor—I had met. I knew that if I were lucky enough to get the job, one of the biggest perks would be proximity to George. And that turned out to be the case: I had ten blissful years with George Herring. When I first arrived to Lexington, he was hard at work on *From Colony to Superpower* but always had the time to meet to discuss my own manuscript.² Beyond talking about our book projects, I would always go to him to learn best teaching practices, what recent studies to add on graduate students’ comprehensive exams, and how to balance research, teaching and service as an assistant professor at the university. When *From Colony to Superpower* came out to great fanfare and deserved accolades, George generously visited my classes, as I had assigned the masterpiece in the two-semester lecture course on US foreign policy history.

In short, I would not let George really retire, and I only had to make sure that Dottie—his better half—was ok with that! Fortunately, she was. At some point, George and I got it into our heads that we wanted to host the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in Lexington. We had so much fun checking out sites for the social event and of course, we settled on a bourbon distillery. Along with my partner, Paul Chamberlin, we four were the local organizing committee and we had a ball showing off our hometown to five hundred of our closest friends in the field.

Right before Paul and I departed Lexington, George had nominated us to become Kentucky Colonels and presented us with two framed certificates recognizing our service to the commonwealth. He said that we were

¹ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 3rd edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2019), 1995.

² Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

always going to be a part of the community and that we will always have our ole Kentucky home. In many ways, George was that intellectual home and I will miss his warmth, his spirit, and his friendship. But every time I sip on bourbon (Woodford Reserve, his favorite, taken neat with a splash of water), I will remember George.

Essay by Kyle Longley, Chapman University

“The Best of the Best”

On 30 November 30 2022, the fields of US foreign relations and military history lost a giant when George Herring passed away after a battle with cancer. I learned almost immediately and a great sadness enveloped me. We knew he had been struggling in the end, but it was still a shock. That day, I lost a bedrock in my life for more than thirty years since I met him for the first time in the Spring 1989 when I visited Lexington to explore graduate schools.

From the start over a lunch at Billy’s BBQ, I immediately connected with George (or “the Chief” as most of us called him due to him serving many years as department chair at the University of Kentucky). While a major scholar in the field of US foreign relations, he was down-to-earth and genuinely interested in me and my interests. This was exactly what my thesis mentor at Texas Tech had told me; he had been a younger graduate student at the University of Virginia when George finished there. I immediately returned home and made plans to attend the University of Kentucky (UK), much to the great chagrin of my parents, who wanted me to attend a major university in my home state of Texas (my other choice). It proved to be the right choice on so many levels.

I flourished in my four years in Lexington, largely because of George and good friends, especially Bob Brigham and Dottie Leathers, who headed the department support staff for nearly four decades and later married George. From the beginning, George was the consummate role model, humble and accommodating yet tough when needed. I later learned more about the roots of this in his own experiences. He admitted to being a “poster boy” for the “Silent Generation” while an undergraduate at Roanoke College, 1953-1957, “apolitical, devoid of ambition and sense of purpose, floating with an uncertain tide.” While pondering possible careers in law and journalism (he noted that “the hours worked by newspaper people did not especially appeal to me”) he found his way toward a profession in history after a stint in the U.S. Navy, graduating from the University of Virginia with a focus on Edward Stettinius and foreign relations, despite no one of the staff having trained in the field.⁵⁵

Few matched his intellectual abilities over the years after his graduation from UVA and a short stint teaching at Ohio University. As colleagues in this roundtable undoubtedly note, his early work on the origins of the Cold War in *Aid to Russia, 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War* (1972) was part of a post-revisionist school with other fine scholars of the time including John Gaddis and Warren Kimball. It firmly established his credentials as a serious intellectual and leader among a young generation of outstanding scholars.⁵⁶

Most important, almost everyone by the late 1980s when I entered graduate school knew about the importance of his *America’s Longest War* (I believe it was in its second edition at the time) that he first published in the late 1970s.⁵⁷ It was a seminal work that shaped many of my fellow graduate students as well as our predecessors including Carol Reardon, Mitch Hall, and Clarence Wyatt. Beyond UK, George joined others including Marilyn Young, Lloyd Gardner, and Larry Berman in influencing a whole generation of scholars such as Kathryn Statler, Lein-Hang Nguyen, and Frederik Logevall. The latter noted the book “gave

⁵⁵ George C. Herring, “Becoming a Historian,” Learning the Scholar’s Craft Series, H-Diplo, June 23, 2022 <https://hdiplo.org/to/E444>.

⁵⁶ Herring, *Aid to Russia, 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

⁵⁷ George Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975* 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

generations of college students...their introduction to the war” and “it’s a fair guess that it has taught more Americans about the war than any other book.”⁵⁸

I saw this up close and personal when George and I traveled to a conference at UC-Santa Barbara after I started teaching at Arizona State University. The young front desk person (Fred’s undergraduate student at the time) gushed when he checked in. She stumbled with the words praising the book, clearly a fan (and I had been the same way the first time I met Walter LaFeber). I felt like I was with a rock star, at least by historians’ levels.

Others reinforced the idea of the book’s influence. One of my own students, now an AP High School teacher, noted at the time of his death: “I am so thankful to have been introduced to Dr. Herring in your classes [*America’s Longest War*]. You shared his research and expertise with us in such a way that he was always more than the author of the book we were assigned. We came to know him through your teachings.”⁵⁹ I know she continues to use that knowledge in her classroom, touching many over the years and showing the full extent of George’s influence and reach.

However, whenever I arrived at UK in 1989, I had chosen a different route and concentrated on Central America, which in the 1980s was very much in the news. Like all good advisors in the field, George had subject dexterity. He had written a great essay on El Salvador and Vietnam in his co-edited work, *The Central American Crisis: Sources of Conflict and the Failure of U.S. Policy* with his colleague in political science at UK, Kenneth Coleman.⁶⁰ While most everyone focused on Vietnam, George pushed me to think deeply about the crisis in the region and its origins, letting me build off my MA thesis and work on the US response to an early Cold War crisis. George was a firm believer in pointing you in the right direction and then letting you go with guidance when needed. I think it was a great form of mentorship, one that encouraged you to think on your own, but always have a person to bounce the ideas off and secure assistance when necessary.

A lot of the skill development in graduate school from George came in the classroom through lectures and well-designed seminars. During my doctoral studies, George shaped me in many ways as an intellectual. I took four classes with him, two undergraduate level US foreign relations surveys as graduate classes and two graduate seminars on the same topic. As everyone who knows him can attest, George was an introspective and careful thinker. He pushed us that way, rarely rewarding the student who shot from the hip and recognizing positively those who came to class prepared and thought before they answered. I remember being in a terrific writing seminar with him on US foreign relations with a wonderful group of students including Bob Brigham and Nick Sarantakes. We learned a great deal, and I became a better researcher and writer. What I remember most, however, is that at first he awarded me an A+ on my final paper and then scratched out the plus as he could not allow me to get to comfortable (he refused to admit it at the time, but a Cheshire-cat-like grin enveloped him when we discussed it years later).

In addition, George was a skilled and patient editor who taught me a lot about the process of writing history with my dissertation. He always demonstrated a humility and wisdom that impressed me as I progressed. One of my best recollections of him involves the time between when I finished my comprehensive exams and started my dissertation. One day, I sat working on the computer when I suddenly saw out of the corner of my eye George standing in the hallway. Recognizing that I was tense, he walked into the office, stood behind me, put his hands on my shoulders, and gave me some great advice. “Just remember that I have been doing this for thirty years more than you.” He walked out without saying anything else, but that moment remains

⁵⁸ Quoted in Emily Langer, “George Herring, Scholar of US diplomacy and Vietnam War, Dies at 86,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2022/12/06/george-herring-vietnam-war-historian-dead/>.

⁵⁹ Memory on Facebook shared by Ali Rund, 2 December 2022.

⁶⁰ Kenneth M. Coleman and George C. Herring, eds., *The Central American Crisis: Sources of Conflict and the Failure of U.S. Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1985).

indelibly burned into my memory (and I often tell the story to my students to reinforce what time and practice can do for you).⁶¹

In addition to my intellectual development, George molded me in other areas, including how to balance life and career. During my four years at UK, I always remember George being busy managing the department as chair and directing more than twenty graduate students, all clamoring for his time. He provided a model for dealing with such challenges. One idiosyncrasy stood out. The old joke was that you always knew when he had time for you. If you entered his office, and he came from behind the desk and sat beside you, you knew you had as much time as needed. If he sat behind his desk, you knew you had better make your point and move on. Nevertheless, I marveled at how he managed a department, continued to write, and had a life beyond the university that included spending a lot of time with his kids.

He also proved a good and accessible mentor away from the department in the many dinners and parties he hosted for his students and colleagues, often in tandem with Dottie. We also interacted in other arenas including the softball field. A particular incident stands out. One Saturday, a group of graduate students and professors decided to practice for the upcoming intramural season. As we gathered, a group of locals decided to challenge us to a game. They obviously had been playing together for years as they marched forward in common uniforms complete with loaded ice chests of food and alcoholic drinks, mainly the latter. They thought they would give the eggheads a good thrashing.

In reality, we had some good athletes in the department including our older, yet athletic first baseman, George (he played tennis well into his 80s). The highlight of the day occurred when a very large guy stepped up to the plate. A left-handed batter, he looked ready to tear the cover off the ball. I remember sending a high-arching ball toward him that he promptly ripped down the first base line. George effortlessly lifted his glove and snagged it. Then, he just jogged (well, really strutted) off the field, leaving the batter wondering how this wiry man had just robbed him of a hit. We went on to crush the opponents, a point enjoyed by all, including George, who argued that his catch had proved the turning point.

My four years at UK were truly memorable ones. Yet, George's mentoring and friendship never stopped once I left UK. I stayed remarkably close to him and Dottie, talking to them about once a month over nearly thirty years, sometimes more. He read most of my nine books in advance, often remaining the best editor with his insights and commentary. These included my book, *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam*, which I dedicated to him and Dottie who helped all of us in innumerable ways.⁶² I am sure he never signed on to continue to work with me, but I was always so deeply grateful for all the hours of continuing mentorship and development.

Sometimes, I returned the favor which made me feel very good. After I graduated, we often talked about his research on his last major work, the magisterial *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*.⁶³ He worked on it religiously for many years, and in a thousand pages, he challenged many preconceptions of the long durée of American foreign policy including the ideas of the significance of isolationism, showing U.S. global engagement since the revolution. He also emphasized that Americans needed to "cast away centuries-old notions of themselves as God's chosen people" and understand how "such pretensions cannot fail to alienate others."

⁶¹ I shared a number of these memories in a piece I did a decade ago. Kyle Longley, "Tribute to George Herring," *Diplomatic History* 33:5 (November 2009): 971-72.

⁶² Kyle Longley, *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

⁶³ George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The book was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and received very strong reviews (and he even got cranky when he did not win and had a few choice words for the judges because deep down he was very competitive). The reviewer for the *New York Times* noted George's "Herculean power of synthesis" and wrote that the book "recaptures a quarter-millennium of American foreign policy with fluidity and felicity" and is a "steal" for the price.⁶⁴ It eclipsed standards such as Thomas Bailey's *A Diplomatic History of the American People* and will unlikely be unsurpassed by any other such synthesis for many years, educating scholars and the general public about the role of America and the world since the country's founding.⁶⁵ But for me, the greatest thing remained the fact that he told me multiple times that if he had any question on Latin America, he would pull my book, *In the Eagle's Shadow: The United States and Latin America*, to answer them. It made me so proud.⁶⁶

In the professional realm, I often liked to ask George if he planned to attend conferences in the latter part of his life. I emphasized how people would love to see and talk with him. He would always tell me that no one really cared that much about the Vietnam War and certainly not about what he had to say when compared the younger generation of scholars. I argued much to the contrary, but I am not sure I swayed him that much.

But there were times he relented. In 2012, he flew to San Diego to the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association. I had the great pleasure to be giving the presidential address on issues of the memory of the Vietnam War relating to my *Morenci Marines* book.⁶⁷ He and Dottie provided support as he even took the time to introduce me with an eloquent toast. I remember vividly that he said I reminded him of Theodore Roosevelt as a "steam engine in trousers" but that I was a "jet engine in gym shorts." I think I was prouder of his introduction than giving my address. I look back and realize how important his affirmation was to me as a scholar and person. It pushed me to excel and make him pleased, even though I know he never really cared that much. But to me, I reflected him and wanted to succeed to sustain that perception.

I also remember that when he did attend conferences, he showed all of us the way to practice being a senior member of the field. We have had some great ones in foreign relations led by George, but we have had many others including Walt, Lloyd Gardner, Richard Immerman, and Marilyn Young, to mention but a few. He would enter the room and students gravitated toward him (many had reached out in advance via email that he always responded to). He was patient and kind with each, listening to them and often offering advice of materials and many cases to read parts of their works with feedback provided.

Many have noted his kindness, including colleagues in the field. One prominent one noted: "Watching him working with students at conferences was such a pleasure."⁶⁸ The students have added their own memories. One remembered: "George was the first book I read on Vietnam. I met him at a planning meeting . . . where I tripped over myself talking to him. He was so incredibly kind, interest, and generous."⁶⁹ Another added: "Professor Herring was always so kindhearted and supportive and incredibly generous in sharing his time and knowledge."⁷⁰ Many have similar stories about George who shaped a couple of generations of scholars and whose influence will not diminish, even in death.

⁶⁴ Josef Joffe, "Entangling Alliances," *New York Times*, October 31, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/books/review/Joffe-t.html>.

⁶⁵ Thomas Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* 10th edition (New York: Pearson College Division, 1980).

⁶⁶ Kyle Longley, *In the Eagle's Shadow: The United States and Latin America* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2002).

⁶⁷ Kyle Longley, *The Morenci Marines: A Tale of Small Town America and the Vietnam War* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2013).

⁶⁸ Memory on Facebook by Ron Milam, 30 November 2022.

⁶⁹ Memory on Facebook by Amber Batura, 30 November 2022.

⁷⁰ Memory on Facebook by Nguyen Hong Uyen, 30 November 2022.

Such interactions over the year have provided me so many lessons, many listed here, but not all. It also created expectations of how to honor George by remembering all that he has done for me and so many others. One friend observed: “The loss is hard, but you honor them by stepping into their shoes. Model them to future generations.”⁷¹ I know I will try and hopefully even if only on a smaller level I will carry his legacy forward just like so many others. As another noted: “The field has lost a giant.”⁷² He is correct, and while gone in body, he will remain with us in spirit and our actions.

⁷¹ Memory on Facebook by Gregory Urwin, 2 December 2022.

⁷² Memory on Facebook by Larry Berman, 30 November 2022.

Essay by Kathryn Statler, University of San Diego

As a terrified third year graduate student about to present at her first SHAFR conference, I thought the moment could not get any worse. Then, my fellow presenter, Andy Johns, leaned over and said, “look, George Herring just walked in.” That was it. I could feel my already racing heart accelerate into overdrive. I was about to present in front of the dean of Vietnam War studies. I had read *America’s Longest War* multiple times of course. I knew what a giant in the field he was. But that wasn’t the problem. What was I presenting on? Vietnam. And not just any aspect of Vietnam but the prickly Franco-American relationship in the period leading up to the 1954 Geneva Conference, one of George’s many areas of expertise. I somehow managed to get through my presentation without passing out, and George had some very positive comments for me at the end of it. And from that moment on I realized George Herring was not just a giant in his field but one of the kindest souls I had ever encountered. Rather than resting on his laurels, he was eager to hear what a new generation of scholars were working on. After all, the panel he had just attended consisted of two unknown graduate students and an assistant professor. But that was George, always, always supporting emerging scholars in the field.

I next met George in person at the 1999 Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association conference. As I sat, terrified once again to be presenting in front of many Vietnam experts, I figured there was not a chance George would show up. We were in Maui after all. But no, a few minutes before the panel started George strolled in, sporting a Hawaiian shirt, shorts, sandals, and a smile. After the panel, we chatted once again, and George had nothing but words of encouragement as I was nearing the end of my dissertation. Those two formative experiences with George led to over two decades of professional engagement and friendship that I will always treasure. George and I continued to exchange ideas and questions at conferences and via email, but our closest collaboration began in 2012 when then director of the University Press of Kentucky Steve Wrinn proposed a series, “Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace” with George, Andy Johns, and myself as series editors.

How did I get so lucky? The chance to work with George was one of the highlights of my academic career. And it was a seamless collaboration. Looking back, our conversations were effortless. George’s sincere desire to make sure we were all in agreement and to encourage his junior colleagues to take the lead on decision-making made the whole process a delight. We would meet at a SHAFR conference, confer about ongoing projects, discuss our efforts to bring new authors on board, and then magically another book or two would be in the works. That George was a magnet for authors, we left unsaid. We did not need to.

So in considering another aspect of George's legacy, I think it well worth listing the titles of the books that he helped bring to fruition over the past decade, all thirty-eight of them.⁷³ There are many on conflict and diplomacy of course; we had to work for the "peace" part. You will notice books on the Vietnam War feature prominently, but so do studies of President Ronald Reagan, the connection between domestic and foreign policy, presidential studies, bilateral relationships, the larger Cold War, decolonization, sports diplomacy, and biography. Of particular note is the geographic breadth and depth we achieved. I have assigned all or part of every book on this list in my classes and am inordinately proud to be associated with this part of George's legacy. I know he was proud of what we achieved, too.

Another vivid memory and part of George's legacy was seeing him in his own environs when SHAFR came to the University of Kentucky in 2014. What an amazing conference, and what a delight to sit with George after the SHAFR social outing (bourbon tasting and dinner) at the Buffalo Trace Distillery, soaking up the atmosphere, watching fireflies, and chatting about panels, recent books and articles, and the world. It felt like time actually paused in that moment as we all paid homage to the man who had inspired so many of us. Really, we could have simply called it the 2014 George Herring SHAFR conference.

And speaking of books and articles, what a record. For my own research and writing, I relied heavily on George's many articles about Franco-American relations in Indochina, beginning with his early article "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," on how the United States

⁷³ The books are all, of course published by the University Press of Kentucky. Michael F. Cairo, *The Gulf: The Bush Presidencies and the Middle East* (2012); William J. Rust, *So Much to Lose: John F. Kennedy and American Policy in Laos* (2014); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Currents of War: From Isolation to International Engagement* (2014); Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (2014); Ryan C. Hendrickson, *Obama at War: Congress and the Imperial Presidency* (2015); Joseph A. Fry, *The American South and the Vietnam War: Belligerence, Protest, and Agony in Dixie* (2015); Robert M. Farley, *Grounded: The Case for Abolishing the United States Air Force* (2015); Bruce L.R. Smith, *Lincoln Gordon: Architect of Cold War Foreign Policy* (2015); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Conversion of Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg: From Isolation to International Engagement* (2015); Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (2016); William J. Rust, *Eisenhower and Cambodia: Diplomacy, Covert Action, and the Origins of the Second Indochina War* (2016); Jessica Elkind, *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (2016); Stephen G. Craft, *American Justice in Taiwan: The 1957 Riots and Cold War Foreign Policy* (2016); Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War* (2016); Richard A. Moss, *Nixon's Back Channel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente* (2017); Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest, eds., *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (2017); Bevan Sewell and Maria Ryan, eds., *Foreign Policy at the Periphery: The Shifting Margins of US International Relations since World War II* (2017); Andrew L. Johns and Mitchell B. Lerner, eds., *The Cold War at Home and Abroad: Domestic Politics and US Foreign Policy since 1945* (2018); , James W. Pardew, *Peacemakers: American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans* (2018); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Harold Stassen: Eisenhower, the Cold War, and the Pursuit of Nuclear Disarmament* (2018); Bradley Lynn Coleman and Kyle Longley, eds., *Reagan and the World: Leadership and National Security, 1981–1989* (2018); Thomas Tunstall Allcock, *Thomas C. Mann: President Johnson, the Cold War, and the Restructuring of Latin American Foreign Policy* (2018); Laurence R. Jurdem, *Paving the Way for Reagan: The Influence of Conservative Media on US Foreign Policy* (2018); Beth A. Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan's Cold War Legacy* (2019); Alessandro Brogi, Giles Scott-Smith and David J. Snyder, eds., *The Legacy of J. William Fulbright: Policy, Power, and Ideology* (2019); Sean J. McLaughlin, *JFK and De Gaulle: How America and France Failed in Vietnam, 1961-1963* (2019); Joseph A. Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era* (2019); David P. Fields, *Foreign Friends: Syngman Rhee, American Exceptionalism, and the Division of Korea* (2019); Heather L. Dichter, ed., *Soccer Diplomacy: International Relations and Football since 1914* (2020); Richard H. Immerman and Jeffrey A. Engel, eds., *Fourteen Points for the Twenty-First Century: A Renewed Appeal for Cooperative Internationalism* (2020); Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. Johns, eds., *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations since 1945* (2020); Philip Nash, *Breaking Protocol: America's First Female Ambassadors, 1933-1964* (2020); David F. Schmitz, *The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy* (2021); James Cooper, *A Diplomatic Meeting: Reagan, Thatcher, and the Art of Summitry* (2022); Kenneth Kolander, *America's Israel: The US Congress and American-Israeli Relations, 1967–1975* (2022); James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics* (2022); Jessica M. Chapman, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* (2023); and David L. Prentice, *Unwilling to Quit: The Long Unwinding of American Involvement in Vietnam* (2023).

increasingly supported France in the First Franco-Vietminh War. Instrumental to the initial framing of my work was his overview of the Franco-American relationship “Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950-1954” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American relations*, Eds. Kaplan, Artaud, Rubin (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1990), 29-48.⁷⁴ Another article in that volume, written with Gary Hess and Richard Immerman, “Passage of Empire: The United States, France, and South Vietnam, 1954-1955,” helped me formulate my own questions on how and why the United States was able to replace France in South Vietnam as the dominant western power so quickly.⁷⁵ Earlier George had co-authored with Immerman the article on Dienbienphu, reprinted in that volume, that was seminal to my thinking about the formative years of America’s odyssey in Vietnam by identifying the risky nature of the Eisenhower administration’s machinations to bring about United Action, a US plan for multilateral military intervention in Indochina: “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dien Bien Phu: The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited.”⁷⁶ And finally his impartial analysis of John Foster Dulles’s role in increasing US involvement in Vietnam “‘A Good Stout Effort’: John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955,” had a positive influence in moderating (at least in part) my inclination to cast Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as an unnuanced villain.⁷⁷

Some of George’s later work turned to legacies of the Vietnam War. For example, last spring semester for my Armed Conflict and American Society class, I assigned George’s article, “Preparing Not to Refight the Last War: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the U.S. Military,”⁷⁸ The class discussion on it was lively, with many students debating George’s point that while the war revolutionized organization, recruitment, and training, it did not have much impact on doctrine; instead, as George pointed out, the military services said they would simply never fight another war like Vietnam. Students also debated his point that the armed forces remained ill-equipped for low intensity conflict at the end of the twentieth century and that the United States had engaged in a dangerous reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum, with military objectives or desires determining politics.⁷⁹ Even though the article was over twenty years old, the class concluded that it was just as vital reading in 2022 as in 2000.

Then there is *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. Cited repeatedly in this forum’s essays, it does not need any introduction.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, for the record, it is hands down the best classroom text on the war that exists. I assign it every fall semester when I teach my Vietnam Wars course, and students praise it for its accessibility, impartiality, and illuminating analysis of each facet of the Vietnam War. As I was rereading the 6th edition (I think I have every edition), I was struck once again by both George’s wisdom and his ongoing engagement with new scholarship, new experiences, and new voices in the field. The very last section of the book “The War That Never Goes Away” is an absolute masterpiece of analysis (and synthesis) of every critical point we should be considering about what the Vietnam War means to Americans and to US foreign policy today. In closing, he writes, “The task the United States took upon itself in Vietnam ultimately proved beyond its ability to achieve, a concept difficult for Americans to grasp. Such interventions will

⁷⁴ George C. Herring, “The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina,” *Diplomatic History* 1 (Spring 1977): 97-117; and Herring “Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950-1954” in Larry S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark R. Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1990), 29-48.

⁷⁵ Herring, Gary Hess, and Richard Immerman, “Passage of Empire: The United States, France, and South Vietnam, 1954-1955,” in Kaplan, Artaud, and, Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu*, 171-95

⁷⁶ Herring and Immerman, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited,” in Kaplan, Artaud, and, Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu*, 81-103.

⁷⁷ Herring, “‘A Good Stout Effort’: John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955,” in Richard Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 213-43.

⁷⁸ Herring, “Preparing Not to Refight the Last War: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the U.S. Military,” in Charles Neu, *After Vietnam, Legacies of a Lost War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000): 56-84.

⁷⁹ Herring, “Preparing Not to Refight the Last War.”

⁸⁰ Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 6th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2019).

inevitably ensnare us in complex and often bewildering tangle of local cultures and politics. They do not lend themselves to the quick fixes we prefer. Vietnam offers no easy lessons.”⁸¹ Indeed.

The first day of this semester I started my 20th Century US Foreign Relations class by announcing to my students that George had passed away. Many of them had taken my Vietnam Wars class in the fall and were thus familiar with *America’s Longest War*. They commented on how much they had appreciated his nuanced views of the Vietnam War, and I took to heart that his legacy will endure in successive generations. After all, what book had I assigned as the class textbook for the current semester? George’s *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, part of the Oxford History of the United States and conveniently available as a stand-alone second volume titled *The American Century and Beyond, U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893-2015*.⁸² I take great comfort that my students and I continue to read George’s words this semester.

In closing, I raise my glass of Kentucky bourbon to you George—your scholarship, your professionalism, and your kindness will stand the test of time. Thank you.

⁸¹ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 373.

⁸² George C. Herring, *The American Century and Beyond, U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893-2015*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).