



Beating Plowshares into Swords: An Alternate History of the Vietnam War

F.C. Schaefer

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It is January of 1965 and without warning the North Vietnamese launch their Tet Offensive against the South, routing the American supported army and rolling over territory without a fight. In a matter of days it appears as if the Communists are about to score their biggest victory in the Cold War since Stalin's armies rolled over Eastern Europe at the end of World War II, while the West is on the verge of an unprecedented defeat. In Washington, President Lyndon B. Johnson cleans house at the Pentagon and reaches across the political divide to a man who has built a career out of being tough on the Reds: former Vice President M. Richard Nixon, a man in the wilderness of politics after a career ending defeat. With Nixon as Secretary of Defense, the United States sends more than a million men to South Vietnam and proceeds to bomb the North back to the Stone Age, but it is not enough, as the North Vietnamese refuse to give up and beg for terms of peace. Is it time to think about the unthinkable? Told in the form of an oral history by the men and women who fought, protested and profited from the Vietnam War, Beating Plowshares into Swords is a look at the history that never was, but might have been, and a very different 1960's than the one we remember.

For years I've heard historians and armchair warriors claim that America fought the war in Vietnam with our hands tied behind our backs; that we really could have won if only North Vietnam had been bombed into to a waste land; if only the Ho Chi Minh Trail had been cut; if only a million more men had been sent in country; if only we had wanted to win. In this short novel, I attempt to construct a scenario where the United States military put the hammer down on the North Vietnamese and what the consequences of such a policy would have been for America, Indochina and the wider world. At the same time I constructed different fates for such historical personages as LBJ and Nixon, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, as seen thought the eyes of fictional characters: a young man fighting in the jungles of Southeast Asia, a General working in the halls of the Pentagon and the Oval Office, and an idealistic school teacher marching in the streets of America's cities. History is a great Leviathan, driven by ego and ambition, fear and avarice, ignorance and insight, brute instinct and sheer brilliance, and most of all by forces far beyond the control of any one person no matter how much power they possess. It is full of fascinating What Ifs and Beating Plowshares into Swords is but one of them.



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