of friendship’. Host Bob Hope, a supporter of the war, was seen scribbling a note, read out by Frank Sinatra: ‘We are not responsible for any political references made on the programme and we are sorry they had to take place this evening.’ Within a few weeks, the last Americans had fled Saigon.

Anthony Hayward
Journalist and author
We must be ready to fight in Vietnam, but the ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and the minds of the people who actually live out there,' said President Lyndon Johnson in 1965. From this, director Peter Davis took the title of his landmark documentary 
Hearts and Minds.

Released in 1974, a year before the end of the Vietnam War, 
Hearts and Minds was the first mainstream American theatrical film to question the US invasion of Indo-China. It was backed by a major American studio, Columbia Pictures, and marked a shift in popular attitudes and the influence of the anti-war movement.

Producer Bert Schneider had shown his anti-establishment credentials with films such as Easy Rider (1969), starring Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper as non-conformist motorcyclists looking for ‘freedom’ on a road trip across the United States, and Five Easy Pieces (1970), with Jack Nicholson playing a rebellious outcast.

Schneider had been impressed by The Selling of the Pentagon, a 1971 CBS television documentary about the Pentagon's pro-war propaganda, produced and directed by Davis. Schneider hired him to make Hearts and Minds.

Davis uses juxtaposition to powerful effect. Former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford's description of how the United States emerged from the Second World War as a major economic, military and industrial power bent on controlling the future of humanity is followed by a rousing scene from the super-patriotic 1943 film musical This is the Army, with armed, marching soldiers declaring in song, 'We're dressed up to win, we're dressed up to win, dressed up for victory.'

Much of the juxtaposition is ironic and tragic. Newsreel footage shows ‘American help' for the French who are fighting ‘roving communist bands' in their colony and are eventually driven out by the resistance, opening the way for the United States. American veterans describe the ‘thrill' and ‘excitement' of a war that left more than three million dead and a bountiful land devastated.

We thought of ourselves as trying to defeat communism... it was the underpinning of an imperial policy,' says Daniel Ellsberg, a Pentagon analyst who turned against the war and leaked the secret 'Pentagon Papers' that revealed a strategy of rapacious aggression and duplicity. In South Vietnam, the United States's 'ally', Mui Duc Giang is filmed making coffins in Saigon – up to 900 a week. He says many are for children.

Barton Osborn, a former CIA army intelligence officer, describes the torture meted out to captured resistance fighters. Their eyes were gouged out and they were thrown from helicopters. Edward Sowders, an army deserter, tells a Congressional hearing that the Vietnamese were regarded as less than human. 'We called them gooks,' he says.

A former South Vietnam government minister, Nguyen Ngoc Linh, a war profiteer who imports Ford cars, is juxtaposed with American veterans with prosthetic limbs. One of them is Bobby Muller, an eloquent advocate who founded Vietnam Veterans of America.

General William Westmoreland, who commanded US forces in Vietnam in the 1960s, observes, 'The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does the Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient.' An infamous image follows – that of nine-year-old Kim Phúc running naked from a napalm attack.

When Hearts and Minds won the Best Documentary Feature Oscar in 1975, Schneider’s acceptance speech included a quote from Dinh Ba Thi, ambassador of the Provisional Revolutionary Government delegation to the Paris peace talks, thanking the anti-war movement and expressing ‘greetings