

Paradoxes of the joyous season

by Larry Eckholt
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Toy guns and Christmas, G.I. Joe and peace. Violence and children. Do these words mean conflict; are they interrelated? It depends . . .

Following the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy this year, an indignant section of the American population demanded an end to the violence which permeated the country.

STRICTER GUN control was demanded; some was legislated. Violence on television and in the movies was blamed for attitudes which seemed to glorify killing. Some producers promised to get rid of portions of this violence.

Then there were children's toys.

Toys like G.I. Joe, the Barbie doll of the military set, Joe comes in many selves. He is a marine or a navy man, even as astronaut. Joe has a complete line of military hardware — rifles, hand grenades, bayonets.

Toys like the arsenal of guns found in most toy departments during the Christmas season. Lone Ranger holster sets; rifles and shot guns; secret ray guns for outer space travel.

A **NEW TOY** on the market this year is a "riot control police car," which, according to advertising, "clears out rioters in a zig-zag fashion and has a sound like machine gunning." Toy rioters are not furnished.

There are others. Miniature factories that make plastic monsters; games like "Commando" and "Hit the Beach" which are similar to war games.

During the summer, Sears, Roebuck and Co., announced that it would no longer sell children's toy guns or toys which were connected with violence. The Sears Christmas catalog contained no toy guns. G.I. Joe is represented only in his skin-diving or space-exploring forms.

The Sears store in Lincoln has a small selection of toy guns, left-overs from last year's stock, according to Paul Aberle, manager of the toy department.

"We did not reorder any toy guns and we don't intend to," Aberle said.

Gold's toy department, managed by Doris Crewson, has a large assortment of guns, war games, and monster factories but does not have the riot control police car.

(A check of all toy departments in Lincoln's major department stores revealed that the riot car is apparently not available in Lincoln.)

"I **HAVEN'T** noticed a significant decline in sales of toy guns," she said, adding that there "hasn't been any greater demand either."

Spokesmen for other toy departments in the city substantiate that statement, the popularity of toy guns and military-orientated toys has not suffered greatly from the summer's demand for their extinction.

As in the control of real guns, there has been a public debate concerning the effectiveness of the regulation of a child's entertainment, including toy guns.

One question which nearly always is raised concerns the actual effect of violence, real or imagined, on the impressionable child.

"**MUCH VIOLENCE** is impulsive," wrote Leonard Berkowitz in the September issue of Psychology Today. He is chairman of the psychology department at the University of Wisconsin.

"It (violence) is not primarily a planned purposeful activity; neither is it the 'inevitable' result of internal drives or maladjustments."

Berkowitz believes that "things set the stage"

for violent action "and help carry the action forward." He continued that "it is important that there be a stimulus or immediate cue to trigger aggression."

In a study conducted at the University of Indiana it was found that toy guns "did more than lower the child's restraints against aggression; they seemed to pull out aggressive reactions that would not otherwise have occurred."

But such results are inconclusive, other persons say.

"It's hard to say who is right," said Dr. Ann Duke, a child Psychologist at the University. "Evidence points in both directions. Toy guns often do stimulate violent action; to some, they have little effect."

Parental denial of playing with toy guns may have adverse effects, too, Miss Duke said.

"**THERE ARE** problems in denying toy guns," she said. "Some children then think it's a big thing to run into a toy store and start playing with the guns. Denial of aggressive toys is not always the right answer."

Instead of putting blame entirely on aggressive toys or violent programs, Miss Duke believes that parents encourage their children to be aggressive.

"They tell their kids to hit back if they are hit, they praise war and the armed soldier. It's only natural that children would want aggressive toys to be aggressive in play," she said.

MISS DUKE believes that "toys reflect adult society."

"The majority of parents respect and admire the way the police handle riots," she explained. "So it would follow that a toy would reflect that attitude."

What can be done, then, since clear cause-and-

effect relationships can not be determined concerning violence and children's toys?

If a child is taught to respect a gun through the use of toys, some good may evolve, Miss Duke said.

"We should teach a child how to properly handle a gun, not pretend he's killing off the neighborhood kids," she stated.

The pre-school child can be taught much, but when he is exposed to other children he is faced with a crisis: other children don't act as he does. This problem has not been solved either, Miss Duke added.

There are other ways to approach the effects of violence on a child. Some studies show a high correlation between the amount of physical punishment used by a parent when disciplining and the amount of aggression in a child. The mass media has "an even greater effect," Miss Duke said.

Creative toys, designed to stimulate the child into "doing his own thing" are growing in popularity but their consequences are "a matter of opinion."

"**I LIKE** them the best," Miss Duke said. "But no one knows for sure what will be their end result."

Some persons think that toys of today lack imagination on the child's part. They say that the "specialty doll" which talks, walks, crawls, wets, etc., has taken the fun out of play.

Others believe there are too many toys period. But at Christmas time, a child's fancy often turns into reality. The toys which he wants are often given to him.

THE TOYS may not last until next Christmas but their effects may be with him for a lifetime.



And now the talking GI Joe doll.

And further more . . .

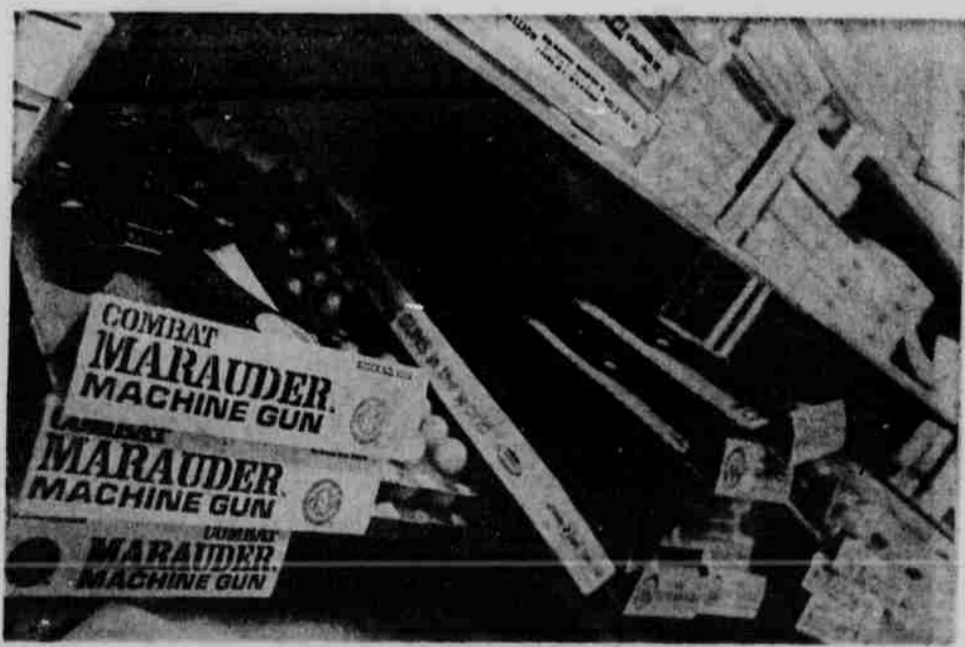
Cops out with the megaphones.
Telling people 'Stay inside your homes.'
Man, can't they see the world's on fire?
—Mamas and Papas.

Take your place on the Great Mandella.
As it moves through your brief moment of time.
Win or lose now, you must choose now
And if you lose you're only losing your life.
—Peter, Paul and Mary

I hate war.
—Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Childhood heroes: the fast-drawing gunslingers. Wild Bill Hickok . . . the Lone Ranger . . . the Cisco Kid . . . Billy the Kid . . . Matt Dillon . . . Paladin . . . Wyatt Earp . . . Bat Masterson.



Marauder — One who invades for the sake of booty; who ravages; plunders. One who roves about plundering or robbing. One who pillages. (Funk and Wagnalls' New Practical Standard Dictionary.)

The Soul's Desert

They are warming up the old horrors; and all that they say is echoes of echoes.
Beware of taking sides; only watch.
These are not criminals, nor hucksters and little journalists, but the governments
Of the great nations; men favorably
Representative of massed humanity. Observe them.
Wrath and laughter
Are quite irrelevant. Clearly it is time
To become disillusioned, each person to enter his
own soul's desert
And look for Gods— having seen man.

Robinson Jeffers



R. COBB