

America's delusions

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by DENNIS SNYDER

The Indochina war has been studied, analyzed, and reported from many angles but someone has yet to give the soldier's view of his role in the war.

Despite all the controversy most Americans still see little injustice in asking their sons to bear arms against the North Vietnamese in the name of national defense.

This is not unusual when you consider the fact that many of today's parents are veterans of World War II and Korea. It's quite natural for them to associate Indochina with past wars, because they have nothing else to compare it with.

So it's no small wonder that most parents accept the drafting of their sons, hoping it will benefit the country and in some small way straighten them out.

The sad part is that draftees cease to be individuals and become part of a large group en masse, the Army. But most Americans don't realize this because the passage of time has clouded memories and few veterans remember the hassles and degradations they were forced to endure before being allowed the honor of defending freedom.

In 1968, Richard Nixon promised the American people an honorable end to the Indochina war and was elected to the Presidency. Following the election, Mr. Nixon said American forces would be withdrawn, but a Vietnamization program was necessary to protect remaining Americans.

Until recently the President could voice his concern for the plight of American soldiers and expect sympathy. But the invasion of Laos and Mr. Nixon's authorization to reopen several fire support bases in the northern area of South Vietnam clearly demonstrate that American soldiers lack a friend in the White House.

The bases being reopened are all within a few miles of the demilitarized zone and subject to enemy artillery barrages from Laos and North Vietnam.

Most of these bases sound familiar—Khe Sanh, Con Thien, Rockpile; and they all evoke memories of past battles.

Located just 15 miles below the DMZ, Khe Sanh has experienced some of the bitterest fighting during the war. In 1968, 6,000 Marines withstood a 77-day artillery siege at Khe Sanh and claimed victory. Few remember the 204 dead and 1,622 wounded.

Now, there are 9,000 Americans at these bases according to Gerald Warren, Deputy Press Secretary to President Nixon.

This figure leaves the question: how can so few men safely hold this area?

Warren said the troops are relatively safe because the Communists are no longer able to pose a threat. But the results of the Laos invasion seem to challenge the credibility of this opinion.

So we must assume that U.S. forces in the northern highlands are in an extremely precarious position and subject to possible annihilation by the North Vietnamese Army.

Here is a perfect example of American and Vietnamese lives being risked needlessly without a word of protest from anyone.

Since 1965 America has used television to observe its army attempting to win the war. This callousness has left the rest of the world wondering how Americans could sit back and watch their sons die in living color.

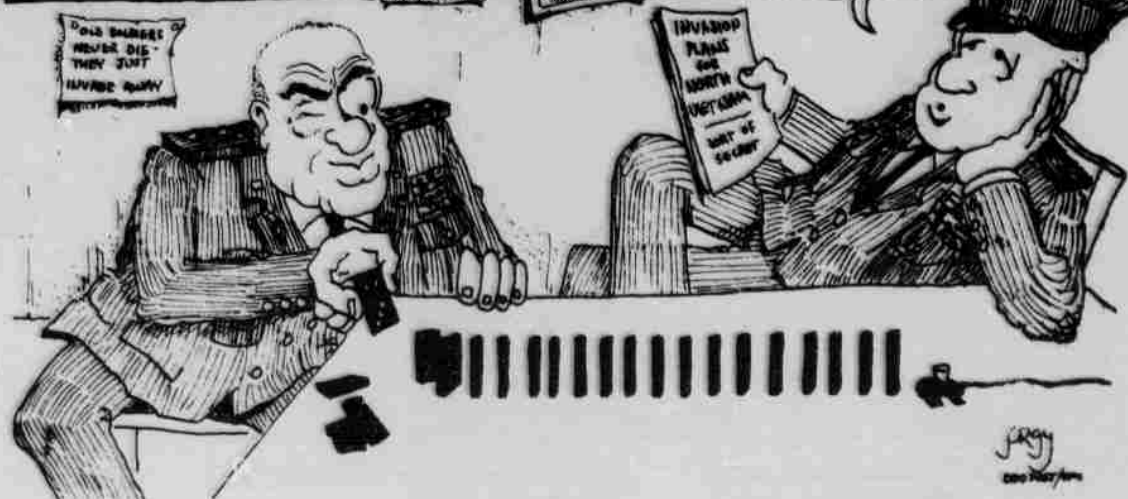
The answer is that most Americans find it easier to consider casualties as impersonal parts of a military machine rather than dead and wounded men. Hoping to ease its conscience, American society has dehumanized its army only to find that the process doesn't work. Why? Where are the Veterans Organizations? concerned parents? the President? If the American public is so proud of its young men why doesn't someone support them?

The answer to all these questions is the simple fact that the American public can't distinguish between an individual soldier's life and the monolithic monster called the military presence in Southeast Asia.

Soldiers in the Indochina war generally lose a lot more than the public back home. They have few rights, but are human enough to realize that wars are fought by men, not machines.

editorial
COMMENT

MILITARY ND-SAIGON



William F. Buckley, Jr.

Modern conservatism

Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, who is a great tease, has gleefully sent me the remarks of Mr. Herbert Stein, a member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, as delivered recently before the Annual Financial Outlook Conference in New York. Mr. Galbraith's covering note says: "Here is a thoughtful restatement of the fiscal principles of modern conservatism. I feel that similar repetition would be valuable for your own neo-Keynesian readers and should be recommended strongly to the Voice of America when next you gather to advise it."

The first sentence of Mr. Stein's speech was: "The Federal Government had a deficit in fiscal year 1970; it will have a large deficit in fiscal year 1971, the current year; it will have another deficit in fiscal 1972."

The second sentence was: a repetition of the first.

The third sentence was: still another repetition of the first.

And then Mr. Stein explained, "I am trying to demonstrate that the Administration is not ashamed of the fact that we had, have, and will have deficits and is not trying to conceal the fact. We do not talk about the full employment budget in order to deny the existence of deficits. We do not project a Gross National Product of \$1065 billion for 1971 in order to reduce the prospective deficit."

"If we can suspend these natural but superficial and erroneous political and journalistic suspicions we can begin to discuss seriously what the Government is doing in fiscal policy . . . Probably the most convenient way to get into this subject is to recognize that for at least the last 40 years we have had deficits when the economy was declining below full employment. The last serious attempt to bring the budget into balance in such conditions was Herbert Hoover's in 1932, although Franklin Roosevelt made a brief and half hearted move in that direction in 1937. The Hoover experience did not

invite imitation." And so on.

Now Professor Galbraith is very well entitled to remind Mr. Nixon and his conservative backers of the rhetoric we have directed over the years at unbalanced budgets. But the learned professor is flirting with a most dangerous species of epistemology. Can he be saying that because Mr. Nixon and his conservative economists have adopted the deficit-budget, now finally we know that it is correct policy?

The traditional opposition to deficit spending, as enunciated by classical economists, has hardly been discredited by the American experience. One argument, for instance Lord Keynes', in favor of deficit spending is that it will make unemployment go away. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's colossal failure to end unemployment is excused on the grounds that his deficit spending was insufficient. Let it go. General Eisenhower, in the course of eight years as president, overspent by 27 billion dollars (the figures are approximate). When he came into office, there were two million unemployed. When he left, there were almost four million unemployed.

John Kennedy sustained a deficit in each one of his three years, and Lyndon Johnson, as we all know, ran deficits totalling 50 billion dollars. The unemployment figures were

high in the early years of Mr. Kennedy, and were headed towards the present highs when Lyndon Johnson left office.

What Mr. Nixon and his Administration really mean to say when the plot a budget deficit is that a democracy will not support such measures as are necessary to test the theses of the classicists. Consider. It was Keynes who spoke about the advisability of budget surpluses during good years, which would be drawn upon during bad years. Now who is a Keynesian in that sense? When last did Professor Galbraith suggest that the time was right for the government to spend less, tucking some of it away for a rainy day? Not Galbraith, not Lyndon Johnson — and not Richard Nixon. Mr. Nixon was not elected in order to alter human nature. Because a member of his Council of Economic Advisers repeats three times that there will be a deficit, it does not follow from the incantation either that a deficit is economically wise, or that it is soundly virtuous. Mr. Galbraith is much more cautious in his own asseverations. When a few days after the big Tet offensive he predicted that the Thieu government would be overthrown within a matter of weeks, he did not make the statement three times. Should we have believed him if he had?

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