

BOOKS

Halberstam reports took place on another occasion in General Westmoreland's office:

One of the top intelligence officers did a study on the number of men that Hanoi could send down the trails into South Vietnam without damaging its defenses. When he showed the results of the study to a general in the office, the general responded, "Jesus, if we tell this to the people in Washington, we will be out of the war tomorrow. We will have to revise it downward." So, the figure was duly scaled down considerably.

As the war went on the President himself became deeply troubled by the reports he had been receiving. The reports emanating from Ambassador Lodge, who was then our emissary in Saigon, were generally rather pessimistic. On the other hand, the reports from the chief of our military Mission, reporting through the Department of Defense, were quite optimistic. In late 1963, the President sensed a serious rift developing in Washington between State and Defense. In order to get at the facts, the President asked Hilsman of State to draft a cable to Saigon reflecting con-

siderable doubt about the progress of the war. When the answer came in, Ambassador Lodge's report was entirely pessimistic, while Harkins' report was markedly upbeat. It was puzzling until one of the White House aides found a reference in the Harkins cable to an outgoing cable of Taylor's. As Halberstam reports it, "They checked out the number of the Taylor cable but could find no record of it in the White House. Sensing that something was wrong, one of the White House aides called over to the Pentagon for a copy of the Taylor cable." It was "a remarkably revealing cable from Taylor to Harkins explaining just how divided the bureaucracy was, what the struggle was about"—in effect, how to answer the White House cable.

Averell Harriman suspected something unusual at once and Kennedy was to remark later, "Harriman is really a shrewd old S.O.B." At the conclusion of the meeting at which this information was disclosed, Kennedy took Taylor into his office. There is no record of the conversation that took place. In the meantime, Secretary McNamara was trying to make the best of a very difficult and rapidly deteriorating situation.