

3/19-There are enormous values, including the negatives, in the self-justification attempts of those who hide guilty knowledge & pretend after knowing better that their to-them principled errors of the past are in retrospect as contemporaneously the correct approach. This seems likely to be an operational counterpart to Lyman Kilpatrick's "The Real CIA". Please return, no rush. H

Cold war condottiere

In the Midst of Wars

An American's Mission to Southeast Asia.

By Edward Geary Lansdale.

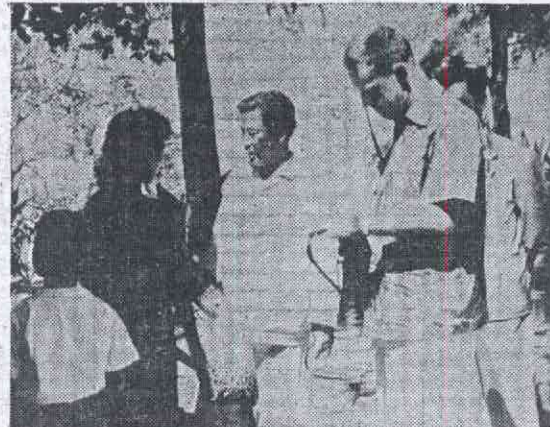
Harper & Row. Illustrated. 386 pp. \$12.50

Reviewed by SHERWOOD DICKERMAN

To Graham Greene's jaundiced British eye, he was a model for Pyle, the naively dangerous "Quiet American." Burdick and Lederer took an approving, American view of him as Colonel Hillendale of *The Ugly American*. In Jean Lartéguy's *Yellow Fever*, he was Colonel Teryman, astute, somewhat sinister and, of course, anti-French.

Now Major General Edward Geary Lansdale has finally written his own book about himself. *In the Midst of Wars* covers the six years from 1950 through 1956 when Lansdale, in the Philippines first and then in South Vietnam, was Washington's leading agitprop agent for American-style democracy and against communism. An Air Force intelligence officer well connected with the Central Intelligence Agency, Lansdale was a cold war condottiere

Sherwood Dickerman spent five years in Southeast Asia as a foreign correspondent.



Madame Nhu, Diem, Lansdale, 1956

who became possibly the most influential single American in Southeast Asia and certainly the most controversial. As the close friend and adviser of Ramon Magsaysay, Lansdale helped to defeat the Communist Hukbalahap rebellion in the Philippines and to get the idealistic Magsaysay elected president despite the opposition of the corrupt Filipino political establishment. In South Vietnam, he did his best to perform the same role in a more difficult situation with Ngo Dinh Diem.

Throughout, Lansdale promoted his belief that democracy on the American model was exportable, desirable, and an effective method of countering Communist "people's wars." In his view, the theories of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln were both morally and tactically superior to those of Lenin and Mao Tse-tung, and his evangelism was unabashed:

In sharing our ideology while making others strong

enough to embrace and hold it for their own, the American people strive toward a millennium when the world will be free and wars will be past.

The Washington officials to whom Lansdale addressed this message were, he notes, "not too happy" over it. In the sadder and wiser America of the 1970s, perhaps most Americans would not be happy with Lansdale's sense of global commitment to democratic panaceas. (Yet the Lansdale spirit is not so dated as it may sound; it survives, perhaps in more sophisticated forms, among able and intelligent men at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, and elsewhere.)

In trying to realize his ideal, Lansdale was ingenious and ruthless. He was an early student of Maoist military theory and psychological warfare. "Dirty tricks beget dirty tricks," he writes, and the premise is that the other side played dirty first. Thus he writes approvingly of a Filipino psywar squad that drained the blood of an ambushed Huk through punctures in his neck to terrify the man's comrades of a vampire. Lansdale also recalls his success in causing a mass work stoppage in Hanoi at the time of the Communist takeover there through distribution of phony leaflets proclaiming a one-week victory holiday.

He does not tell all, however, which is probably one reason why the book by Lansdale reads less melodramatically than the ones about him. Through the Pentagon Papers, it is known that Lansdale's American agents in Hanoi also sabotaged the city's bus fleet at that time to embarrass the Vietminh and that American-trained Vietnamese guerrillas, the "Hao" and "Binh" teams, were infiltrated into Haiphong under his direction for anti-Communist underground activity. It may not be surprising for a retired career officer to omit such secret and sensitive material, but in Lansdale's case there are grounds for suspecting that he may have omitted more than he put in. His protests about exaggerated news. *(Continued on page 15)*

Cold war condottiere

(Continued from page 4) reports of his activity in Vietnam sometimes have a hollow tone.

Certainly Lansdale's 386-page book is no comprehensive record of the U.S. involvement in either the Philippines or Vietnam during this period. Neither are there any major historical revelations. What does emerge strongly is the personal philosophy and style of America's best-known "nation-builder" in Southeast Asia at a time when the nation-building concept was generally accepted and applauded. Anecdotes alternate with moralizations. Out of these, Lansdale appears as idealistic and courageous (he notes offhandedly that he was marked for assassination in both Manila and Saigon), a warmly sentimental man toward Asian friends, and a quick-study improviser and promoter. There is abundant evidence of his powers of persuasion. For instance, he remembers Secretary of State Dulles having told him that it was a message from Lansdale to Dulles that led to the U.S. decision in April, 1955, to support the fledgling regime of Ngo Dinh Diem against the armies of the Vietnamese sects. For the U.S., this commitment was one of the first critical ones. Lansdale, of course, was with Diem "as a friend" earlier in the day when Diem made his decision not to resign under pressure.

Less significant but more illustrative is the picture of Lansdale inviting himself into the bedroom of a newly arrived U.S. ambassador, General J. Lawton Collins, to outline the Lansdale policy for Vietnam during the reluctant Collins's siesta break. Or Lansdale deciding that Diem needed a restful weekend and bundling the Vietnamese president, who preferred the mountain resort at Dalat, off to the seashore. Lansdale had brought along swimming trunks for Diem, but Diem balkily plunged into the sea wearing his long underwear. In politics, too, Diem sometimes disappointed his American mentor.

A curious aspect of the book is that, though Lansdale completed it only last year, there is almost no reference to events after 1956. Lansdale returned to Saigon with ministerial rank in 1965 and stayed there till 1968. Yet he does not deal with this period, which must have been a disappointing one for him, and there are only hints that the author has been touched by the sobering perspective of the 1970s, with the doubts and recriminations that have been raised. As a result, the book sometimes reads like an adventure of Frank Merriwell in Asia, a daring lark for a good cause with no regard for consequences that are now dismally apparent. The national mood nowadays calls for either repentance or justification from Hillandale-Pyle-Teryman, but the archetype provides neither. Unfortunately, he does not even reflect on what has happened since. What results is a period piece of the cold war, a nostalgic memoir of the days when our overseas nation-builders were younger and, in their way, perhaps more innocent. □