

McNamara's Enemies

By Joseph Kraft

Vested Interests Display Hand

UNDER COVER of the Vietnamese war there is being waged a dirty political fight against Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.

The attackers are the same old professional military men who have at all times challenged McNamara's rational approach to defense management. They are allied with the same old vested interests in the defense industries. And they speak through the same old military tribunes of the Congress.

Only now they are using the confusion and emotion of the war to reopen arguments lost long ago on the merits. A broad sampling of this ugly technique comes newly to hand with the publication of the Senate and House Armed Services Committee hearing on the supplemental defense appropriation bill for this fiscal year.

FOR A STARTER, consider that old chestnut, the role of the heavy bomber. Secretary McNamara and his civilian aides found, and convincingly demonstrated, that in a nuclear war, missiles would be immeasurably superior to manned bombers. They also found

that in nonnuclear war, medium bombers were the most useful. Accordingly, they have been phasing out production of the heavy bombers.

But Air Force bomber pilots die hard. And they are now having their spokesman intimate that if only heavy bombing in North Vietnam were permitted, the other side would be on its knees. Here, for example, is Sen. Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, a former Secretary of the Air Force.

"They have taken the Air Force, put it in the ring, said make a good fight, then criticized it. You turn loose the Naval air and Air Force air of this country against North Vietnamese military targets and you are going to have a changing situation in South Vietnam."

Another outworn issue centers on the famous TFX or F-111, a combined fighter-bomber which Secretary McNamara had designed for combined use by both the Navy and Air Force. Inevitably, the common design compromised out certain special features that the Navy wanted, and others desired by the Air Force. Still the plane has proved very effective.

BUT HERE is a sweet question on the matter put to two Navy officials by Chairman L. Mendel Rivers, the Democratic Representative from Charleston, S.C., with its big naval base: "When you get by yourself at home at night . . . do you wish you had some other plane rather than working on the 111, to work aboard the carriers? If you had your way, wouldn't you rather have something else?"

And here is Rep. William H. Bates, a Republican of Massachusetts and former naval officer, on the same subject:

"We have to remember that these planes here might fight the latest that somebody else might have, and we cannot fight a com-



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promise airplane against a noncompromised airplane. If the situation should change overnight in Vietnam, so that we would have other planes against us, this is what we have to be ready for. . ."

Another issue long since settled considers the Navy attack plane. Instead of the heavy and expensive A-6 Secretary McNamara had designed a lighter and cheaper attack aircraft, the A-7. A part of the savings in money and weight came in radar equipment, and as a result, the A-7 is less able to fly in bad weather than the A-6. Still, there has been no important letup of naval air attacks because of weather in Vietnam.

But the A-6 was built by the Grumman Aircraft Com-

pany of Long Island, while the new A-7 contract went to another company. And here is a typical question from Rep. Otis Pike, from a Long Island district with not a few constituents who work for Grumman:

"Does it make any sense to you to continue to buy aircraft in large numbers which are incapable of performing their mission at night, or in bad weather?"

ON THE SURFACE, to be sure, these look like reasonable questions and comments. But the real purpose is to put into question the whole system of analysis and choice that has for the first time made it possible for the civilian leadership to get a grip on the defense program. And if anyone has any doubts on that matter, here is a revealing assertion by Rep. Bates:

"The question that bothers me in all of these hearings is the kind of planning."

In the face of these attacks, it is easy to see why Secretary McNamara sometimes seems high-handed with the congressional committees. The fact is that the only way he could have amicable relations with the committees would be to let them and their allies in the defense industries and the military services run the defense program. To me anyhow, it is a supreme source of satisfaction that he continues to meet his responsibilities.