

McNamara Admits A Few Mistakes

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara acknowledges that some concepts and methods forged by him and his experts have failed to meet the test of the Viet Nam war.

This is a rare admission by the Pentagon chief who normally wears an air of total self assurance.

"We have to develop new methods to meet problems for which we had old answers," McNamara told a news conference Wednesday. "Old answers were not applying.

"These new methods do require changes in procedures, changes in policies, changes in habits and thought."

The defense secretary did not specify what problem areas he was dealing with.

However, some of his associates said that the concept of using Reservists in crises had undergone a drastic change.

It was apparent that the current intention to deal with the rising manpower demands of the Viet Nam war without calling up Reservists stemmed from a desire to avoid creating turbulence in U.S. civilian life and the economy, as well as from the growth of the regular forces available and planned.

McNamara's news conference was called to put to rest any idea that the United States has overextended itself in Southeast Asia and has left itself vulnerable in other areas of the world.

McNamara showed unusual irritation in a couple of instances.

He tangled with reporter Clark Mollenhoff when Mollenhoff persisted in quizzing him about the critical views of Sen. John C. Stennis, D-Miss.

In a bitter exchange, Mollenhoff accused McNamara of dodging and the defense secretary snapped "I unfortunately haven't been able to dodge all the rocks you have thrown at me for five years."

Mollenhoff, of the Cowles Publications, has written articles questioning, among other things, McNamara's actions in the matter of the TFX fighter plane contract.

Mollenhoff wasn't the only reporter to draw McNamara's irritation.

A German newsman triggered a sharp response from the defense secretary when he suggested that "the best - trained, best-equipped and most-mobile American units have been absorbed by the Viet Nam crisis."

Detecting an accent, McNamara demanded to know "Where are you from?"

When the reporter replied "from Germany," the defense secretary said

"It is absolutely not true and you are the first that ought to know it. I am sick and tired of having implications made that we have drawn down the forces in Western Europe when we haven't."

McNamara said flatly that the U.S. 7th Army deployed in Germany for the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance will not be weakened as the result of the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia.

"The first people that ought to know that are the Germans," McNamara said.

One Pentagon source said the defense secretary had been under pressure from the Germans, apparently seeking assurances that NATO defenses will not be weakened in the light of the heavy and growing U.S. commitment in the Viet Nam war.

The reason for McNamara's news conference in itself was unusual. Just last week he had made a 220-page presentation to congressional committees spelling out in great detail what has been done to maintain U.S. armed strength as second to none.

However, he was stung by a number of newspaper articles, some appearing before his formal presentation to Congress, suggesting that U.S. armed power was being spread thin and that dangerous shortages of supplies and equipment had developed.