

State Department Primer On the War Discontinued

By LINDA CHARLTON

NYT-7/24/71

Once upon a time, there was a curious child who wrote a letter to a city called Washington, where the President lives, asking if someone would tell him, please, about this thing called Vietnam that the grownups were talking about all the time.

Several hundred other little girls and boys did the same thing. So it was decided in a place called the State Department, where all the letters went, that a story should be written to answer all their questions, and the story was called: "An Explanation of the War in Vietnam for Primary School Children."

But a lot of grownups read the story, too, and some of them, including Senator George McGovern and a number of editorial writers, didn't like it. The "explanation," they felt, was so oversimplified as to be misleading. So the State Department has decided to stop sending it to the children.

The discontinued primer, which opens with "Vietnam is a very old country in Asia, about 8,000 miles away from the United States," started out as a form letter reply to the "childish scrawls" of inquiry that reached the department's Bureau of Public Affairs.

Printed in Large Type

But then, according to Louis J. Link, chief of the Public Inquiries Division of the bureau, "the mail got so heavy from young children that we had to put it into printed form." He added that the four-page pamphlet was printed in large, easy-to-read type.

During the last two years, he estimated, about 6,000 letters from children all over the country have been answered with the little homily. Sometimes, he said, the letters were prompted by parents and sometimes they were school assignments.

The story is chronological, starting with the Vietnamh "about 17 years ago" fighting the French, explaining that some of them were Communists and "especially dangerous because they believe in the use of armed force and terror," and moving on through the Geneva

ers knew the elections "would not be fair" and refused to participate. This determined the Northern leaders "to take over South Vietnam by force."

After a description of "guerrillas" digging up hidden guns and killing people in the South so they would be "afraid to fight against the Communists," the United States role is defined: "During this time we were send-

Continued on Page 51, Column 3

conference where it was "agreed to make peace and to divide Vietnam into two parts."

Then "a few years went by," and the North Vietnamese planned to take over the South "by elections because there were more Northerners to vote than Southerners and because the Communists would make sure, by force if necessary, that more people would vote for the North."

But South Vietnam's lead-

Continued From Page 27

ing guns and supplies to the South Vietnamese so they could fight back. We also sent some soldiers to advise them how to fight."

But, as the story continues, things did not go well in the South, "so they asked us to help them fight the North Vietnamese." And we agreed because "we hoped to keep the war from becoming a big war."

The final edition—it was continually updated, Mr. Link said—also offered brief explanations of the Cambodian and Laotian undertaking.

'Stop the Communists'

As for American aims, "all we want to do is to stop the Communists from taking South Vietnam." And at those talks "in the city of Paris in France," "we are telling them that if they will take all of their soldiers out of South Vietnam, we will, too.

But if we take all of our soldiers out of South Vietnam before peace is made or before we are sure that the South Vietnamese can help themselves, we would be

breaking our promise to them. Other countries would then believe that our word is no good. And President Nixon is very concerned about the men held prisoner by the enemy."

The story ends with the hope, at least, that everyone will live happily ever after: "We are sorry the North Vietnamese are not ready to pull back their soldiers, but we think they will come to see that peace is better than to go on killing. President Nixon and all of us believe that a good and just peace is possible."

But it reminds the children that "until the North Vietnamese agree, we must have lots of patience and grit."

"While this paper was necessarily, in view of its purpose, a highly simplified statement, we agreed with its critics that it contained statements which were oversimplified to the point of factual distortion," according to Mr. Link.

Critical editorials to this effect appeared in at least two newspapers, The Washington Post and The Chicago Sun-Times.