

"We have stopped losing the war", Secretary of Defense Robert Strange? McNamara proclaimed at the end of a 30-hour-long whirlwind tour of inspection of South Vietnam, a territory whose extent greatly exceeds that from Portsmouth, Maine to Newport News, Va. McNamara's announcement was greeted by the papers with prominent typographic displays, editorials of commendation, and signed articles of opinion in which the pundits reveled in the good news. It was trumpeted by radio and television like a second coming and the entire country bathed in the euphoria that ensued. Few if any stopped to ask any questions, and those few were largely unheard. Not since Jehovah addressed Moses on the mountain had a word of such unquestionable authoritativeness been bestowed upon mortal man.

Prudently, McNamara had suppressed a predilection for prediction, the accuracy of which varied in inverse proportion to the length of time he remained in the blighted land from which many wiser heads deduced that in 30 hours he had observed fewer non-existent realities than on his two previous tours extending as they had for a week or more. On his return from South Vietnam in 1963, McNamara announced all the Americans would be out of that country and restored to their homes by

Christmas. The following year, much of which the Secretary of Defense spent as tho he were running for office, he promised that the war would be over by the end of 196⁵/~~4~~. But by the end of 1965, "we" had merely "stopped losing" it. With Walter Lippmann ~~was~~^{pre}/occupied with a tour of South America, apparently there was in the entire United States no little boy to point out the nature of the emperor's clothes. And the Secretary of Defense so captured the imagination of the politicians and writers that he was immediately ^bgroomed for Secretary of State, McGeorge Bundy having resigned as presidential adviser on foreign affairs. ^{That} ~~By~~ McNamara had for some years exercised a major prerogative of the Secretary of State and might see no advantage in the shift was not considered.

"We have stopped losing the war," is a very simple, six-word sentence so welcome to those who wanted the wish to father the thought ^{it}that/was accepted without questioning and without analysis. It was sufficient that this was the considered opinion of a man under whose ungraying hair was a head that combined the best features of computers and brains. If McNamara said it, that was it. To question him was stupidity or treason, and, in fact, those who did, largely students

and college professors, were called treasonable and labeled "kooks". A Texas Congressman who had followed McNamara to South Vietnam returned to the United States and announced that, upon the reconvening of Congress, he would introduce a bill by which, in its great wisdom, Congress would change the Constitutional definition of treason to make all who disagreed with the government's policies guilty of the crime.

But who were the "we" of whom McNamara spoke? Was it the puppet forces ^whe dignified by terming a government? Was it the armed forces of the United States, or the people? Or was it both? At the time of McNamara's visit, our puppet forces whose ranks have been consistently decimated by the Viet Cong, greatly inferior in number, were sustaining losses of a magnitude even they had hitherto found unattainable in a single encounter at the Michelin rubber plantation but a few minutes by air from Saigon, they had lost almost an entire battalion, and admitted 500-600 men, in a single encounter. And in a single week American deaths had admittedly totaled considerably in excess of the gory average of the Korean war. No territory was being taken and held by either or both of armies. In fact, ^{care} ~~there~~ was exercised

to make understandable that neither army had any such intention.

So perhaps it was fortunate McNamara didn't make clear who he meant by "we" and perhaps equally felicitous that no one asked him.

How did we "stop losing" the war? Obviously, it was not from a reduced casualty rate for that had in Pentagonese "escalated" to an all-time high. It was not in the taking and holding of territory for that normal function of military operations was not even the intent of South Vietnam. It was not in improvements of the lot of civilians for in order to feed them it was necessary to import vast quantities of rice, a normal export of the country. Nor could it possibly have been in what was called "pacification" of the countryside - those few shards of territory where a pretense of control was maintained - for the American pacifiers were disagreeing with each other, the head of the aid mission had been replaced, a former colonel and CIA operative, _____ Lansdale, had been returned to the country where his earlier efforts had met with the disapproval of the army leadership, and graft was so rampant no effort was any longer made to hide it.

There remained the "infiltration" of forces from North Vietnam. It was these forces we were given to understand that were responsible

for the American presence in the country~~xx~~, and we had a way of stopping their "infiltration". We bombed the virtually defenseless north, and this was going to make them keep their forces at home and make it impossible for their forces to travel. Bomb them we did the entire length and breadth of the country, its bridges, its ferries, its good roads, its pigsties, hospitals, and forests. During the period from the beginning of the bombing until McNamara's visit, the forces of the north grew from what Secretary of ^{State}/Rusk had called "elements" of a 325th division to nine divisions in McNamara's observation, in itself a remarkable growth of from 2 to 4 divisions when compared with the allegations of the American military made a mere fortnight earlier.

It would seem that the only way in which we had "stopped" losing this war was by virtue of our still being in the country.

What was the war we were losing? Was it the military war? the political war? the diplomatic war? The military war was a fisaco, a disaster without parallel in American history. The half-million puppet forces were augmented by more than a quarter of a million Americans underrated in official statements at approximately 175,000 by the simple

expedient of ignoring the entire Seventh Fleet with its air arm and all support forces, a naval power of unprecedented strength and size. Equipped with such a plethora of modern weaponry that the footsoldiers were burdened by its weight, these armies were unable to handle and opposition army inferior in size and equipment to the Americans alone. It can hardly be said that a political war was in any sense being won for we dared not permit an election in the country and had been ignominiously but shamelessly reduced to installing in seeming control a new military dictator who, even more than his predecessors, proclaimed his opposition to everything the United States said it had intruded into Vietnam to achieve. Air Force Colonel Ky was so completely persuaded a fascist that immediately upon assuming power, if his position may be so designated, he fervently proclaimed himself a disciple of Hitler. Even under the pressure of his American masters, he declined to withdraw his glorification of and dedication to the monster who had caused the death ^{of} ~~by~~ unknowable millions in World War II. The political war was not no longer being lost in the countryside even though that part of the countryside over which we pretended control had shrunk considerably and even most of these few areas were abandoned to the

enemy at night. Within walking distance of Saigon it was not even possible to keep the power lines intact and the city enjoyed a chronic shortage of electricity. Eight miles from town American engineers building a new generating plant would not remain in it after dark and the newspapers were openly speculating about what would happen when the plant was completed and had to be put into operation.

There was certainly no improvement in the diplomatic war to justify the opinion we had stopped losing it. Appeals of the utmost abject sort for support for our position were ignored by our allies and mendicants alike with only a few minor contributions coming from the Philippines, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, token forces for which the Asiatics extorted usurious payment. Among the major powers no government even spoke up in our behalf so that ~~our~~^{of} ailing Great Britain whose Labor administration was only too acutely aware of what the United States manipulations could do to the foundering pound. Lip-service the British Government did offer, but not a single soldier.

However, the Secretary of Defense was so widely regarded as a 20th Century ~~oracle~~^{oracle} that, when he described the total failure of an American involvement in an almost semi-savage land in which the

addition of a quarter of a million of the best armed, best trained fighting men in the history of the world have been unable to in any ~~i~~nsignificant way alter the course of military, political or diplomatic events as an end to losing had the lightning flashed from the thunder cloud and the voice been that of God, it could not have received more total credibility.

Meanwhile, in the boondocks, American military men were, for the first time in our national history, slaughtering women and children, burning down their flimsy homes, poisoning o their land with chemicals, and, when the cameras were looking, giving the kids chewing-gum. From the air Americans were incinerating forest, farmland and human beings with white phosphorous and napalm with a fine lack of discrimination and distinction.

But the United States did send plastic surgeons, and a few of the scorched and mangled bodies were patched together, and the American newspapers touted the humanity of the medical repairmen.