

Asian Engagements**TRUTH IS THE FIRST CASUALTY:
The Gulf of Tonkin Affair—
Illusion and Reality**

by Joseph C. Goulden

Rand McNally, 285 pp., \$6.95

THE BLUNDERS AND PERFIDY surrounding America's entry into the Vietnam War are devastatingly bared by Joseph Goulden in *Truth Is the First Casualty*. By meticulous attention to detail the author has reconstructed the actual events surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin affair, related these events to the general situation of which they were but a part, and shown how they bear on our future ability or inability to avoid national catastrophes like Vietnam.

Goulden's presentation of the tangled web of official deception surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin "attack" is straightforward and reportorial. In Part One, entitled "The Illusion," he shows how the Gulf of Tonkin incidents were described to the United States Congress and the American people by the Johnson administration between August 2 and August 9, 1964. This section of *Truth Is the First Casualty* reveals quite clearly President Johnson's arm-twisting style of leadership and the confusion it created among his principal advisors as each subordinated his responsibilities to the task of keeping the Chief Executive satisfied. There is not so much a tale of conspiracy in high places as one of surrender of independent judgment to President Johnson's ego.

Part Two—"The Reality"—reviews the same incidents, *not* as they were

depicted to the Congress and the American people, but, as Goulden is able to demonstrate, the way they actually occurred. He also points up how those who direct America's hydra-headed world-wide electronic and scientific espionage *apparatus* exist almost as a law unto themselves and, in fact, create the very conditions that make war by accident more likely than not. This portion of Goulden's book is of considerable significance because it shows most clearly the menace to our nation from faceless, nameless individuals who are able to define the national interest according to their own lights. From Goulden's disclosures about the "dangerous business of electronic espionage" and the paramilitary activities of the United States before Tonkin it seems evident that, regardless of the true intentions of the President and those who surround him, all are captives of an intelligence/information system that is beyond their capacity to control or understand.

President Johnson's information/decision system is starkly revealed in all its inadequacies by the actions of one lone sailor, Patrick N. Park, who refused to be swept along by the pressures originating in Washington to execute his assignment of firing the guns of the *USS Maddox* against the "enemy" targets in the Gulf of Tonkin on the night of August 4, 1964. Park, who was in control of the *Maddox's* main gun battery firing key, said:

I finally told them, "I'm not opening fire until I know where the *Turner Joy* is." The bridge got on the phone and said, "Turn on your lights, *Turner Joy*." Sure enough, there she was,

right in the cross hairs, I had six five-inch guns right at the *Turner Joy*, 1,500 yards away. If I had fired, it would have blown it clean out of the water. All I had to do was squeeze the trigger. In fact, I could have been shot for *not* squeezing the trigger."

Goulden comments: "What if Seaman Park *had* fired? The possible consequences are too frightening to contemplate." But one thing is certain from reading Goulden's book: never was it so necessary for one man to defy so many.

In Part Three—"The Revelation"—the author recounts the process through which the United States Senate learned of the difference between illusion and reality in the Gulf of Tonkin affair. Here Goulden traces the incidents leading to Senator Fulbright's disenchantment and final awareness that he, like the rest of the Senate and the public, had been deceived by President Johnson's and Secretaries McNamara and Rusk's distortion of the facts about Tonkin. These events underscore the decline of our nation's system of checks and balances to prevent such an anomaly as a "Presidential War." Fortunately, there were a few hardy souls in the government hierarchy who were willing to jeopardize their own positions in order to expose the truth about Tonkin to Mr. Fulbright and other members of the Senate.

For those who have been growing increasingly uneasy about the operations of our national security machinery *Truth Is the First Casualty* is an important book. By revealing the actual story and the significant issues of the Gulf of Tonkin affair Goulden has raised serious questions concerning the drift of national policy, the division of war-making power between the President and the Congress, and the almost frenetic efforts of elected and appointed officials to keep unpleasant truths from the American public. Thanks to his sharp focus on the last, Goulden has performed a major public service by showing the explicit and implicit hazards in "government by secrecy."

Truth Is the First Casualty provides the factual basis on which to begin a full re-examination of our national security goals and how they might be achieved, or changed. The book is highly recommended to those who may be disposed to believe that in times of war and hostilities the one casualty we cannot afford to sustain is Truth.

William R. Corson

William R. Corson based his controversial book, "The Betrayal," on his experiences as the Marine colonel with the principal responsibility for the pacification program in Vietnam.

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by David M. Glixon

PUBLISHING PROBLEM

You will please Constance Cozzens Milton of Chadds Ford, Pa., by filling in the blanks with words corresponding to the definitions alongside. When you have used the words she thinks you should, their initials reading down will form the name of a well-known publishing house. Answers on page 38.

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| 1. Engraving process _____ | 9. Author's copy _____ |
| 2. Book size _____ | 10. Explain or depict _____ |
| 3. With nothing removed _____ | 11. Unsalariated writer _____ (2 words) |
| 4. Type proof _____ | 12. Comment or reference _____ |
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