

On Capitol Hill, the Reaction Is Muted

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The end was barely discernible on Capitol Hill. The Senate was preoccupied with speeches about inflation and recession. The House indulged in a brief spate of preliminary sparring over control of the Navy's petroleum reserves and then closed its doors for the day.

For America, the war in Vietnam was over. In Congress, it was accepted quietly, numbly, as an American tragedy that would best be forgotten but for the lessons that it left. But if there were lessons to be learned, they had been enunciated, on all sides, long ago.

"I don't think the country's ever been torn apart so much since the war between the states," Rep. F. Edward Hebert (D-La.), until recently chairman

of the House Armed Services Committee, reflected in the House lobby. "Let's forget it, but don't forget to learn."

Hebert paused, then smiled over the impracticality of his own injunction. "The tragedy," he said, "is that we never learn from history. We never learn."

The muted reaction was reflected in the Senate as well. There was a sense of relief, but it came in soft voices, in remarks coaxed by the press. There were no grand speeches, no cries of elation or shouts of recrimination.

"The only way to redeem anything from the whole nightmare is not to repeat it," said Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.). "That's the only consolation I can draw from it."

It was, like Hebert's, an uncertain

consolation at best. Nearly two years ago, in the midst of his futile campaign for the White House, McGovern had matter-of-factly predicted that if he became President, the Thieu regime would fall and North and South Vietnam would eventually reunite as one nation.

McGovern got little thanks for the prophecy then. He gets little thanks now. Most of his Vietnam mail in recent days has been from critics, people who blame the unhappy end of the war on the opposition to it, who tell McGovern, "You must be happy now, you must be celebrating."

"I'm not doing any dancing or celebrating," McGovern said fervently. He said he thought most people would be "content to drop the issue now." But

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he hoped, too, that it would lead to a recognition that there are "some limitations on the exercise of military power," some wonders that it cannot perform.

That is not the lesson that Hebert would draw. Along with the sense of relief over the evacuation of the last Americans, there is still an undercurrent of machismo, a conviction that the United States can lick any opponent if only its hands aren't tied.

"If we had gone into the war to win, we would have won," Hebert declared firmly. The recriminations and divi-

sions that the conflict caused at home would not, in his view, have come about if the military had been allowed to bomb Hanoi and block the harbor at Haiphong as it advocated. But as it happened, he said, "a lot of kids died in vain."

Across in the Senate, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) talked of the same theme, but not with approval. "The tragic experience we've gone through shows that modern weapons are not the answer," he declared. "We had everything. The other side had a people who had literally nothing but a determination to defend their own country. It's a collective tragedy for all involved."

The lessons to be learned, in short, depend on the teacher. Some, such as Sens. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) and Frank Church (D-Idaho), complained that the evacuation should have been carried out sooner, before the Vietcong got so close.

At the same time, Congress itself had yet to decide on legislation authorizing U.S. forces to assist in the evacuation of South Vietnamese as well as Americans. The bill, which also provided humanitarian aid for South Vietnam, had been scheduled for final action by the House yesterday when it was put aside in light of the accomplished facts.