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KENNEDY ASSAILS VIETNAM TACTICS

Calls Fight for Apbia Peak 'Senseless'—Asks Nixon to Curb Such Actions

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By HEDRICK SMITH
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WASHINGTON, May 20—

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, challenging the Nixon Administration's military tactics in Vietnam, charged today that bloody assaults such as those in the battle for Apbia Mountain were "senseless and irresponsible."

In his most pointed criticism to date of the Administration's Vietnam policy, the Massachusetts Democrat declared: "American lives are too valuable to be sacrificed for military pride."

His speech, which drew an immediate Republican rebuttal, was the latest in a series of challenges by Senator Kennedy to the Nixon Administration on issues from antimissile defense to the diversion of funds from space projects to domestic programs. The White House already views this as a deliberate build-up to a race between Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Nixon in the election in 1972.

He told the Senate in a brief but emotional floor speech: "President Nixon has told us, without question, that we seek no military victory, that we seek only peace. How then can we justify sending our boys against a hill a dozen times or more, until soldiers themselves question the madness of the action? The assault on Hamburger Hill is only symptomatic of a mentality and a

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Kennedy Decries U.S. Military Tactics in Vietnam

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policy that requires immediate attention."

Senator Kennedy, the majority whip, challenged Mr. Nixon to "issue a new order to the field cutting back these offensive operations." Their level, he contended, "runs opposite to our stated intentions and goals in Paris."

Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Republican whip, rising in rebuttal, defended the current military strategy and urged that critics such as Mr. Kennedy "not try to second-guess" the battlefield tactics "because we are not there."

About a dozen Senators were in the chamber when the two men engaged in a sharp eight-minute debate shortly after the Senate began its session at noon.

Standing only a few feet apart, the two men spoke in quiet tones, but the sharpness of their language reflected the tensions in the Senate arising

form the war. None of the other Senators present joined the debate.

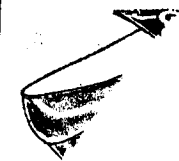
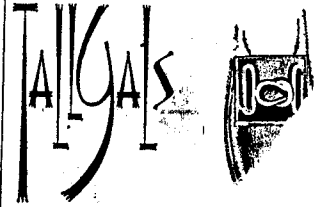
Senator Scott declared: "I am convinced that what we are doing both in the military and in the diplomatic spheres are designed to end the casualties as soon as possible. If our military are told to contend for a hill, it is part of the strategy which is essential to maintaining the military posture while we talk for peace."

At the Pentagon, military officers-bristling at Senator Kennedy's criticism of battlefield commander—explained that Apbia Mountain has been a vital target for assault because it offered a commanding position over the Ashau Valley, a key North Vietnamese infiltration Route in northern South Vietnam. The hill earned its nickname, officers said, because "it chews people up like meat."

They said that the Ashau Valley was a staging area and route for possible enemy at-

tacks against such coastal cities as Hue, Danang and Quang Tri. Allied intelligence has reported heavy enemy activity in the valley, possibly as a build-up for a new offensive next month.

There have been periodic eruptions of heavy fighting over high ground elsewhere in Vietnam.



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