

Shoup Bjt 480

WASHINGTON AF — A war-hungry military shot through with interservice rivalry is pictured by former Marine commandant David M. Shoup as encouraging the Johnson administration to widen the Vietnam war in 1964.

The general, who retired from the Joint Chiefs of Staff just before the events he describes in the current Atlantic Monthly, said "an aggressive military" persuaded the civilian leaders to drop their longstanding opposition to a land war in Asia.

Shoup, a frequent critic of the U.S. role in Vietnam, contends the military brass wanted to test new equipment and young troops and to put hypothetical problems to work in the battlefield.

Adm. David L. McDonald, retired chief of naval operations who served briefly with Shoup and remained on the Joint Chiefs during the period described, said he thought no purpose would be served by commenting on the former Marine chief's article.

"It wouldn't do any good," McDonald said from his retirement home in Florida. "They're Shoup's views, and I presume he feels he can substantiate them."

"But I'm just a has-been. And, I might say, so is Shoup."

Other members of the Joint Chiefs were unavailable for comment.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, current chairman of the chiefs, had no comment for the record after learning of Shoup's account.

Shoup wrote of "belligerent," "glory-seeking" military leaders competing with each other to have their service play major roles in Vietnam.

"In Vietnam in 1965," he said, "the four services were racing to build up combat strength in that hapless country."

One sign of that eagerness, the general said, was competition between the Air Force and Navy over the bombing of North Vietnam.

"The punitive air strikes immediately following the Tonkin Gulf incident in late 1964," he wrote, "revealed the readiness of naval air forces to bomb North Vietnam. It now appears that the Navy actually had attack plans ready even before the alleged incident took place."

The first air strikes against the North were ordered by President Johnson after charging that North Vietnamese gunboats had attacked U.S. naval bases in the area.

Shoup called the bombing effort "one of the most wasteful and expensive hoaxes ever to be put over on the American people." By early 1965, he said, the Air Force and Navy were caught up in bombing "contest" in the North, reporting "misleading data or propaganda to serve Air Force or Navy purposes."

Meanwhile, Shoup said, the Army and the Marines were waging a similar contest attempting to outdo one another in getting troops into Vietnam. He writes:

"Top ranking Army officers wanted to commit forces for a variety of reasons, among them to test plans and new equipment, to test the new air mobile theories and tactics, to try the tactics and techniques of counter insurgency and to gain combat experience for young officers and noncommissioned officers.

The Marines had similar motivations, the least of which was any real concern about the political or social problems of the Vietnamese people. In early 1965 there was a shooting war going on and the Marines were being left out of it, contrary to all their traditions."

Shoup said the Marines had explored the idea of conducting an amphibious operation to solve "a hypothetical aggressor-insurgency problem" in Vietnam.

"So Marine planners were seeking an acceptable excuse to thrust a landing force over the beaches of Vietnam when the Viet Cong attacked the U.S. Army Special Forces camp at Pleiku in February 1965," he said.

"It was considered unacceptable aggression, and the President was thereby prompted to put U.S. Ground combat units into the war."

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