

The Very Big Lie Technique

By DAVID HARRIS

SAN FRANCISCO — Daniel Ellsberg hasn't told the rest of us anything we didn't already know. He just gave us the names and dates.

I thank him for it. I wanted to know the names and dates, even though I might have been able to guess them all without his help. The rest of it, we already knew.

Some of us knew it with the front of our lives and some of us with the back. But we knew it. From bowling alleys to supermarkets, we knew that the stacks of burned children all over Southeast Asia didn't have much to do with freedom and democracy.

The first lie came in the mail. It said, "Dear Mrs. Smith, the President regrets to inform you that your son, Specialist 4 Ralph Smith, was killed in action on the 22d of May. He died helping a people struggle for their freedom." It was a lie. Ralph Smith was there on his mother's doorstep in a plastic sack. And that was all. His death wasn't part of anyone's freedom, surely not his own. He had been swept up in a flood of khaki and mashed. And none of us felt any freer for it.

The second lie came to us over the television. The President (all four of them in a row) said he didn't want to fight a war. Not all of what he said was a lie. He really didn't want to fight a war. And he didn't. He wanted the rest of us to fight one under his orders. And some of us did. Some of us didn't. But after he told us that he didn't want a war, he spent all our money to make one. We may not have caught the lie the first time around, but after three or four years of carrying around dollars that aren't worth but 83 cents, things got a little clearer.

The President lied. And we all knew it on the very next day when he showed up on TV, playing draft soldier.

Whatever he says, wars are made and always have been made by people who play soldier. There he was with sixteen stars and a spread eagle on his hat, taking a look at the cannon fodder. He was flanked by smiling men in ties who sell bullets to the Army and make a million and a half a year at it. Strange company for a man who doesn't want wars.

The third lie came from everywhere. It came from the schoolyard, the grocery store, the gas station, and the White House. It said, "The world is full of enemies." It is one of the lies we helped tell on ourselves. Then the lie said, "A lot of our enemies are in Vietnam." So a crowd of soldiers was given rifles and sent six thousand miles from home, to a place they didn't know existed. When they got there and shot at some things and got shot back and had a chance to look around, they figured out that Vietnam was full of people who were trying to muck their way through just like everyone in Dayton, Ohio, except in a different language.

And the soldiers began to see the lie. So did the rest of us. And the soldiers began to come home. They came home in wheelchairs and airplanes and with hypodermics stuck in their veins. They didn't want to go back. Neither do the rest of us. Instead of enemies, we found our own empire and it was a cruel and sick thing. And the last words the lie said were, "Just a little while longer."

What Daniel Ellsberg has done is lift a curtain on the Government and show us that all the people there knew it was a lie too. And they still kept telling it.

Daniel Ellsberg did a very real thing. The Government will probably prosecute him for lifting that curtain. Because the Government is convinced that it can't govern if it can't lie to the people it governs.

I'm convinced that if it can't be a Government without lying, then it's not worth keeping.

David Harris was just released from Federal prison after serving a term for refusing induction into the Army. He was one of the founders of the draft resistance movement.