

MAR 15 1971

Kennedy Puts Vietnam Civilian Dead at 25,000 in 1970

By NEIL SHEEHAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 14 — Senator Edward M. Kennedy has estimated that at least 25,000 civilians were killed in the war in South Vietnam last year and that 100,000 were wounded.

The Senator's estimate, which was based on official figures, is not disputed by Government officials.

"By this yardstick alone, we can see that the war in Indochina is not 'winding down' for the peoples of the area," Senator Kennedy said.

He gave his estimate recently in response to a reporter's inquiry. He questioned how much the general level of violence had declined in South Vietnam and, in effect, how much real physical security the South Vietnamese have today.

In his State of the World Message, two and a half weeks ago, President Nixon said that "roughly 80 per cent" of South Vietnam's population of 17 million people lived in secure, Government-controlled areas. He cited the figure to support a

statement that there has been major progress in the pacification program in South Vietnam since he took office two years ago. *

"Now, while there are still many dangerous pockets," the President said, "the vast bulk of the country is secure."

Mr. Kennedy and the staff of his Senate Subcommittee on Refugees do not dispute that the war has diminished over the last year. Official admissions of wounded civilians to hospitals declined by about 25 per cent from the

1969 total, and the Senator's staff believes the decline in the civilian death rate from 1969 has been even greater.

Staff members say the death rate was probably reduced by half in 1970 as a result of the diversion of American bombing raids from South Vietnam into Cambodia and Laos. Bombing has always accounted for a sizable proportion of the civilian war casualties in the South.

But Senator Kennedy and his staff assert that the level

Continued on Page 2, Column 4

* SEE TAB SZUC
13 MAR 71

Kennedy Offers Vietnam Casualty Data

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

of violence continues high and they question precisely how solid the reported pacification gains have been.

Senator Kennedy arrived at his civilian casualty estimate by extrapolating from official figures on the number of civilian war wounded admitted to hospitals in South Vietnam last year—50,882. He used one of several formulas he and the staff subcommittee have worked out over the years to calculate the full extent of civilian casualties.

Estimate of Casualties

This formula consists of counting one civilian war wounded not admitted to a hospital for each one who is, and then calculating that a quarter to a third more civilians were killed outright or died before they could reach a hospital. By this reckoning, for about 50,000 hospital admissions, there would be about 50,000 wounded not tabulated and at least another 25,000 dead.

The rough over-all toll for 1970 is 125,000 to 150,000 civilian casualties from military action by both sides, including 25,000 to 35,000 dead, the Senator says.

Official hospital admissions for 1969 ran to 67,767 civilian war wounded.

The Agency for International Development, which compiles the statistics on hospital admissions, has declined to estimate total civilian war wounded and dead ever since the chief of its civilian medical program in Vietnam made an estimate in 1967 and aroused the displeasure of senior officials in the Johnson Administration. His estimate, based on a formula similar to the one used by Senator Kennedy, was 26,000 dead for 1967.

Over the years, A.I.D. officials and doctors in Vietnam have privately not disputed Senator Kennedy's estimates. One official with wide experience in Vietnam privately estimated civilian war dead last year at 30,000.

After a field study of the problem in Vietnam last summer for Senator Kennedy, the General Accounting Office said

that hospital admissions misleadingly understated the extent of civilian casualties.

While down significantly from 1969, the number of admissions of civilian war wounded to hospitals in 1970 was still reported to be slightly higher than the 1967 level.

"Nothing more accurately documents the intensity of warfare or the level of military operations better than the little reported numbers of civilians killed or wounded by the war," Mr. Kennedy said in a statement.

It is impossible to ascertain what proportion of the civilian casualties is inflicted by each side in the war. The allies have been considered responsible for the majority because of their greater firepower. But the enemy proportion is believed to be rising as a result of mortar and rocket attacks on Government-held centers.

Toll in Laos Rises

The subcommittee staff said that the intensification of air raids in Cambodia and Laos had increased civilian casualties in those countries. They estimated that civilian casualties in Laos, a country with a population of about three million, were now exceeding 30,000 a year, including more than 10,000 dead.

Other official statistics gathered from the Pentagon showed that the number of South Vietnamese soldiers killed in action last year, and the number of Government officials and supporters killed by the Communists in terrorist acts, also continued at a high rate in the South.

Pentagon officials said that 20,914 South Vietnamese servicemen died in combat last year, nearly equal to the 21,833 killed in 1969. Officials estimated that the extension of the ground war into Cambodia accounted for only about 1,000 of the 1970 combat deaths.

The number of Government officials, supporters and innocent bystanders killed in terrorist attacks last year amounted to 5,951, Pentagon officials said, nearly the same as the 6,202 reported killed in 1969. Kidnappings by the enemy in 1970 increased slightly from those in 1969, from 6,289 to 6,872.

Meanwhile, American war deaths, reflecting the reduction of United States forces, declined from 9,367 in 1969 to 4,183 in 1970—about a sixth the number of the civilians Senator Kennedy estimated were killed in South Vietnam last year.

"Still Has a War"

A Defense Department spokesman said he could not readily explain why reported gains in pacification did not appear to reflect far greater physical security for the South Vietnamese.

"We would not claim from here just from the pacification figures that everything is rosy out there," he said. "The ARVN [Army of the Republic of South Vietnam] still has a war on its hands."

He noted that while actions of battalion size or larger had declined in the South, smaller-scale clashes in the countryside were continuing "and the level of terrorist attacks is still up." But "there is greater Government control and greater security from the big war," he said.