

Viet Role Of Military Is Praised

Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger sent a message to members of the armed forces yesterday declaring that American involvement in Vietnam "was not purposeless" and that American servicemen accomplished their assigned mission. This is the text of the message:

As the last withdrawal of Americans from Vietnam takes place, it is my special responsibility to address to you, the men and women of our armed forces, a few words of appreciation on behalf of the American people.

For many of you, the tragedy of Southeast Asia is more than a distant and abstract event. You have fought there; you have lost comrades there; you have suffered there. In this hour of pain and reflection you may feel that your efforts and sacrifices have gone for naught.

That is not the case. When the passions have muted and the history is written, Americans will recall that their armed forces served them well. Under circumstances more difficult than ever before faced by our military services, you accomplished the mission assigned to you by higher authority. In combat you were victorious and you left the field with honor.

Though you have done all that was asked of you, it will be stated that the war itself was futile. In some sense, such may be said of any national effort that ultimately fails. Yet our involvement was not purposeless. It was intended to assist a small nation to preserve its independence in the face of external attack and to provide at least a reasonable chance to survive. That Vietnam succumbed to powerful external forces vitiates neither the explicit purpose behind our involvement—nor the impulse of generosity toward those under attack that has long infused American policy.

Your record of duty performed under difficult conditions remains unmatched. I salute you for it. Beyond any question you are entitled to the nation's respect, admiration and gratitude.