

San Diego Shifts on War, With Many Now Opposed

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SAN DIEGO, April 22—Harry Kripton was a hawk. "I really wanted us to go into Vietnam," he remembered the other day. "I was more like John Wayne than John Wayne himself."

Now Mr. Kripton, who runs a janitorial supply store, takes a different view. "I began to wonder," he explained, "what we would accomplish being there. Who would we beat, and how long would the situation stay that way after we left?"

"All we're trying to do is save face, if there is such a thing," he added. "But we lost that a long time ago, by losing the war out in the bush."

Mr. Kripton's views reflect a changing sentiment here in San Diego toward the Vietnam war. This week, as the veterans camped out in Washington and the capital prepared for a massive demonstration tomorrow, the Asian conflict revived as a topic of conversation and concern.

But dozens of random interviews turned up few people who defend the conflict as necessary or useful. Many now believe the whole thing was a mistake and some, like Mr. Kripton, believe that the United States has been defeated.

Support for Nixon Holds

At the same time, a majority seem to support President Nixon's strategy of gradual troop reduction and his refusal to set a timetable for American withdrawal.

Antiwar feeling might be an old story in Berkeley or New York, but it is a significant development in San Diego, a city dominated by the military and conservative politics. Just this week, for example, 20 local individuals and organizations won awards from the Freedoms Foundation for "promoting America."

In November, 1969, a reporter toured San Diego and found considerable war weariness and frustration. But most people appeared to believe in the war's value, to despise antiwar protesters, and to care desperately about America's "honor."

During a second visit, after the Cambodian incursion last May, some hawks renewed their calls for a military "victory." Support for President Nixon remained strong, even though several doves questioned his commitment to de-escalation. Few people seemed to doubt the basic purpose of the war or the importance of the nation's "commitment" to repel Communism in Southeast Asia.

Today in San Diego there is little talk of victory. And in some quarters, America's entire foreign policy and role in the world is under attack. Richard Hertig, a 30-year-old clerk in a clothing store, put it this way:

"At first Vietnam was just a name. I felt we were right in being there because of what the media told us—we were saving people from Communism. But the more I could see into it, the more I could see we weren't saving people from Communism, we were doing the same thing the Communists were doing—inflicting our system on those people over there."

"They say we have an 'honorable' end, but what's honorable about war? Being honorable is to admit you're wrong. The basic concept of this country is honesty, and if we're wrong, we're wrong."

'A Ruptured Hawk'

This deep disillusion with the whole Vietnam adventure shows up in unexpected places. A lawyer who's political hero is Senator Barry Goldwater said:

"Like a lot of people around here, I'm a reformed hawk, a ruptured hawk. I would hate like hell to be a kid facing a tour in Vietnam knowing that the effort there is going to be

so inconclusive. I'm 43 and I would have fought gladly in World War II, but if I were 18 today I would resist.

"We're a one-dimensional people, we have to win or lose, and we've lost. The only question is when we're going to admit it."

An elderly lady who runs a nut and candy shop noted that her son was a lieutenant colonel in the Marines. "He would kill me," she said sheepishly, "but I almost feel we should become isolationist again. We should mind our own business, and maybe we could do an awful lot more good at home with that money we're spending over there."

Tom Strong, a Vietnam veteran working in a gas station, said: "I'm an American and I'd go back, because I'll fight for what they tell me to. But the Vietnamese don't want us over there. There's no reason to be over there any longer, if there ever was a reason to begin with."

Even if many San Diegans believe the United States has lost the war, they retain their faith in the nation's power. They blame the defeat on "politicians" who "tied the hands" of the military, not on the armed forces.

"We should have done the job right in the first place, and we wouldn't have had this mess," said E. W. Scott, a service station owner. "You can't do a halfway job. Killing people is what war is all about."

Confidence in President

Despite the acrimony frustration, confidence in ident Nixon runs high. At trell, a used-car salesman, a typical remark:

"Nixon is doing a fant job of handling the He certainly has a withdraw than the Johnson done i Admini tion ever thought of doi "Nixon took a bad of deal probably because of elec pressures, made a good th out of it," added Mr. Kript

In San Diego there is a reservoir of confidence the President, and faith in wisdom. "They want to belie him so badly, you know," said Otis Romine, a book seller

Some support has eroded because of the Cambodian Laos incursions and a pa of troop withdrawal that cr ics contend is too slow. Kindergarten teacher shoppir in a discount supermarket said

"He promised us he would ge us out of the war—that is wh he was elected—but he hasn't kept his promise."

And a number doubt his mo tives, including Rudy Arenas who works in a car showroom "I'm not too sure how he's handling it; he's trying to do something, but I don't understand it. He seems to be playing politics more than any- thing, looking ahead to the next election."

But for the moment, the war does not seem to be a major liability for Mr. Nixon partly because no opponent has emerged as a rallying point. Time and again, people said that without a Kennedy in the race, they could see no alternative to the President.