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Nixon Also Teaching Americans a Lesson

WASHINGTON—At the end of the second day of the Cambodian invasion, the U.S. Command in Saigon reported "at least" 634 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong killed, but only seven weapons captured. This kind of discrepancy suggests that Cambodians may be discovering the price of membership in the Free World. It also suggests that the President is trying to do what cannot be done. Mr. Nixon advances two objectives. First, to destroy the "Central Communist Headquarters" which our generals have decided is called COSVN ("Central Office for South Vietnam") and from which, as Mr. Nixon solemnly assured us, the whole enemy operation is run. Once this headquarters is overrun, the theory goes, U.S. troops can go back to Vietnam, Vietnamization can proceed and so can U.S. troop withdrawals.

But it is only Americans who think in terms of little Pentagons to fight guerrilla wars.

We will find some bunkers and capture some weapons, some documents will turn up predicting a summer offensive and a few tons of rice will be destroyed. The U.S. Command will measure the rice in pounds—they would count the grains if there were time.

But the enemy will have melted away. Does anybody seriously believe he will not come back, as he has in all the other places where Americans have died for the proposition that there are headquarters and strongholds and road centers and we can win if only we take them away from the Viet Cong?

It may be that John Mitchell does; the

President consulted him throughout the decision-making process. But if the American people are to rely on a man whose entire career has been spent in the narrow area of municipal bonds as their expert on the Far East and guerrilla warfare, then the President really needs the prayers for which he has called.

What our generals, including our attorney general, do not appear to understand and apparently never will understand is that in guerrilla war the guerrilla survives as long as the people are on his side.

It is now Mr. Nixon's theory that there will be no denouement in Cambodia; the troops will be out in eight weeks; the American Command will say the operation was successful; and Hanoi will have been "taught a lesson."

What he does not understand is that the American people will also have been taught a lesson—namely, that their government intends to go on trying to win an unwinnable war. "Gen." Mitchell may not have counted on that.