

Oh! What a Lovely War

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, Feb. 12—Stuart Hampshire, the English philosopher, wrote recently of the impact of Freud's demonstration that human behavior is governed less by conscious than by unconscious thoughts and feelings. It was a Copernican revelation for men who understood, he said; it destroyed the "comfortable feeling that we are easily in control of our own thoughts and purposes."

The significance of that understanding is of course not only for neurotics; the most normal man is moved by forces of which he may be unaware. And that, Hampshire seemed to say, has necessary implications for our whole effort to govern society by rational means. He wrote: "The species is more likely to be destroyed by the agency of men who know that they are normal, and who misunderstand their own minds, than by the mentally disturbed."

We must rely on some such view of man to help explain war. In any high school history course, students perceive that wars are fought for territory or ideas bearing no rational connection with the cost in blood. Yet still men fight.

It is always easier to see these things historically. Thus World War I is now a subject for fantasy treatment. We can no longer bear to take seriously the rationalizations of those who directed that carnage. Yet at the time, most people believed them. Only a poet here or there pointed out what was really happening.

At Ypres and the Somme and other battlefields, hundreds of thousands of men died to move the Allied lines forward 1,000 yards. But men like Haig and Kitchener—unbelievable figures in history—could only think to ask for more. And young men continued to volunteer for useless death, destroying the best part of a generation on a baseless faith in their leaders.

No one laughed when Lord Carson said: "The necessary supply of heroes must be maintained at all costs."

Some day men will read about the Indochina war with the same disbelief that we feel about World War I. The Haigs and the Kitcheners will all be there, the pointless savagery, the jingo commentators glorying in other people's bloodshed, the self-deception.

"This limited operation is not an

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enlargement of the war," the State Department's spokesman said as the South Vietnamese-American ground and air assault into Laos began. Oh never: more or less.

The American invasion of Cambodia last spring was a "limited operation," too. Now Vietnamese of both persuasions are fighting all over the poor country. The Communists, abandoning their established border sanctuaries, have set up bases in the heart of Cambodia. American bombing and American military aid are accelerating. The Cambodians are being offered the same visions of "victory" that have laid Vietnam waste and that sent innocents charging out of their trenches at Ypres.

No wonder that most careful and professional of British journals, *The Financial Times*, greeted the Laos invasion with the comment that the professed limits on the operation were "liable to arouse skepticism." It is only a few days later, and already we have South Vietnamese leaders talking about making the invasion an annual affair. Naturally, this will require American air support, if not covert ground participation. All in the name of peace and withdrawal.

The great difference between now and 1914-18, so far as the illusions of war are concerned, is that so many fewer people believe them now. Certainly the American soldiers in Indochina do not, nor the draft-age men waiting the call to replace them. Nor do most ordinary Americans believe, any more, that any stated political purpose justifies our staying in Indochina and continuing the destruction.

The relative silence that has greeted this latest non-expansion of the war is not a silence of approval. It is the silence of despair. What else is there to do but despair, if one does not believe in revolution, when peaceful assembly and the democratic process and protest and polls showing an overwhelming public desire to get out of Indochina unconditionally produce no political result?

Creatures from another world, learning the history of the Indochinese war, would conclude that our leaders were mad. But the truth is worse: they are what passes, on earth, for sane.