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NYTimes

Civilian Casualties

To the Editor:

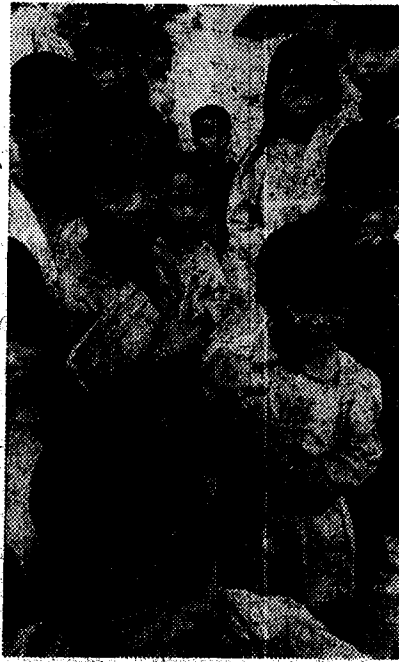
It was reassuring to see that Hanson W. Baldwin's Op-Ed article (May 31) gave serious consideration to the question of civilian casualties in South Vietnam. For too many years it has been difficult to get this kind of attention focused on the plight of people caught in the war.

As much as I welcome the attention Mr. Baldwin has given this problem, it is unfortunate that his article contained a number of factual errors and distortions—both regarding the findings of the Subcommittee on Refugees as well as the General Accounting Office.

For instance, Mr. Baldwin asserts that the G.A.O. does not support the findings of the subcommittee. Quite the contrary. The G.A.O. has found—as the subcommittee has found since 1965—that official statistics on civilian casualties used by Mr. Baldwin are gross underestimations. The G.A.O. report says this quite explicitly on page 35.

Mr. Baldwin remarks that the refugee subcommittee "has never been prone to understatement in its assessments." He may, therefore, be interested to note the recent testimony of Ambassador William E. Colby, director of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) pacification program. He reveals that the cumulative number of refugees and war victims now total 5,898,148—a million more than the subcommittee has ever estimated.

While I, too, have visited South Vietnamese hospitals and have my personal impressions, as Mr. Baldwin does, he fails to report the findings of the G.A.O. In three separate reports the G.A.O. directly contradicts Mr. Baldwin's sanguine description; they found the facilities for war wounded "overcrowded," "inadequate," "unsanitary."



The New York Times/Nancy Moran

I invite anyone to read the full text of these and other reports by simply writing to my office.

Finally, we can hardly take comfort in the fact that the so-called "limited war" we have sponsored in Vietnam has taken fewer total lives than the full-scale "conventional wars" of World War I or II. For this "limited war"—which, incidentally, has raged now for over twenty years—has seen more tons of bombs dropped, greater firepower unleashed, than all the world wars. Surely, there is no comfort in whatever toll of lives this massive firepower has taken. Presumably, we set out to aid

the South Vietnamese people, not wage war against them.

Few will disagree that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong have also contributed to this carnage. But the question today is how much longer will we tolerate policies by our Government which make easy the killing, maiming, and dislocation of millions?

It is unfortunate that Mr. Baldwin seems to find it necessary to lump everyone an "extreme critic" who has attempted over the years to express concern about the impact of the war on civilians. I would hope that we who advocate "extreme restraint" in the use of America's massive power to destroy would never be accused of losing "our cool," but of keeping it.

EDWARD M. KENNEDY
U.S. Senator, Massachusetts
Chairman, Subcommittee on Refugees
Washington, June 10, 1971

TR/S FILE