

'The Real Casualties'

By J. W. FULBRIGHT

WASHINGTON—Chivalry in warfare, I suppose, is an antiquated concept. Such notions are impossible for a B-52 bomber crew five miles up in the sky. The targets they drop their bombs upon are like grid squares on a map; they bear no physical resemblance to real cities and farms inhabited by real people. Now the crew hardly even have to concern themselves with accuracy; their "smart bombs" are carried on laser beams. It is called "surgical" bombing but it is not so "surgical" as to spare the schools and hospitals, and the men, women and children who happen to be in the target areas.

Their dying and their burning take place beyond the sight—and beyond the psychic knowledge—of the B-52 crews and their countrymen across the sea. Only occasionally do the sights of war intrude upon our vision, as in the widely published picture of a little naked Vietnamese girl, screaming as she ran toward the camera to try to escape from the napalm which was burning the skin from her back.

Such are the sights and sounds of the Vietnamization program through which the Nixon Administration has reduced American casualties to almost none. Appealing to our weariness and disgust, our leaders have invited us to lose interest in Vietnam, to ignore what happens there now that our own sons are no longer dying in large numbers. They have invited us to ignore the tragic fate of the Vietnamese themselves and to look elsewhere to the President's visits to Peking and Moscow.

We are told that we must continue such a policy if we are to remain a great power and retain respect throughout the world for the office of the American Presidency. In his dealings with the Soviet Union and China Mr. Nixon no longer engages in ideological warfare for its own sake; he has ceased to be a crusader against "godless Communism" and has become a skilled practitioner of *realpolitik* in the tradition of Metternich and Bismarck. But in his continued prosecution of the war in Vietnam the old Nixon has survived—Nixon the Red-baiter, Nixon the battle-scarred veteran of the "warfare of politics"—to take the term he used in his book "Six Crises."

One of the most ironic of the many ironies of this long and futile crusade is that the Vietnamese Communists themselves have found it incomprehensible that the mighty United States could take an obsessive interest in the internal dissensions of so small and remote a country. For a short period in 1946, the only official representative of the United States in Hanoi was a young major in the Office of Strategic Services named Frank White.

Ho Chi Minh had formed a Vietnam Provisional Government and had proclaimed the independence of the state of Vietnam "within the French Union." On a number of occasions during those turbulent days, White spoke informally and at length with Ho.

On one occasion Ho "dwelled at some length on the disposition of Americans as a people to be sympathetic to the self-determination of nations and generous in making contributions to less fortunate states. But he doubted that the United States Government could be counted on to come to the aid of Vietnam."

For reasons that will likely puzzle historians for decades to come, just as they puzzle and dismay ordinary citizens today, Vietnam has captured and held America's interest beyond Ho Chi Minh's wildest imaginings of 26 years ago. It has caught us in the grip of a prideful, fearful obsession with "defeat" and "humiliation."

Perhaps, as the Nixon Administration has seemed to suppose, the American people will tolerate an endless war as long as it is Asians rather than Americans who are being "wasted" on so prodigal a scale. But I do not think so; I think that the American people are offended and outraged by the prolongation of this useless killing even though most of those now being killed are foreigners.

I think that the American people are disgusted by the obsession with

victory, even in its various, euphemistic disguises. I think that the majority of Americans would now share the puzzlement and dismay expressed in a letter which I received back in 1967 from an American soldier in Vietnam. Speaking of the phony propaganda and the savagery of the war, he described the real casualties—"the farmers and their families in the Delta mangled by air strikes, and the villagers here killed and burned out by our friendly Korean mercenaries."

This young soldier then asked, "... whatever has become of our dream? Where is that America that opposed tyrannies at every turn, without inquiring first whether some particular forms of tyranny might be of use to us? Of the three rights which men have, the first, as I recall, was the right to life. How then have we come to be killing so many in such a dubious cause?"

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