

# Once More, With Numbness

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By Russell Baker

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16—There are many cryptic sayings about Vietnam and the war there. Today we publish the most cryptic of all.

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Peace is at hand, but the hand is at the end of the tunnel.

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If Vietnam goes Communist, President Nixon will go to Peking and Moscow like a row of falling dominoes.

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In the Johnson Administration the Government said there was no such word as "tunnel." In the Nixon Administration the Government announced "tunnel" was a five-letter word.

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During the Stone Age it would not have occurred to anyone to bomb anyone else back to the Stone Age. This is because Stone Age man was not civilized. An advanced degree of civilization is required to produce truly great barbarians.

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To say that a man was "neither fish nor fowl" was a phrase that fell out of use during the Vietnam war. Instead, we began saying of people that they were either "hawks" or "doves." Thus we left land and water behind us in our small efforts at poetic speech and took to the air. Men who think of themselves as birds while looking for light at the ends of tunnels have more urgent problems than they want to hear about. This is why politicians keep telling us we are Number One.

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Paris is at the end of the tunnel.

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President Kennedy said that we would have to struggle bravely if we were to avoid the plight of being Number Two. President Johnson said that we were not only Number One but also Numbers Two, Three, Four and Five. President Nixon said that we were at least Number One, and would have told us that we were also Numbers Two and Three except that he feared hurting the feelings of China and the Soviet Union. "What I'd like to know," said the mole in the old fable of Aesop, "is why, if I'm Number One, I have to spend my life down here in this tunnel, while the Japanese and the Germans and the French and the Swedes and all those others from Number 17 through 87 are up in the light drinking wine on sunswept hill-sides with beautiful women."

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## OBSERVER



Klaus Albrochtson

turn aside from it and start burrowing a new tunnel, possibly in Burma.

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The Pentagon people understand that war is irrational and that irrational activity, while natural to humankind, must be explained in nonsensical terms so absurd that humankind will not think to question his own solemn good sense. Thus, they never discuss the "tunnel" at the Pentagon. They concede the existence of "a metaphorical subterranean connector system linking hypothetical ingress and egress channels." From time to time they also announce that there is "an increased capability of luminescent-egress visibility." These are \$75-billion-a-year words. Despite paying such huge sums for them, we persist in laying out additional money for copies of "Alice in Wonderland," wherewith to educate our children in the eternal and joyous nature of folly.

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If the Vietnam war lasts another four years, Professor Kissinger will no longer be Number Two, but he will be well-qualified to become a tour guide in Paris and should therefore not be allowed to go on welfare while writing his book, which will make him a great deal of money no matter what happens. Posterity may observe that Vietnam made professorship as fruitful as defense contracting.

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There is a tunnel at the end of the tunnel.

A mole will never break into the light at the end of the tunnel, not because there is no light there but because it so frightens him that he will