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Marine Chief Faults 'Search and Attack' Strategy**Vietnam War Seen**

By George C. Wilson

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The Vietnam war was fought in vain "from a military point of view," the nation's top Marine said yesterday.

Gen. Louis H. Wilson, who became commandant of the Marine Corps July 1, also expressed doubts that any future war would stay limited once a nuclear weapon was fired on the battlefield by either side.

Wilson made those and other comments during a wide-ranging interview at his office in Marine headquarters at the Navy Annex overlooking the white headstones of the Navy Annex Arlington Cemetery.

He appears a thoughtful man, as well as the tough Marine who has vowed to kick the corps into better shape.

His remarks on Vietnam, for example, were tinged with sadness as he answered questions on what the United States and the corps—which had 12,937 men killed in action and 51,392 wounded—gained from the war.

"It bought us nothing whatsoever in retrospect," said Wilson. "In fact, it caused a great polarization among the American people and between the American people and the armed forces."

The historically good relationship between the people and the military "is coming back now," Wilson added, because the majority of Americans recognize that "an armed force is an absolute necessity."

Although the Vietnam war gained the services

some military experience, he added, "It's not the experience I would like to have."

Wilson who won the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in World War II—served in Vietnam as assistant chief of staff for the 1st Marine Division.

In discussing the mistakes American forces made in Vietnam, Wilson contended "we lost a lot by going out in search and attack units. Had we concentrated more on the coastal areas and endeavored to keep up our closeness with the people, we might have done better."

The four-star general said it was "very frustrating" to fight a war under rules which forbade going into the enemy's home ground of North Vietnam or cutting the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos. Given those restrictions, Wilson said, "going out and searching and attacking an unseen enemy which could just fade away and come back the next day was very unproductive."

The Marine Corps' plan early in the war was to take over one city after another along the northern coast of South Vietnam, then win the "hearts and minds" of the people by providing security and medical help.

"In retrospect," Wilson conceded, that Marine plan would not have worked, either, because the Saigon government had so little support among the Vietnamese people. But even so, Wilson said, pursuing the coastal strategy would have made more sense than chasing the enemy up and down hills for years under the



GEN. LOUIS H. WILSON
... new commandant

restrictions imposed on the military.

Wilson's remarks on small nuclear weapons—so-called tactical nukes which the Marines could fire through their 8-inch and 155-mm artillery if ordered to do so—were from the viewpoint of a battlefield commander, not a theoretical policy maker like Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, who has put fresh emphasis on arming the United States for limited nuclear war.

The commandant said the found it "very, very difficult to believe" that a nuclear war could be contained once a small nuclear weapon was fired on the battlefield by either side.

Fought in Vain

"It might be that in the early stages" of a conflict the United States might be able "to send messages" to an opponent, by firing off nuclear weapons, "but that's a political decision which is not my business."

But, on the battlefield, "it would be very difficult to contain" a war "by trading small tac nukes. Once it starts, it is just like youngsters fighting with a stick. I find it very difficult to believe that we could trade tactical nukes and limit it to a certain point."

"On the other hand," said Wilson, if the Soviets build small tactical nuclear weapons, the United States must be able to match them in kind or else settle for "massive retaliation, which is a political decision." ✱

Asked what changes he intends to make in the Marine Corps, the new commandant said he would push for a tougher and brighter outfit which would forego the frills, such as fighter planes too fancy for the jobs at hand.

The 55-year-old Wilson—6 feet 3 inches tall and weighing 190 pounds—is now demanding that overweight Marines slim down. He has urged them to copy his habit of jogging every morning. Marines will be subjected to frequent physical fitness tests.

Wilson said he will put Marine officers through special training soon to improve their skills in calling in artillery, fighter bombers and reconnaissance aircraft to help a squad of infantry in combat.

Everybody from the commandant on down, said Wil-

son, should be working to help the combat squad and must learn to do it better. The special training course will get in full swing this fall, the commandant said, at the Marine Corps desert range near Palm Springs, Calif.

Admission standards for the corps also must be raised, Wilson said, for a higher quality outfit. Wilson will require that 75 per cent of the new recruits be high school graduates. This compares to the 55 per cent high school graduate requirement Congress imposed 18 months ago—in pre-recession days—when it appeared the Marines would not be able to recruit enough men.

Along with taking in higher quality enlisted men, Wilson has ordered a weeding out of trouble-makers in the corps to reduce discipline problems. About 1,500 Marines have been discharged in the last six weeks under the corps improvement program, Wilson said.

In a reversal of previous Marine policy, Wilson recently decided against buying the F-14 fighter airplane on the grounds the Navy should handle sophisticated enemy planes. The Marines, he decided, should stick with planes that can support troops on the ground as well as serve as fighters. So the Marines, Wilson said, will keep the F-4 until another plane comes along that can do both jobs at a reasonable cost.