

Our Man Hoppe

33

The Regularly Scheduled War**Arthur Hoppe**

WITH THE NATION divided, strife-torn and bankrupt in the spring of 1970, it seemed as though the Nixon Administration could not survive the summer.

What saved its bacon was the most creative military innovation in the long history of organized warfare:

The Regularly Scheduled War.

The administration stumbled on this fortunate concept as a result of the Cambodian War. Here, for the first time, a national leader invaded another nation only after publicly promising to invade it for no more than 56 days and for no more than once.

At first the public was uneasy. But Mr. Nixon kept his promise to withdraw every single American soldier by June 30. His popularity soared. He also kept his promise never to invade Cambodia again. On July 31, he invaded Laos instead.

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BEHIND THE INVASION of Laos was a report from the National Security Council on the reasons the Cambodian War had proved so acceptable.

"Basically," said the report, "wars have generally proved popular at the beginning. As the troops march off to battle, flags flying, drums beating, the populace rallies behind their leader. Patriotism runs rampant. Dissent is stilled.

"Wars inevitably become unpopular, however, if they drag on and on. Frustration, bitterness and disillusionment with the leaders invariably set in.

"Thus we see," concluded the report, "that the Cambodian War was popular because its brevity was definitely scheduled."

"Let me get one thing perfectly clear,"

said the President thoughtfully. "You mean the people want short wars?"

Always one to give the people what they wanted, Mr. Nixon declared a 32-day war on Laos, followed by a 17-day invasion of Burma and a long weekend in Kathmandu.

In each case, American troops would storm in, rifles in one hand, watches in the other, capture villages, bridges and strong points—and then, at least 15 minutes ahead of schedule—pull out.

The invaded countries never seemed to mind too much, particularly as the U.S. provided reparations to "rebuild their war-shattered economies." Indeed, the demand grew.

"Lower Volta has been one of America's most loyal and faithful friends in Africa for 20 years," cried the Ambassador from Lower Volta angrily. "Why can't you declare war on us?"

But the State Department had to inform him regretfully that the U.S. had no further openings on its schedule until the fall of 1971.

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WITH EACH Regularly Scheduled War, the President's popularity grew. As victory followed victory of American arms, Mr. Nixon was obviously a shoo-in for reelection in 1972.

It was undoubtedly his desire to capture every single electoral vote that led to his one grave miscalculation.

"My fellow Americans," he said, speaking from his desk in the White House on election eve, "it is with great pride that I want to bring you tonight the shortest war in history. I promise you it will last no longer than 37 minutes."

And, with that, he reached across his desk and rushed a red button.