

Letters to the Editor

Vietnam Orders: Spare Civilians

To the Editor:

I am home on leave from Vietnam and I have read Burke Marshall's Op-Ed article, "We Must End the War" (April 10.) As a responsible officer of the United States Army in Vietnam, I should like to comment on this article from first-hand knowledge.

Mr. Marshall says that "our war in Indochina is based on killing civilians." I must tell you that I know as to my own experience that this monstrous statement is simply not true.

I am on my third tour in that bitter and difficult war. I was an adviser in the Delta in 1963-64 and a brigade commander in the Tet 1968 fighting around Hue, and I am now an adviser again in the Delta. While I believe that the U.S. effort in Vietnam has been and is in a worthy cause, I am only too aware of the cost of the war, in all its dimensions, including the innocent civilians killed and maimed, and I share Mr. Marshall's anguish at the loss of civilian lives.

But I assure you that as a commander and adviser in the field the instructions which I personally and others like me have received have always been absolutely clear. Our solemn and repeated orders have always been to take every possible measure to keep civilians from harm. Wherever I have been, and wherever I have observed, we have gone to extraordinary lengths to do so. We have in fact sometimes exposed our men to increased risks in our efforts to carry out these instructions meticulously.

Mine is no isolated case; these are

the standard instructions of this war. They are not the characteristic instructions of a war "based on killing civilians." Such a horrifying concept is completely antithetical to the personal and professional code which must be the essential equipment of responsible officers in uniform.

Mr. Marshall refers to Lieutenant Calley's case. Lieutenant Calley was court-martialed for a clear and abominable violation of instructions. Despite our most natural grief at what his trial has revealed, it would be a fundamental error to go on to say, as Mr. Marshall does, that the premeditated murder of which Lieutenant Calley has been found guilty "we are now doing daily in Indochina."

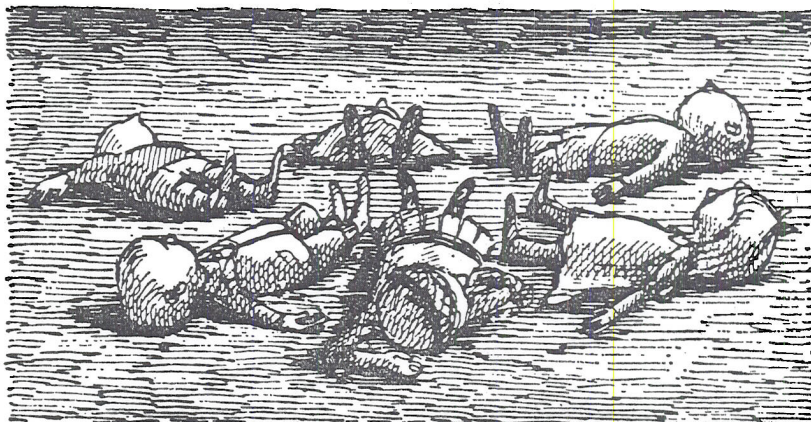
I respect, indeed I admire, Mr. Marshall as a concerned citizen and an able lawyer. I would want him to

know that there are many good and decent men in the United States armed forces in Vietnam, not brutalized by that war, and immensely saddened by the destruction and loss of life and general suffering which this war, like all wars, brings to noncombatants as well as combatants.

These men are laboring well and with some good results in a multifaceted, interdependent military-civilian effort to achieve the limited U.S. objective there—namely, to gain as quickly as possible a reasonable assurance that the people of South Vietnam can determine their own affairs.

I believe you, and Mr. Marshall as well, would find that at the same time these men are doing their utmost, and not without success to keep the war from destroying the innocent.

JOHN H. CUSHMAN
Major General, U.S. Army
Sullivans Island, S.C., April 15, 1971



Edward Gorey