

Catch 266,000,000

South Vietnam's President Thieu must be heartened at the degree of carelessness conveniently exposed in some Pentagon accounting office.

Dismay was mounting in Saigon—and at the Department of Defense—that South Vietnam's war effort might have to be sharply curtailed in the coming weeks if the United States did not provide an extra \$474 million in military aid for the period through June 30. The Administration's lobbying for this supplemental appropriation was accompanied by a smear campaign, led by the American Ambassador in Saigon, Graham Martin, to imply that those hesitating to support President Thieu wholeheartedly could only be dupes of Hanoi.

Wisely resentful of these tactics and fearful of new open-ended commitments in South Vietnam, Congress blocked the new request early this month. Upon that unexpected rebuff, the Defense Department suddenly came up with a previously overlooked \$266 million on its books, appropriated by Congress long ago in connection with the Vietnam war but somehow never spent. Key Congressional leaders, reluctant to go on record as voting more funds for President Thieu but equally fearful of later recriminations if Saigon's forces fared badly, seem ready to suspend normal disbelief at the fortuitousness of this accounting discovery and let the money go to Saigon.

The whole issue of American military support for the South Vietnamese regime will come up for thorough airing in connection with next fiscal year's budget request. Meanwhile it seems perfectly proper to wonder why an unexpected windfall of \$266 million has to be applied so casually to the account of President Thieu—rather than, for instance, more generous education, job training or health benefits for three million American veterans of the Vietnam war.