

Books of The Times

A Nation of Veterans

By JOHN LEONARD

MILITARISM, U.S.A. By Col. James A. Donovan. Foreword by Gen. David M. Shoup. 265 pages. Scribners. \$6.95.

"The rapid deployment and support of a force of over one quarter of a million men to an area 10,000 miles from our shores clearly demonstrates that our logistics system has that capability. Never before has this country been able to field and support in combat so large a force in so short a time over so great a distance."

"The war is far from over, but the future is much brighter and the record shows that it was tactical airpower, U.S. Air Force style, that gave our ground troops the edge they needed to break up the VC drive and turn the tide of battle in our favor."

"There are no greater patriots than those good men who have been maimed in the service of their country."

"The assumption is that war is a kind of game on which nations embark after consulting a computer to see who would come out ahead."

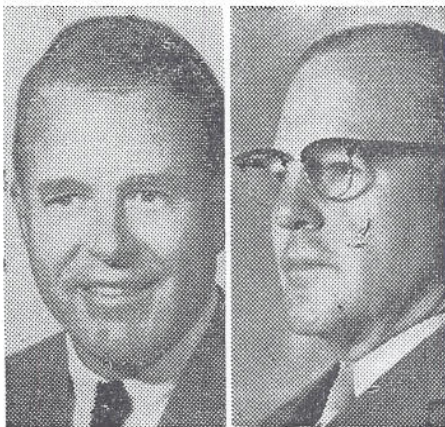
Of these four quotations, three come directly from "Militarism, U.S.A.," by Col. James A. Donovan, United States Marine Corps, retired. They were uttered, respectively, by Robert S. McNamara (1966), Air Force magazine (1966) and Napoleon (somewhat earlier). The fourth quotation is from an article by I. F. Stone, and is included because I think it represents an important point on the compass of Colonel Donovan's argument.

A Chance for Everyone

Colonel Donovan believes that American servicemen were deployed in Southeast Asia simply because we had the capacity to do so, and not because the national interest warranted it. Vietnam gave the Army a chance to test its counterinsurgency doctrines; the Air Force a chance to perfect tactical and strategic bombing strikes; the Marines a chance to try out amphibious coastal attacks and mobile air-ground "inkblot" operations; and the Navy a chance to play in-shore counterinfiltration patrol and riverine-delta warfare games.

He further believes that the bombing of North Vietnam was a "hoax." By October, 1968, we had dropped almost 50 per cent more bombs on Vietnam than in both Europe and the Pacific during all of World War II—2,948,057 tons to 2,057,244 tons—at a cost of about 50 cents a pound of bomb, or \$3-billion. "Never," he says, "were more money and effort wasted with less results to show for it." By July, 1969, according to Gen. John P. McConnell's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, everything was operating in North Vietnam "very nearly as if it had not even been touched." And, adds Colonel Donovan, "a small underequipped army of irregulars [has fought] to a bloody standstill the finest and best-equipped expeditionary force America has ever fielded."

Colonel Donovan attributes the impasse both to faulty strategy (we are an air/sea power and shouldn't have gotten ourselves trapped in an Asian land war) and to faulty psychology (the idea that we can police the world, and that there are military solutions to every political problem). He offers a number of specific proposals for cutting back military manpower and reducing defense appropriations, none of which I am qualified to review. But the design of "Militarism, U.S.A.," which grew out of an Atlantic magazine article by Colonel Donovan and Gen. David M. Shoup,



James A. Donovan

David M. Shoup

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is much broader than just one more critique of our Vietnam war policies.

Several chapters are devoted to the history of the American military establishment from the Spanish-American War to the Safeguard ABM system. Much of this material is familiar, but the incidental facts are fascinating and disturbing. For instance: 2,072 retired senior military officers are employed by defense industries. The Department of Defense owns \$195.5-billion worth of property. L. Mendel Rivers's Charleston Congressional district got quite a few defense plants, submarine and Air Force bases, supply depots and military hospitals after Mr. Rivers became the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. The cost-efficient Mr. McNamara took over a defense budget of \$44.7-billion a year, and left a defense budget of \$80-billion a year.

What the Figures Show

More important are the chapters dealing with our acquiescence to demands by the military for tax monies at home and adventurism abroad. Colonel Donovan believes that the reasons for this acquiescence go deeper than any conspiracy theory about military-industrial complexes. "We are," he says, "a nation of veteran military and naval professionals," 14.9 million World War II veterans, 5.7 million Korean veterans—most of them conditioned by training to respect military codes of honor, patriotism, sacrifice; most of them associated with veterans' groups; many of them (3,182,141 in 1967) receiving compensation and pension benefits. Every American President since Franklin Roosevelt has tried to shore up his image with the personal popularity of generals and admirals, excepting, of course, Dwight Eisenhower.

This is dangerous territory, not really dealt with in Morris Janowitz's "The Professional Soldier" (1960) or Samuel P. Huntington's "The Soldier and the State" (1964). Colonel Donovan goes over it with the same thoughtfulness he brings to R.O.T.C. (he wants liberal-arts majors in the armed services to counterbalance the professional warriors) and military careerism (reminding us of de Tocqueville's observation that "an officer has no property but his pay and no distinction but that of military honors," and so military professionals may desire war "because war creates vacancies"). Still, we are asking questions about the national psychology; we are going to have to work long and hard at getting the answers; and we may not like those answers when we get them.