

Table Talk

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THE VIETNAM PREDICAMENT

by Stan DeCamp
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The war in South Vietnam cannot be won; it dare not be lost. Conflicting reports from the battlefield make absolute decisions difficult, but the situation now present seems to confirm this judgment. No one is winning in South Vietnam, but the country is being devastated. Our one-time advisory position has now become a major commitment of American ground forces. Since July the United States has escalated the conflict, turning it into an American war. There are no lines of battle and the front is everywhere. Death may strike anywhere and those living in this situation live in constant terror.

Bombing of North Vietnam has not brought an end to the war, but only greater escalation. Instead of sealing the border, U.S. air strikes in North Vietnam have led to more and more North Vietnamese soldiers being sent into South Vietnam. U.S. air and sea power has only stiffened Hanoi's resistance rather than weakened it. Does this mean the United States must respond in turn and start the vicious circle of more escalation over again? U.S. military might has depressed Asians more than impressed them. Bombing has thus impelled Hanoi to unleash massive units of its regular army (there are about 375,000 men in the Peoples' Army of North Vietnam, plus an additional million more in its "ready reserve"). Despair, destruction, and the raw exercise of military power prevails in South Vietnam with a decisive victory for either side growing ever more elusive.

Set against this folly, the United States dare not leave South Vietnam. If the U.S. withdraws, western influence and especially our own status will be liquidated in Asia. When the French relin-

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"TRAGEDY OF OUR TIMES"

Dr. Wernher Von Braun, Director of the George E. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, made the following remarks in a commencement address delivered at Wagner College in June of 1965.

"I think one of the greatest tragedies of our time is that so many feel, now that science is providing us with more and more answers, now that we know more and more, there will be less and less need to believe. Now that science tells us more of what nature is about there is less need to believe in God. Many people believe that science and religion are basically incompatible. Again, this is one of the greatest tragedies of our times. We need faith and we need religion more than ever before now that we have learned to unleash forces in nature for which science provides us mechanical answers. . . . how to build bombs--but not the rules on how to cope with them.

"Science and religion are not incompatible. In fact, I think they are sisters. Through science, man tries to better understand creation. Through religion he tries to better understand the Creator. . . . There can be no creation without a Creator. Through science man is trying to learn to harness the forces of nature around him. And I think science will never, never replace religion in this most important role of providing man with the ethical guidance he so desperately needs."

(From N.L.E.C. NEWS BULLETIN)

VIETNAM (cont'd from col. 1)
quished Indo-China in 1954, a power vacuum was created. The U.S. in response tried to fill this void. Backing one unpopular government after another, the (cont'd on page 2)

LIBRARY EXHIBIT

There is a new exhibit of art works in the Library. This time the work of Itzhak Sankowshy is featured. The works are from the collection of Mr. & Mrs. Clayton Berse.

Several of the pieces portray various Old Testament personages, and they are well executed. Special attention should be payed to the grain of the wood, used to enhance the work.

Sankowshy, in addition to his wood engravings, also works in two other media: cold wax and wood sculpture. The Sankowsky works will be here until January 16th, when they will give way to a collection of etchings and drawings by Michael Biddle.

COMING ATTRACTION

In a few weeks Table Talk will be publishing the results of a survey of college students done recently in which the students rated the good and bad points of their professors. The National Lutheran Educational Conference has culled responses from the students that would apply to the faculty of a theological school as well as a college. We shall publish the article at the conclusion of the series on Vietnam beginning in this issue.

VIETNAM (Cont'd)

U.S. sent equipment (much of it outdated) and technical personnel to Saigon. This was done in the name of freedom to contain Communism in Asia and maintain the political independence of South Vietnam. This is still our official aim, but the war is really part of our national self-interest. Our Vietnam policy actually involves the rest of Asia. The "Domino Theory" which says if South Vietnam goes to the Communists, then all of Asia--Laos, Burma, Thailand, India, Malasia-- falls with it, orients the thinking in Washington. In addition, it is felt the Saigon government is so weak (cont'd next col.)

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VIETNAM (Cont'd)

that without U.S. support it would almost certainly tumble to the Communist Viet-Cong within the country.

U.S. military posture maintains if we don't stop the Communists in South Vietnam, we will have to fight them elsewhere. This is the old containment policy as applied against Russia in Europe during the late 1940's. The difficulty is that in Asia against Red China a line cannot be drawn as it was in Europe. The threat of China is primarily a political threat, not a military one as it was in Europe. Containment in Europe worked because we used military power to halt Communist expansion. But political power is needed in Asia. Thus, in South Vietnam we are in a blind alley, because we are alone trying to exert military power.

The extreme dedication of the Viet-Cong makes winning this war dubious. These are men dedicated to a cause with a fierce determination which appears unshakable despite enormous suffering. Against their terrorist activities in the cities there is no defense. Secretary McNamara has said that "no matter how many Americans we send to South Vietnam there simply are not enough men and ways to prevent terrorist attacks," such as that which recently occurred in blowing up a Saigon military hotel. This kind of reckless devotion by the Viet-Cong terrorist makes controlling him almost impossible.

The Viet-Cong are being supplied from North Vietnam over supply routes running from Red China, through Laos and (cont'd on page 3)

VIETNAM (cont'd from page 2)

Cambodia. To stop the supplies from coming, these lines and bases in these countries would have to be bombed. This means going to war with two other "neutralist" countries. Red China, once bombed, would enter the war with its waves of human courage and Russia would be forced into the fighting. No one is yet willing to make a decision for that kind of global consumption.

The position and attitude of Red China and Russia are significant in this regard. Red China is encouraging with direct military supplies the North Vietnamese. Though the North Vietnamese have had a tradition suspicious of China, they seem to be ever under Red China's influence. Indeed, Communist China has promised regular army troops to fight in South Vietnam if this becomes necessary. Red China seems most to be inducing Hanoi's determination not to negotiate. Indeed China does not want negotiations but prefers a war of interminable duration. This would pin down Americans by the hundreds of thousands on Asian soil. Such a war would have the effect of "using up" American men and at the same time keeping China's people in a hyper-state of anti-American action. With five hundred million people China could lose five million men with little effect. Such a consequence for the U.S. would be disastrous. As Spain learned in its own civil war, a nation cannot lose the power of its manhood (as we are doing in South Vietnam) without desimating itself for generations. China knows she can continue to suffer such losses--can the U.S.? Again we are presented with a predicament! The longer the war continues, the more Americans are killed, and the more demoralized the U.S. becomes; yet withdrawal is untenable.

For Russia's part she doesn't want the U.S. removed from Vietnam as this would leave her alone to face Red China in Asia--note Russia's recent bitter denunciation of U.S. peace efforts and her own refusal to intervene in Hanoi. Russia wants us to remain. The Soviet Union sees the advantage of tying up the

U.S. in their area of the world so it can devote itself to other problem areas.
(cont'd next col.)

VIETNAM (CONT'D)

Against the background pictured above, the U.S. has now committed itself to an "American War," fought, paid and bled by Americans. U.S. troops are rolling in, now over 165,000 men with a rise to 250,000 by next spring. Air bombardment in the jungles continues daily. Captured Viet-Cong have indicated the enemy is being hurt, but the great influx of regular North Vietnamese troops is acting as a balance. Rebel supplies within the country are running low and the people in the villages (once the great support for the Viet-Cong) are less inclined to aid them. The all-out communist offensive expected last summer by General Giap did not materialize and American marines in their "search and destroy" operations have been notably successful. The great battle of Plei Me in which hundreds of Viet-Cong were killed demonstrated American ability to stand up and inflict heavy damage upon guerrilla forces. (Our losses that week were more than the total combined casualties of any week in the Korean War, however.) This would point to a feeling of optimism.

But the final irony of this war may be that even if the U.S. were able to score a decisive military victory, South Vietnam might still be lost. Our best experts estimate that at least one million men will be needed to subdue the country. Assuming even this the communist guerrillas will simply fade underground, back into China and Laos, continue attacks, build and come back stronger for another try. The country needs to be subdued, foot by foot, but in doing this homes and villages, women and children, as well as the enemy, will be killed. We may conquer the land and lose the people. For the people do not and cannot understand why their homes must be detonated, their villages destroyed. Thus, the U.S. becomes the enemy to the very people we are trying to help. The refugee problem is already enormous and growing worse. Even if war ends the country cannot survive without continued U.S. presence--militarily to control the guerrillas, politically and financially to support the government. In the face of this, the tragedy is the war cannot be won.

(To be continued next week.)