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soliloquy 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, APRIL 20—A short while ago, an American general reportedly received a letter from his teenage daughter named Becky. She asked him why he and the U. S. soldiers were fighting the war for the Vietnamese. He wrote back a rather passionate reply explaining the war was as important to the United States as to Vietnam and it was America's duty to help the ~~Vietnamese~~ Vietnamese. The general's wife reportedly replied, "That was a ~~beau~~ beautiful letter you wrote Becky, but she thinks you're biased."

The general, involved in a personal credibility gap with his own daughter, reached the simple conclusion: "We're in this fix today because the American people don't understand this war. They don't understand the nature of the enemy. Maybe if they spent more time studying it, then they would understand it's not just a Vietnamese war."

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soliloquy 2 (normass/deepe)

And, the general's reported high-level, net judgment: "Never in American history have the stakes been so high—or so much in doubt."

More and more in the provinces, senior officers and officials are practicing almost Buddha-styled introspection about the broader dimensions of this conflict. It is as though they suddenly viewed the war as an inter-crystallization of the political, psychological, economic and military facets, no longer as separate compartments of the war, but as a solid, integrated whole.

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soliloquy 3 (normass/deepe)

These meditative soliloquies cover new dimensions of the military aspects of the Vietnam conflict, profound contemplation on the political, economic and psychological facets of it--and re-thinking ~~it~~ about the Western press corps. In and of themselves, these soliloquies would probably not be considered worthy of coverage in either news ~~or~~ stories or in official dispatches to Washington. Yet, they are grievously etched in the minds of leaders who may be making policy decisions for America in the coming decade.

This process of introspection began for the field leadership echelon with the Communist ^Tet offensive in late January and it was compounded by President Johnson's peace ~~offensive~~ offensive two ~~month~~ months later.

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soliloquy 4 (normass/deepe)

These ~~an~~ senior officials in the ~~provinc~~ provinces believed they had won a smashing military victory during the Tet offensive--but lost the political-psychological side of the battle.

"The peace offensive (by President Johnson) is an outgrowth of the Communists' psychological advantage or benefit," one high-level source explained. "The ^e enemy has given the world the impression of much greater capability than he actually has. All he has to do now is ^{to} hurl three B-40 rocket rounds at the American Embassy and ~~then~~ he will get headlines all over the world and everyone will fear he's invaded Saigon....

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soliloquy 5 (normass/deepe)

"If the enemy (the Communists) negotiates," the source continued, "he'll go to the conference table with his strongest hand. All he has to do is to attack. Even if he fails in the attack, he succeeds in making a point. Though his force may be wiped out, the fact the fella could attack makes an impression on the World War II-type of mind. If the American people had deserted us in the Battle of the Bulge, like they did here, I don't know what we'd have done...."

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soliloquy 6 (normass/deepe)

Before the Tet offensive, "the Allies went through a period of deluding ourselves," another source explained. "We ~~did~~ didn't understand the enemy. For one thing the enemy has ~~in~~ ^{many} initiatives we forget about. Sometimes he's like a mad dog. ~~Someone~~ people ask me to guess the intention of ~~Giap~~ ^{Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap} (Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap--commander of all North Vietnamese forces). This is an exercise in futility. There's no way for me to get on the same wave length with him. I can assess his capabilities--but, his intentions--well, that's a real never-neverland. The enemy will take great casualties and this is an ^{we} initiate he has and you must give him this credit.

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soliloquy 7 (normass/deepe)

"If someone comes up and hits you in the face, maybe you kill him. But still the fact is you got slapped in the face--and everyone comes up and asks you why you let it happen. But you can't stop it, even by killing him later.

"We Americans have gotten tangled in our thinking," he continued. "Wars are a big chaos. They are always fought on matters of principle, but individuals can't identify with the principles. How do you define freedom while watching a Vietnamese house ~~burn~~ burning?

"We identify with the superficial aspects of the war. We are horrified at the house-burning--but for the Vietnamese owner maybe it means being free of Communist taxation and terror."

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soliloquy 8 (normass/deepe)

The source gave the example of Walter Cronkite, the national television news commentator who recently criticized American policy in Vietnam. "Walter told me he had always come to Vietnam as a dove and left as a hawk," the source explained. "Until the last time when he saw the destruction of Hue. He asked me 'How can you justify this war when you're destroying the people. We claim we are preserving Hue, but we destroyed all the homes'.

"My answer was he couldn't identify with the principles involved. I said he was making his observations on superficial conclusions. He could see the destruction but he had no idea of the freedom involved for the people. For the Vietnamese, having their houses burned is awful--but they know if the Communists take-over, they'll be shot.

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soliloquy 9 (normass/deepe)

"But what I said made no difference," the source lamented. "In World War II, what the generals said was believed by the troops, by the press and by the people. Now the generals have no credibility.

"I can say I see a great groundswell of animosity against the Viet Cong," he explained. "But Mert Perry (Newsweek correspondent with five years of reporting experience in Vietnam) says the opposite. Who will believe me? Who will Ho Chi Minh believe? The press corps is a factor in this war, in getting Ho Chi Minh to change his mind. So Mert Perry is just as important as the generals."

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soliloquy 10 (normass/deepe)

Or, as another source ~~explained~~ explained, "In the Tet offensive, the ~~enemy~~ ~~th~~ enemy though he was going to win a military-political-psychological victory. He thought he was going to bring down the government, the Vietnamese army would disintegrate and rally to his side.... But it didn't happen. Still the enemy got the press carrying stories, emphasizing the psychological factor. The guy is smart. He didn't plan or figure this to be his objective. ~~the~~ the objective of his making this 36-city effort. It was just a bonus that came out of it...."

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soliloquy 11 (normass/deepe)

Another senior sourced explained his view of another twist-around in the public thinking. "There may be a misconception of what we" (the Allies) are trying to do in Vietnam. We have never said we could win a military victory in Vietnam. Neither the President (Johnson) nor anyone else ever said that officially. We did say we could convince the enemy he couldn't win by force, and therefore he would have to seek a settlement by political means through negotiations. We ~~never~~ never said we'd destroy him. We said publicly we had no interest in bringing down Ho Chi Minh and his government. We were simply trying to get him to cease and desist his invasion from North Vietnam....The search-and-destroy operation (the Allied offensive strategy) has also connoted a false impression of what we intended to do. Destroy doesn't mean a scorched earth policy--but some erroneously think it has led to this."

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soliloquy 12 (normass/deepe)

On the military side of the conflict's ledger, the field leadership showed a nostalgia for the black-and-white conventional wars, a frustration with this curious blend of ~~guerrilla~~ ^{American} guerrilla and conventional forces and an ambivalence with the policy of limited objectives.

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soliloquy 13 (normass/deepe)

"We have this idea of limited wars with limited resources and limited objectives fought by certain rules," one source said. "We think somehow the enemy is rational and he'll decide to quit. But what happens when the enemy has unlimited resources (because of Communist ~~bloc~~ aid), unlimited objectives and unlimited war (using Cambodia and Laos) and doesn't play by the rules?.... This light at the end of the tunnel has a ~~seri~~ serious aspect. Now things seem to be adrift. That's the nature of limited war. Budgetary-wise, the country's (the U. S.) approach is that we must do within certain boundaries. Suppose the budget allows for 500 new helicopters for Vietnam—but that's not enough. The Vietnamese troops are outgunned and need helicopters too—so they get criticized for not ~~beef~~ being as effective as they should be. Who's to blame? Not Westy (General/ William Westmoreland). It's the nature of the beast...."

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soliloquy 14 (normass/deepe)

At the rice-paddy level of the military conflict, one source explained: "~~See p 10~~ The problem with our (Allied) strategy is dealing with the nature of the enemy. We must bring maximum pressure on the enemy from top to bottom (of his military structure). There's an ~~army~~ Viet Cong squad in most hamlets, a platoon per most villages, a company for each district and a battalion for each province. Before we fought the main-force to the exclusion of the smaller forces—which lived on the main force threat and could un-do everything.

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soliloquy 15 (normass/deepe)

"Nothing is decisive in the enemy's military structure," he continued. "and nothing will cause the whole structure of ^{it} to fall. The Communist organization isn't built that way. It is cellular. If we wipe out a squad in a village, maybe it will have no effect on the village next door. We are now trying to cope with the whole spectrum of enemy forces--and this isn't an appealing strategy because it does not promise a surgical type of thing cutting out the enemy's vitals....

"We would like to have a strategy like in ~~Genet~~ Germany--when we defeated the enemy army, the war would be over. Here, there's nothing to focus on in the enemy structure. It's like a cancer--as distinct from an appendicitis. It's an illness that can not be ~~cur~~ cured by a simple treatment or surgical operation. We have to treat the whole patient. That's what we are faced with here."

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soliloquy 16 (Pr (normass/deepe)

As an example, the source explained that during and following the Communists Tet offensive in the provinces around Saigon, the Communists had suffered heavy casualties militarily. In one district, a 500-man battalion was ~~reduced to~~ destroyed down to 50 men, the battalion commander, executive officer and political commissar ~~we~~ were captured; the battalion radios were destroyed and the ~~remain~~ remnants were short of food.

"When an Allied battalion is half-strength, we wipe it off the books," he explained. "But, in this war fifty enemy in a district against a 30-man government outpost is still important. If they assassinate the village chiefs at night or destroy the bridges, all these types of actions are meaningful in this war. Even though the enemy force is militarily ineffective, we can't measure enemy losses in conventional terms. In conventional terms, I'd say the enemy has suffered a tremendous military defeat during and after Tet. But, here we can't make broad sweeping ~~statements~~ statements like that.

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soliloquy 17 (normass/deepe)

"Right now, the enemy isn't capable of achieving a big military ~~success~~ success," he continued. "But that is the least troublesom². The difficulty is the psychological impact. Of course, if I ~~id~~ didn't say that the difficulty was psychological, then he couldn't make ~~a~~ any psychological gains."

Lamenting the dilemma of both Vietnamese and American officers, he explained, "Now, I get exhortations from all sides to ~~be~~ forge ahead--to continue the ~~the~~ advance. But people forget I'm not on a frontline. I'm in ~~the~~ the middle of ~~the~~ 360 degrees--and anyway I move, I'm ~~the~~ advancing."

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soliloquy 18 (normass/deepe)

(Hank: I'm sending this in as a zeepager or any other way you chose to use it. Regards ~~Bev~~ Bev).

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