

*South Viet Nam's army took the war to the Viet Cong yesterday in a day-long land, sea and air attack near the Cambodian border, 90 miles west of Saigon. Only three Viet Cong Communists were killed, 19 captured. Some 500 suspected Viet Cong were also rounded up, but many of these were probably villagers fleeing the battle area. Two American advisers and four government troops were wounded. Another tough day in a long, tough war.*

## As Saigon Saw Him: Intimate Glimpse of McNamara the Man

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SAIGON.

The only thing that Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara refuses to tolerate from anyone giving him information is—emotion.

Last year, during an intensive briefing on Vietnamese strategic hamlets, he asked a senior United States aid official to document his statements.

"The guy said he used 'intuition,' and McNamara almost dropped his teeth," one observer reported.

In another case, McNamara asked a Pentagon general for an important study on troop rotations. The General said it was impossible, and vociferously expounded the viewpoint of his service. McNamara asked if he could rotate one man. The general agreed he could. "Then go back and re-study the problem and tell me how to rotate a thousand," McNamara reportedly told him.

In addition, the 46-year-old Secretary believes a man who cannot explain to him clearly and lucidly a subject probably does not understand the subject at all. One night in Washington he was helping his son with his mathematics. His son said he understood the problem, but could not explain it. "Then you don't understand the problem at all," his father replied. McNamara has put a premium on being articulate.

All this has given ammunition to the idea that McNamara is "an IBM machine with two legs," that he is oiled three times a day instead of taking food.

Is this true?

## COLD, CALCULATING MIND

Close associates of his say this is a superficial viewpoint. And disinterested American officials who have seen him operate in Viet Nam agree. "McNamara is not Mr. IBM," one of them explained. "He has a cold, calculating mind, but he's interested in the proportion and ratios of the picture and then the logic and common sense should follow. One of the intangibles here is motivation. You can't IBM that. But he recognizes it as one of the foremost problems."

The computer idea has also grown up because of McNamara's oft-repeated remark that he's on the right track "if I know more about the subject than anyone else." And he has spared no effort to learn.

"He does his homework better than anyone else," one American official here observed. "In the 8-hour session I was in he took more notes than anyone in the room—and there were 60 in the room. He also had his notes from previous trips, and he would stop a provincial advisor and ask him to explain changes from his other trips."

McNamara first visited Viet Nam in May, 1962, but his most intensive fact-finding trip was 15 months later when he spent days visiting all four corps areas, helicoptering to isolated hamlets and battlefield command posts, sloshing through red mud and being briefed by field officers on the spot.

Yet, when he left Viet Nam, he publicly stated that though the political situation was serious the war was going well and that 1,000 American advisors would be withdrawn in three months. But the war was then going so badly the military substructure collapsed a month later.

### WHY THE ERRORS

Why had he been mistaken?

1. His American officers had relied, without first-hand checking, upon statistics of their Vietnamese counterparts. These statistics were designed more to please the Vietnamese President than to pinpoint accurately where they stood in the war effort. Even now, most American statistics are gathered from Vietnamese military officers.

2. Almost all civilian and military Americans in Viet Nam are applying the yardsticks of United States to Asia and come out with the wrong conclusions. This will remain a standard problem.

3. Many knowledgeable officers avoided specifying the problem and corrective measures so their opinions would not clash with those of their senior officers or hurt the feelings of their Vietnamese counterparts.

An almost unbelievable example of how McNamara happened to hear some vital viewpoints occurred on his last field trip in September when he visited the southernmost province of An Xuyen, one of the toughest Viet Cong strongholds.

For the allotted one-hour briefing, the Vietnamese and American top brass in the area gave such a "general and glossy" version of the local situation that one low-ranking officer admitted "we were in tears." When the top brass could not answer specific questions, McNamara broke his rule of punctuality, stayed an extra hour to hear low-echelon field officers tell him, while the Saigon commanders glared, that:

The Viet Cong strength was increasing, the war was going badly, the strategic hamlet program was fizzling and the Viet Cong had so much support from the population "they were running out of recruiting forms."

## MORE THAN FACT-FINDING

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During a delay in the anteroom of the rest room, McNamara motioned one of the local young officers away from the Saigon generals so he could talk in private to him. All this led one brusque sergeant, in an exaggerated way, to exclaim, "When the Secretary of Defense has to get his information in the latrine, something's wrong with the system."

This unscheduled briefing was a grim foreboding. Only a month later, a military coup d'etat crushed President Ngo Dinh Diem, and amidst a whirlwind change of military commanders and provincial officials, the Viet Cong launched their toughest offensive which smashed the vital strategic hamlet program and caused hundreds of villagers and armed militia to desert the government side. Six weeks ago, the first military junta was replaced by goateed Gen. Nguyen Khanh and more military and administrative changes have resulted.

What has McNamara done this trip? On the fact-finding side, he has done in the conference room what he had done previously in provincial headquarters, except that now, after four trips to Viet Nam, he does have his own terms of personal observation and reference.

But there is much more to this trip than fact-finding. McNamara—and the Johnson administration—is trying something totally new in Asia—the New Hampshire method of campaigning in the boondocks.

McNamara and Gen. Khanh have barnstormed from the Mekong Delta to the northern plains to win the support of the Vietnamese people and to assure them that the United States is behind Viet Nam—and Gen. Khanh. It was ironical that while his New Hampshire ballots were being counted, Henry Cabot Lodge watched McNamara make the victory sign with outstretched arms and shout "Viet Nam muon nam" (Long live Viet Nam) before a tumultuous—even though staged—demonstration. Many observers wondered if McNamara or Lodge was the politician of the moment.

Even if McNamara is gathering better information the question is whether the new method of U. S. campaigning in Viet Nam is going to succeed or fail.

Some argue that nothing else is working in Viet Nam and this campaigning might build a spirit of nationalism in the people. Those against argue, "This is not New Hampshire. Votes don't count here and you can't win a war kissing babies." The Johnson administration has gambled on the first argument and may prove right. But in this country where bullets replace ballots, only time will tell.