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If you ask a junior officer what he thinks our war aims are in Vietnam, he usually replies without hesitation: "To punish aggression." It is unkind to try to draw him into a discussion of what constitutes aggression and what is defense (the Bay of Pigs, Santo Domingo, Goa?), for he really has no further ideas on the subject. He has been indoctrinated, just as much as the North Vietnamese P.O.W., who tells the interrogation team he is fighting to "liberate the native soil from the American aggressors"—maybe more. Only, the young American does not know it; he probably imagines that he is *thinking* when he produces that formula. And yet he does believe in something profoundly, though he may not be able to find the words for it: free enterprise. A parcel that to the American mind wraps up for delivery hospitals, sanitation, roads, harbors, schools, air travel, Jack Daniel's, convertibles, Stimudents. That is the C-ration that keeps him going. The American troops are not exactly conscious of bombing, shelling, and defoliating to defend free enterprise (which they cannot imagine as being under serious attack), but they plan to come out of the war with their values intact. Which means that they must spread them, until everyone is convinced, by demonstration, that the American way is better, just as American seed strains are better and American pigs are better. Their conviction is sometimes baldly stated. North of Da Nang, at a

Marine base, there is an ice-cream plant on which is printed in large official letters the words: "ICE-CREAM PLANT: ARVN MORALE BUILDER." Or it may wear a humanitarian disguise, e.g. Operation Concern, in which a proud little town in Kansas airlifted 110 pregnant sows to a humble little town in Vietnam.

Occasionally the profit motive is undisguised. Flying to Hue in a big C-130, I heard the pilot and the co-pilot discussing their personal war aim, which was to make a killing, as soon as the war was over, in Vietnamese real estate. From the air, while they kept an eye out for VC, they had surveyed the possibilities and had decided on Nha Trang—"beautiful sand beaches"—better than Cam Ranh Bay—a "desert." They disagreed as to the kind of development that would make the most money: the pilot wanted to build a high-class hotel and villas, while the co-pilot thought that the future lay with low-cost housing. I found the conversation hallucinating, but the next day, in Hue, I met a Marine colonel who was back in uniform after retirement; having fought the Japanese, he had made his killing as a "developer" in Okinawa and invested the profits in a frozen-shrimp import business (from Japan) supplying restaurants in San Diego. War, a cheap form of mass tourism, opens the mind to business opportunities.

All these developers were Californians. In fact, the majority of the Americans I met in the field in Vietnam were WASPs from Southern California; most of the rest were from the rural South. In nearly a month I met *one* Jewish boy in the services (a nice young naval officer from Pittsburgh), two Boston Irish and a captain from Connecticut. Given the demographic shift toward the Pacific in the United States, this Californian ascen-

ancy gave me the peculiar feeling that I was seeing the future of our country as if on a movie screen. Nobody has dared make a war movie about Vietnam, but the prevailing unreality, as experienced in base camps and headquarters, is eerily like a movie, a contest between good and evil, which is heading toward a happy ending, when men with names like "Colonel Culpepper," "Colonel Derryberry," "Captain Stanhope" will vanquish Victor Charlie. The state that has a movie actor for governor and a movie actor for U.S. senator seemed to be running the show.

No doubt the very extensive press and television coverage of the war has made the participants very conscious of "exposure," that is, of role-playing. Aside from the usual networks, Italian television, Mexican television, the BBC, CBC were all filming the "other" war during the month of February, and the former Italian Chief of Staff, General Liuzzi, was covering it as a commentator for the *Corriere della Sera*. The effect of all this attention on the generals, colonels, and lesser officers was to put a premium on "sincerity."

Nobody likes to be a villain, least of all a WASP officer, who feels he is playing the heavy in Vietnam through some awful mistake in typecasting. He *knows* he is good at heart, because everything in his home environment—his TV set, his paper, his Frigidaire, the President of the United States—has promised him that, whatever shortcomings he may have as an individual, collectively he is good. The "other" war is giving him the chance to clear up the momentary misunderstanding created by those bombs, which, through no fault of his, are happening to hit civilians. He has *warned* them to get away, dropped leaflets saying he was coming and urging "Charlie" to defect, to join the

other side; lately, in pacified areas, he has even taken the precaution of having his targets cleared by the village chief before shelling or bombing, so that now the press officer giving the daily briefing is able to reel out: "Operation Blockhouse. 29 civilians reported wounded today. Two are in 'poor' condition. Target had been approved by the district chief." Small thanks he gets, our military hero, for that scrupulous restraint. But in the work of pacification, his real self comes out, clear and true. Digging wells for the natives (too bad if the water comes up brackish), repairing roads ("Just a jungle trail before we came," says the captain, though his colonel, in another part of the forest, has just been saying that the engineers had uncovered a fine stone roadbed built eighty years ago by the French), building a house for the widow of a Viet Cong (so far unreconciled; it takes time).

American officers in the field can become very sentimental when they think of the good they are doing and the hard row they have to hoe with the natives, who have been brainwashed by the Viet Cong. A Marine general in charge of logistics in I-Corps district was deeply moved when he spoke of his Marines: moving in to help rebuild some refugee housing with scrap lumber and sheet tin (the normal materials were cardboard boxes and flattened beer cans); working in their off-hours to build desks for a school; giving their Christmas money for a new high school; planning a new marketplace. The Marine Corps had donated a children's hospital, and in that hospital, right up the road ("Your ve-hickels will conduct you"—he pronounced it like "nickels") was a little girl who had been wounded during a Marine assault. "We're nursing her back to

health," he intoned—and paused, like a preacher accustomed, at this point, to hearing an "Amen"; his PIO (Information Officer) nodded three times. In the hospital, I asked to see the little girl. "Oh, she's gone home," said the PIO. "Nursed her back to health." In reality the little girl was still there, but it was true, her wounds were nearly healed.

A young Marine doctor, blue-eyed, very good-looking, went from bed to bed, pointing out what was the matter with each child and showing what was being done to cure it. There was only the one war casualty; the rest were suffering from malnutrition (the basic complaint everywhere), skin diseases, worms; one had a serious heart condition; two had been badly burned by a stove, and one, in the contagious section, had the plague. The doctor showed us the tapeworm, in a bottle, he had extracted from one infant. A rickety baby was crying, and a middle-aged corpsman picked it up and gave it its bottle. They were plainly doing a good job, under makeshift conditions and without laboratory facilities. The children who were well enough to sit up appeared content; some even laughed, shyly. No amusements were provided for them, but perhaps it was sufficient amusement to be visited by tiptoeing journalists. And it could not be denied that it was a break for these children to be in a Marine hospital, clean, well-fed, and one to a bed. They were benefiting from the war, at least for the duration of their stay; the doctor was not sanguine, for the malnutrition cases, about what would happen when the patients went home. "We keep them as long as we can," he said, frowning. "But we can't keep them forever. They have to go back to their parents."

Compared to what they were used to, this short taste of the American way of life no doubt was delicious for Vietnamese children. John Morgan, in the London *Sunday Times*, described another little Vietnamese girl up near the DMZ—do they have one to a battalion?—who had been wounded by Marine bullets ("A casualty of war," that general repeated solemnly. "A casualty of war") and whom he saw carried in one night to a drinking party in sick bay, her legs bandaged, a spotlight playing on her, while the Marines pressed candy and dollar bills into her hands and had their pictures taken with her; she had more dolls than Macy's, they told him—"that girl is real spoiled." To spoil a child you have injured and send her back to her parents, with her dolls as souvenirs, is pharisee virtue, just as it is pharisaical to fill a child's stomach and send it home to be hungry again. The young doctor, being a doctor, was possibly conscious of the fakery—from a responsible medical point of view—of the "miracle" cures he was effecting; that was why he frowned. Meanwhile, however, the Marine Corps brass could show the "Before" and "After" to a captive audience. In fact two. The studio audience of children, smiling and laughing and clapping, and the broader audience of their parents, who, when allowed to visit, could not fail to be awed by the "other" side of American technology. And beyond that still a third audience—the journalists and their readers back home, who would recognize the Man in White and his corpsmen, having brought them up, gone to school with them, seen them on TV, in soap opera. I felt this myself, a relieved recognition of the familiar face of America. These are the American boys we know at once, even in an Asian

context, bubbling an Asian baby. We do not recognize them, helmeted, in a bomber aiming cans of napalm at a thatched village. We have a credibility gap.

Leaving the hospital, I jolted southward in a jeep, hanging on, swallowing dust; the roads, like practically everything in Vietnam, have been battered, gouged, scarred, torn up by the weight of U.S. matériel. We passed Marines' laundry, yards and yards of it, hanging outside native huts—the dark-green battle cloth spelled money. Down the road was a refugee camp, which did not form part of the itinerary. This, I realized, must be “home” to some of the children we had just seen; the government daily allowance for a camp family was ten piasters (six cents) a day—sometimes twenty if there were two adults in the family. Somebody had put a streamer, in English, over the entrance: “REFUGEES FROM COMMUNISM.”

This was a bit too much. The children's hospital had told the story the Americans were anxious to get over. Why put in the commercial? And who was the hard sell aimed at? Not the refugees, who could not read English and who, if they were like all the other refugees, had fled, some from the Viet Cong and some from the Americans and some because their houses had been bombed or shelled. Not the journalists, who knew better. Whoever carefully lettered that streamer, crafty Marine or civilian, had applied all his animal cunning to selling himself.