**'From the Washington Evening Star, Nov. 9, 1969: "Let Them Fight It Out" — Growing GI Disillusion Casts Doubt on Morale Claims**

**By Donald Kirk**

**Saigon. — The worn-out cliche of generals and master sergeants that "morale over here is great" no longer seems to apply to men in the field.**

**Unlike the veterans of previous tours in Vietnam, many of those here now say the United States should get out — as quickly as possible. "Leave it to the gooks to fight it out between themselves" is a typical comment.**

**Soldiers do not seem to care particularly which "gooks" finally win the war — "our gooks" or "their gooks." To the Americans slogging through the rice paddies and jungles, under blazing sun or mon.soon rain, all Vietnamese are "gooks" whether fighting for the Communists or the Saigon government.**

**The widespread use of the term "gook," a leftover of World "War II and the Korean conflict, reflects the repugnance and aversion of most soldiers toward the citizens of the country they are ordered to defend.**

**The term, spoken with contempt, hatred or simple resignation, symbolizes a contradiction between the attitude of the average "grunt" or infantryman and that of American ofiicials still intent on "winning the hearts and minds of the populace."**

**SENSE OF futility**

**The reasons for GI opposition to the war range from lack of support at home for what they are doing to a sense of futility in patrolling the same patch of jungle day in and day out without any prospect of real victory.**

**Some soldiers express support for antiwar demonstrators at home, but many despise the demonstrators and center their discontent on the failure of the United States to throw all of its resources into winning a military victory. Whatever the reasons, however, the prevalent GI attitude now goes far beyond routine complaints against authority or per.sonal hardship.**

 **"It's a crazy war," mused Spc. 4 Charles Rose, resting in the back of an armored personnel carrier in between patrols from a firebase operated by the 25th Infantry Division some 30 miles northwest of here. "It ain't really worthwhile."**

**To Rose, like many of the other soldiers interviewed at firebases around the country, one of the most disillusioning realizations was that the Vietnamese did not like the Americans.**

**"We went to a village and we asked the people some questions," said Rose, a 20-year-old former farm boy. "All they said was, 'Who's VC?' They acted like they never heard of them. The people don't give a damn for us."**

**GI's often are not aware that the VC will threaten and possibly kill villagers who provide them with information, but the sense of hostiliy also is manifest in plainly "friendly" areas. Outside the bases taxi-drivers, .soft-drink vendors and the like wait to charge unsuspecting soldiers five or 10 times the going prices for their services.**

**"These people are just out for our money," was a typical GI observation. "They want us to liiiht for them," oh.served one soldier, "and then they'll take us for all they can while we're here. That's all they care about."**

**"If they don't want us to help them, now's the time to go home," said Pfc. Ronald Dorsey. 21. a radio operator from Atlanta, Ga. "As long as the people don't want us here, I don't think we .should he here."**

**The inbred Vietnamese suspicion of foreigners, whether Americans, French, Chinese or Japanese, does not seem to puzzle the troops so much, however, as the opposition to the war in the United States.**

**DISSENT LOUD**

**Despite occasional efforts by Armed Forces Radio in Saigon to downplay criticism of the war, the message of dissent at home gets through loud and clear to the men in the field. They hear reports of anti-war statements by senators and demonstrations by students.**

**Soldiers two, three and four years ago almost unanimously viewed such reports with disdain and disgust. To the men who were then fighting the war, the demonstrators "back in the world" were "draft-dodgers" who were too frightened to go to the war themselves.**

**Many Americans here still hew to this view, but many others now applaud the antiwar dissidents. "They should keep on demonstrating," said one soldier. "Then maybe we'll all get to go home."**

**"If I was there, I'd join 'em," remarked a 22-year-old sergeant, James O. Smith of San Diego. "The demonstrations are 'No. 1.' I don't think half the people here believe in this war."**

**Pfc. Robert Jones, 19, countered that the demonstrations would not "help the cause" even if war was pointless.**

**"They won't get us out of here any faster," he said, "and they might just encourage the gooks to fight harder against us." To Jones, a native of Memphis, the central question was whether or not the United States planned to fight to the finish or merely maintain a stalemate.**

**RISKS CAUSE GRIPES**

 **"I can see the point in the war to fight to win," he said. "If the war is to stop communism, I'd a lot rather stop it in Vietnam than somewhere else. But I can't see any reason for just fighting it half way."**

**The "half-way" nature of the war ranks as easily the greatest complaint among those soldiers who might support it as long as the United States had any intention of winning. The most frequent gripe among infantrymen is they must risk their lives patrolling rice paddies and jungles designated as "no-fire zones" by their superiors.**

**The reason for this designation in most cases is plain enough: artillery and bombs might kill and wound civilians and do more to injure than help the allied cause.**

**To the average GI. however, this reasoning makes little sense, particularly when some "civilians" turn out to be enemy soldiers or informants. And many of the troops are even less convinced of restrictions on going into enemy base areas along the Cambodian border.**

**"This war will always be just a stalemate," observed a GI in a battalion of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, responsible for covering the jungles of War Zone C along the frontier "Either we should invade Cambodia or go back home. There's no middle course."**

**The sense of puzzlement, frustration and bitterness permeates the attitudes of young officers as well as enlisted men. It is not uncommon these days to find lieutenants and captains expressing complete agreement with the "antiwar" views of some of the troops beneath them.**

**WAR BELIEF SHAKEN**

**A lieutenant at a 25th Division fire base singled out a visiting reporter and ad- vised him "None of the men here believe in this war."**

**The lieutenant claimed only the Regular Army officers — career men — were enthusiastic about fighting much longer. "Don't believe what they tell you," the lieutenant remarked when his superior officers were out of hearing. "We're just here because we have no choice and for no other reason."**

**Like the enlisted men, however, officers present a wide variety of views.**

**"Personally, I think we should nuke 'em (hit with nuclear weapons)," remarked a second lieutenant in the 1st Cavalry Division. "We should have increased the bombing of North Vietnam and not have stopped it. That was the worst mistake of the war."**

**Amid these conflicting viewpoints, a significant number of officers and men also support the present policy of the administration of gradual withdrawal of American troops and "replacement" of them by Vietnamese units.**

**"It's their country, their weather, their insects," remarked Pfc. Francis Mc- Carten, 20, of New York. "They can speak to anyone they meet. Anything the VC can do, they can do. If they thought it was their war, then they would fight it."**

**"Leave it to the gooks to fight for themselves," was the advice of a lieutenant who had led a platoon in War Zone C. "It's their country. They know that jungle better than we do. We're lost there."**

**Despite the general decline in troop morale, virtually no soldier admitted his personal attitude and views had alfected his performance.**

**"It hasn't reached that point yet," said a member of an artillery crew, "because we know we only have so much time to do here, and we just mark off the days on our calendars.”**

**Other factors also tend to keep soldiers from refusing orders or openly rebelling. Helicopters fly hot food and mail out to the field. Post exchanges sell luxury goods as well as practical necessities at all major installations. Even on small artillery bases the troops get two cans of beer a day.**

**And then in the middle of his tour in Vietnam, every GI goes on a six-day leave in one of the nightclub- and girl-filled cities of Asia and even to Honolulu or Australia. No other country in history has offered this kind of diversion or spent so much to please the troops.**

**GI's remark, as do students at home, that the United States is the place to
fight -the real war" against America's problems. To some of these soldiers, however the enemies when they return home will not be the generals who wanted them to fight in Vietnam but the youth who demanded an end to hostilities.
"We're fighting the wrong enemy," said a 19-year-old foot-soldier who graduated from high school in June of last year. "I think we should go back to the States and turn some of these weapons and helicopters against these demonstrators. We should take care of that problem before going ahead and fighting another war overseas."**