

Belleville
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VETERANS DAY AND VIETNAM

November 11 used to have a name which would still be quite suggestive of the world we live in today. The old name, Armistice Day referred to one event in one war America has fought, which ended in one specific way. The First World War was our big step into the world of power politics. It made a great impression on a nation which had believed itself beyond the bloody conflicts of the old international rivalry of Europe. That war ended our isolation from the burdens and the honor of being a great power. From then on we were deeply involved in the quarrels among peoples around this shrinking globe.

But that war ended in a certain manner which also has a special significance for the history of the 20th century. The German army was reeling, but it was not beaten. The war has been a true 20th century one by involving most people in a total war effort. But the end of the total war was not total defeat and absolute victory. The Germans quit before they were really smashed. The allies did not demand unconditional surrender. This was a precedent which was not followed in the next of this century's total wars.

Out of the Second World War came many things which were novel to the world scene. One, the United Nations, was not an entirely original organization in 1945 but its powers, on paper at least, were much greater than those of the defunct League of Nations. The Axis had been completely smashed. Many of the enemy leaders were tried by international courts and executed by the victorious powers. The age of total war and total victory seemed to have arrived.

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Another new element in the political world was the emergence of two super powers, neither of which had been particularly outstanding in the game of power politics in the years before the war.

One of these, the Soviet Union, was soon to be recognized as not just a great state. It was the home base of a movement which sought nothing less than the complete acceptance of its ideology by all mankind. The result, of course, was the cold war when the western powers became determined to resist the onslaught of Communist imperialism. A new era of politics and ideological conflict had appeared.

We in this country had experienced one of the great events of our history in the Second World War. Our place in the world would never again be the same. We had been the great arsenal of the anti-Axis powers and had suffered a million casualties in campaigns which raged from the foggy Aleutians to the plains of France to the jungles of Burma. After the war it was thus decided to commemorate the military exploits of all our wars, the losses of our nation on many battlefields, around the world. November 11 became Veterans Day, a day of remembering the millions who had served this nation in wars in all parts of the globe.

Yet at the same time as we honored our fighting men of past wars, the threat of new ones appeared. The fight against communism has been carried on at many levels and in many ways. One of these has unfortunately been the military. In Korea we suffered more than 150,000 casualties. In Vietnam we have added more than 30,000 others to our honor rolls. And still the fight goes on.

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Veterans Day is a day to make us realize that the era of peace on earth is still a dream. The monsters of aggression and tyranny still walk this earth. We should, indeed we must, think of the ^{honored} dead, dying and wounded in this latest of our nation's wars.

The number of American veterans is growing daily as we expand our armed forces, as we send more men to Southeast Asia. The hopes of eternal peace which followed the complete victory of World War II are still only that: hopes. It is indeed a sorry commentary on the affairs of this world that this should be so, but it is. /J

The war in Vietnam is, however, different from the two great wars of this century, and is only partly like the conflict in Korea. This results from another event which came with the end of the Second World War. At the very time that the ideas of complete victory had been adopted by the allies, there occurred something which made all future total victories doubtful. This was the explosion of the atom bomb. From Hiroshima on history was to show that all the great powers were very, very reluctant to go into another total war. The danger was too great that nobody would have anything left after the Third World War. So, some new ground-rules were written for wars. They were to be limited in certain ways.

Today in Vietnam we have more young Americans doing what the men being honored today did -- defend our interests on a foreign soil. But this conflict, like the Korean one, is still being fought within strict bounds.

This does not mean that Vietnam is not a true war. But, nor by most standards of our 20th century wars, is it a particularly big or

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costly one. At least this is the case up to the present. It is this aspect of being both costly and not so costly that helps to explain much of the confusion in this country about this whole affair.

It is a dirty, tedious, bloody fight of a kind which we aren't used to waging, carried on for goals less than those of a holy crusade, in a strange land, with no certain ending. I don't wish today to offer any predictions about the final outcome of the struggle. I'm not going to offer any quick and easy solutions. Rather, for a couple of minutes I would just like to put some aspects of this war in the light of comparison with our earlier wars.

Our losses to individuals are of course as great as they are in any war. Dead and wounded are mourned just as much in a small fight as in a great battle. The cost to human beings is still personally very great.

But, by national standards our losses have not been huge so far. We have suffered over 30,000 dead, wounded, missing and captured. This compares with many times that number in other wars. Most of our losses have occurred since August of 1965. Yet in the first fifteen months of Korea we suffered about 85,000 casualties. In the same period in World War II, before we really became deeply involved, we lost 75,000. We mobilized over 16 million men in World War II and now have only about 3,200,000 men under arms.

The average rate of casualties over the whole Korean war was about 1,000 per week. Since the beginning of this year when we had sizable ground forces in action in Vietnam, our losses there for the

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first nine months averaged about 670, or two-thirds the Korean rate. We can guess that this may be due to causes such as the tremendous use of firepower in place of frontal assaults. Or, it may be due to the enemy's choice to avoid very large-scale battles.

This is not to say that we don't employ a lot of men in seeking a battle. Some of our operations involve more than the equivalent of a division. A military historian has described one operation against a North Vietnamese division as a larger engagement than two main battles in the Spanish-American War, more costly than our first fight in World War I and lasting longer than the battle of Belleau Wood.

In Vietnam, however, we are fast approaching, and may have passed, the peak strength that we had at one time in Korea. We clearly are heading for a larger commitment in Vietnam than we ever had in Korea. The rate of our build-up shows the tremendous pace at which we have become militarily involved. By June 1st, 1965 we had 52,000 men in Vietnam, few of them in combat units. One year later we had 255,000. By mid-October of this year we had 328,000 men. In Korea, we made a faster initial build-up, but then leveled off for quite a while. We went in Korea from a force of a couple of hundred to almost 280,000 in one year. But, in the second year we added only about 35,000 more men. At the end of three years we had about 325,000 more men than when we started.

The-build up in Vietnam may level off soon. But at the past rate we are building up almost as rapidly as in Korea. We haven't slowed

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down the increase of personnel. Some press estimates foresee a force of 400,000 men in early 1967. That would be less than two years after we began our big-build up. Thus, we would have a larger force, and one that would have grown faster than our overall Korean one and in less time than it took to increase our army in that peninsula.

This war is quite costly in not only men, but in airplanes. We have lost more than 400 over North Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense has estimated that during fiscal year 1967 we will lose 580 planes. In terms of both men or material this is not a cheap war.

But it is also necessary to realize that by some standards this war is less expensive financially than other wars. We are currently spending a smaller part of our Gross National Product for defense than we did during 1963. The percentage of our Gross National Product being spent for defense is considerably less than in Korea, and of course much less than in the Second World War. The point is that while the total sum, perhaps on the order of \$60 billion a year, is a good deal of money, we can afford it a lot more easily than we could have ten or fifteen years ago.

On this Veterans Day 1966, when we recall our other wars and the Americans who fought them, what does all this mean? It means that we are in a potentially big war, waged by large forces, and costing considerable, if not huge, losses. It means that if the size of the forces keeps growing, and if no way to peace is found, this latest war to stop international communism could be among our bloodiest. Unlike Korea where the stalemate had appeared within a year, and

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unlike World War II where the course of complete victory was openly charted, this war has no clear future. ~~The costs may remain comparatively small, or we may see them rise. The impact on our civilian life may be great, or it may remain small for the nation as whole.~~

We are now in a war which is unique to our experience. We know not where we go. We can appreciate the hard realities of international life which have put us in that tragic little country in Asia. But, it must certainly be with some sense of uneasiness that we watch the march of events and wonder where they go.

We can only be certain of one thing. Our men are doing a magnificent job. They are as worthy of praise as any we honor here today. We can only hope that this strange conflict will end before many more of them must join our roster of heroes and veterans. 7

The End