

On the Line

The Scrutable East

By Bob Considine



A learned enemy-watcher gives us a rundown on how fares the foe.

"If the Communists win in Cambodia there's no chance that they'll invite Prince Sihanouk to return to his palace in Phnom Penh," he said, carefully peeling a lichee nut. It reminded him of something:

"Sihanouk's a nut. He was once having a diplomatic talk with Nehru, a very serious and dignified man, when suddenly he picked a pillow off the divan and began beating Nehru over the head with it. Laughing, Nehru was not amused.

"Another time he ordered the state radio network to stand by for a special announcement. Then he took over the microphone and said, 'Beware you virgins! My son is home from school. Beware my son, you virgins. Also, you young men. Look out for my daughter. She is not better than her brother'"

Other observations by learned enemy-watcher:

• Documents seized from captured North Vietnamese officers list 15 categories of South Vietnamese earmarked for execution or deportation when/if comes victory. They include elected and appointed officials, landlords, war profiteers, and "those who cling to the old

religion." (Catholicism.) Estimated toll: 3 million out of a total population of 15 million.

• The war could have ended in the spring of 1963, "if Diem had not taken on the Buddhists." The Viet Cong were at that time completely stumped by the "strategic hamlet" concept (long since abandoned). It was the Southeast Asian counterpart of colonial American stockades erected against the Indians.

• If Ho Chi Minh had lived he would have been kicked upstairs to powerless chairman because he demanded Vietnam's unification now. Seven of the nine members of the Hanoi politburo prefer to depend on American pullouts predicated on domestic U.S. political considerations.

• Red China will come into the war if South Vietnamese (or American) troops move northward across the 17th parallel, just as it did when U.N. troops led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Korea swept to the Yalu.

• The Viet Cong have been relegated to fifth class citizenship by their North Viet allies. They are permitted to fight only one hour in every five. The other four hours are spent absorbing ideological theories. About 80 per cent of day-to-day

combat in South Vietnam and Cambodia is in the hands and guns of North Vietnamese. Their prime target is Saigon, not Phnom Penh. VC conscription has fallen to about 1,000 boys per month.

• The enemy was close to victory in the spring of 1965. It would have been all over and the Viet Cong would have won and would now have the country. But along came the Tonkin Bay incident, still disputed, and the American Congress' (including Sen. Fulbright's) relegation of escalation powers to LBJ. The resolution was dissolved last week.

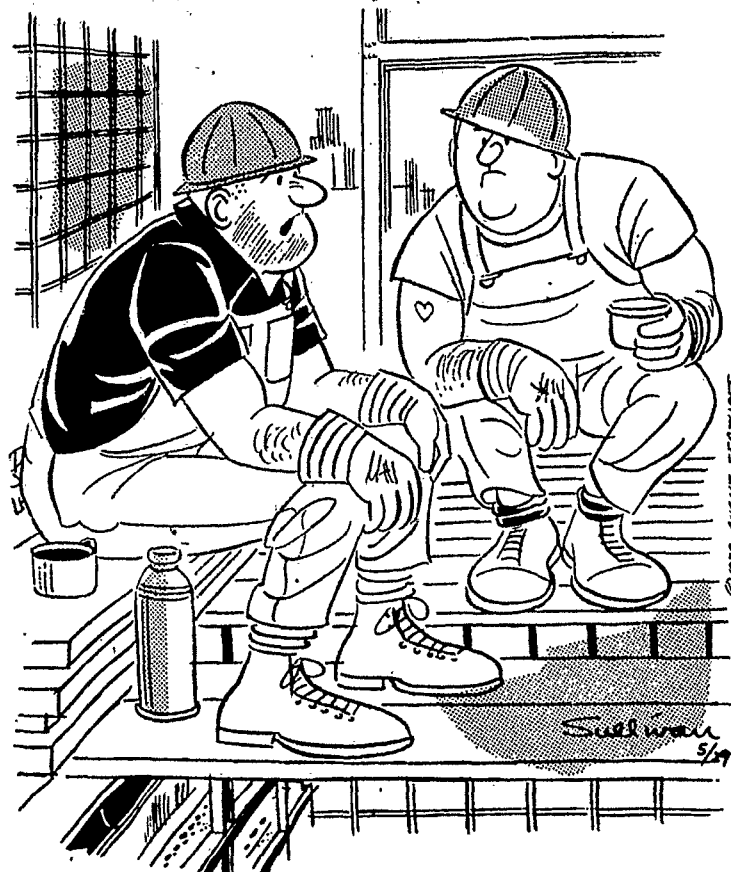
• The South Vietnam government, as now constructed, could last a long time, if given the chance. "Thieu is good; Ky is very good."

• The war is petering out on both sides. Skirmishes, not big battles.

• North Vietnam wants to get back to a "low class" war. This also means "low cost."

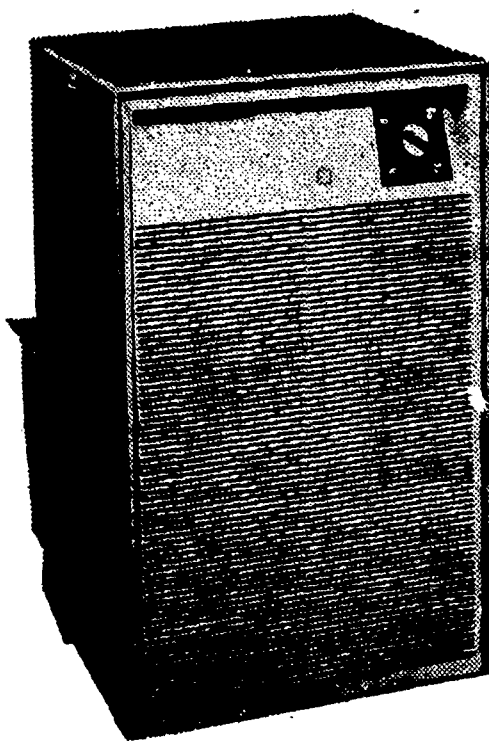
• When and if the Americans leave Indochina, all ground rules will change. The Queensberry codes will become extinct quicker than you can say "Jack the Ripper."

The enemy-watcher finished his nut and disappeared, perhaps forever, in the Tokyo smog. But he left behind the gossamer suspicion that he knew damned well what he was talking about.



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