

I N Q U I R I E S

The Pentagon's MX racetrack

Win, place, or show in Missileland

IN KEEPING WITH OUR POLICY OF STAY-
ing abreast—and sometimes ahead—of the news, we publish
the following excerpt from the 1994 report of the President's
Commission on the Causes of World War III. It was provided to
us by Dede Feldman, an Albuquerque writer who vouches that
it was obtained from a "reliable source."

American air force generals were not generally noted for
their sense of whimsy, but in their final plan for basing the MX
missile, they came up with a scheme that would have done
Walt Disney proud.

This plan, known as the "hybrid racetrack," was unveiled
in the summer of 1979 after several years of controversy over
how best to protect 190,000-pound mobile MX missiles from
Soviet attack. The air force's preferred basing mode, a plan to
shuttle each missile by truck among as many as twenty shel-
ters in a gigantic shell game, was dropped earlier that year
when irate Nebraska farmers and the governors of several
western states objected to having their land turned into "a
great sponge to absorb enemy fire," as one air force official
accurately but indelicately described it. The air force then
moved to a new plan, a sort of flying grasshopper approach,
officially called the Air Mobile System, which involved piggy-
backing the giant missiles on cargo planes and flying them in
and out of an elaborate system of air bases. This plan was
politically attractive but expensive (over \$40 billion) so the air
force scrapped it and turned to another—the "hybrid trench."
The hybrid trench seemed to solve all problems. The location
of the missiles could be verified through the use of sliding
covers over the trenches, and there would be minimal disrup-
tion of the surrounding land, after construction was com-
pleted. But the western governors didn't go for it, and so the air
force came up with the hybrid racetrack.

In this plan, each mobile missile was shuttled along a
racetrack among twenty-three protective shelters located on
spurs branching out from the main racetrack formation. The
racetracks were built on public lands in Nevada and Utah,
most of them in isolated valleys in the Central Basin area.

The racetrack road, specially built to bear the weight of the
missile's 700,000-pound "transporter-erector-launcher"
(TEL), was open to the public. To assure the Russians that
there was only one missile in each of the 200 racetracks, each
missile was assembled in an area adjacent to the racetrack. In
addition, the shelters were equipped with viewing ports that
the United States periodically opened to allow Soviet satellite
verification.

The Air Force introduced the new racetrack concept in a

series of charming promotional announcements on national
TV. The announcements, which featured cartoon-like sketch-
es of the average American family camping and picnicking
near the racetrack, emphasized that there would be easy
public access to all but two and a half acres of land around
each cement shelter. Families would even be able to drive their
recreational vehicles on the racetrack, the Defense Depart-
ment said.

This idea of combining recreational and military benefits in
the racetrack scheme was so appealing that air force planners
were soon stumbling over one another to come up with novel
marketing concepts for the new system, both to win public
favor and to defray some of the expenses of the \$33 billion
program. Since many of the racetracks were located in Neva-
da, the air force soon set up gaming establishments where
bettors could wager on the whereabouts of each MX with its ten
nuclear warheads. In the best air force tradition, each missile
was given a name, and by the end of the eighties millions of
Americans were putting down their bets on whether "Mos-
cow's Lucky Lady" really was in shelter number seven that
week. And for the more sporting crowd, the air force held
monthly events where spectators could watch the TEL "dash"
from one shelter to another at the breakneck speed of 30 mph.

The use of MX racetracks as recreational shangri-las had
another benefit: It eased the boredom in the lives of the 30,000
workers the air force had brought into the desert to build and
operate the new missile system. As the air force's environmen-
tal impact statement had predicted in 1978, 75 percent of the
new residents lived in "construction camps" consisting largely
of recreational vehicles made useless for transportation by the
great gasoline drought of the early eighties, and the MX race-
tracks provided the only antidote to the alcoholism and crime
typical of western boom towns.

The new missile system was not without its problems,
however. The water supply in the missile areas was critically
low by the time the racetracks were completed. Construction
of the racetrack system required so much of the scarce ground
water that local wells ran dry (as predicted by the air force in
1979) and a major legal furor was created by squabbles over
water rights. Plans for botanical gardens and several large
aquariums to preserve plants and fish endangered by the
mammoth project had to be scaled down considerably.

Other controversies over the MX racetracks in the eighties
involved cement and sagebrush.

As early as 1979 the chairman of the Parsons Corporation,
one of the largest construction firms in the country, had
predicted that the MX project would use up all excess cement
capacity in the United States. By the mid-eighties his predic-
tion was born out. Over seven million tons of cement had been
used for the system's protective shelters and roadways, and, as
predicted by the air force, upwards of five million gallons of
liquid asphalt were still needed each year to pave and repave
the heavily trafficked racetracks. This intensive use of con-
struction resources brought down upon the MX the wrath of
western contractors and of the officials of neighboring states
eager to meet housing and other needs in their own energy-
boom areas.

But the controversy over cement was nothing compared to the so-called “sagebrush rebellion” that pitted Nevada officials against the federal government in the early eighties. The MX racetracks—located on Bureau of Land Management land—became the focus of controversy. State officials in Nevada, resentful of the fact that the federal government controlled 83 percent of the land in the state, wanted to annex BLM land, and with it the MX amusement parks. This way, ticket sales and proceeds from MX gambling would go to the state, which would funnel it back to the racetrack communities in the form of “impact assistance” for water, sewage, and education in the financially strapped MX boom towns.

But the air force had other ideas. “Security needs,” the generals said, dictated strict federal control over the parks. And to top it off, the air force was just plain frustrated. In the late seventies the men in blue had spent several years and millions of dollars looking for a home for the MX, despite the opposition of farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, and others who did not want to see their lands gutted by tunnels or crisscrossed by giant grids. Without the vast expanses of unpopulated federal land in Nevada, perhaps the MX could not have been deployed at all.

And in the late eighties the air force had a new problem on its hands: Not to be outdone, the Soviet Union embarked on a crash program to build its own racetracks. Alas, this put the generals in the same awkward position they found themselves in earlier—on the road again, in search of land for still more missile racetracks.



DEDE FELDMAN

The Chad Green case

Intruding on the family

WHEN THE PARENTS OF THREE-YEAR-old leukemia victim Chad Green fled the country in order to obtain laetrile treatment, his case made headlines around the world. Even after Chad died, the case stayed in the news as local authorities in Massachusetts insisted on their prerogative to press charges against his parents should they return.

Not only did the principal figures in this incident have to move hastily around the United States and into neighboring Mexico in search of a cure, but the story clearly dramatized the issues of governmental intrusion into family life and freedom of choice in cancer therapy.

Chad's parents, Diana and Gerald Green, lived in the effusively evangelical, but otherwise quiet community of Hastings, Nebraska. When they discovered that their young son had leukemia, they took him to the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. There he was treated with chemicals that kill all cells undergoing division. Chemotherapy, which is what such treatment is called, attacks both the cancerous cells and those in other parts of the body where frequent cell replacement goes on. Because of the destruction and waste

inherent in this treatment, Chad's body was wracked with pain.

After a month of treatments in Omaha the Greens moved to Boston, where Chad continued to undergo chemotherapy for a year and a half. But the tormenting side effects convinced his parents that he should be taken off the treatment.

At this point the medical establishment and its allies in the courts seized control of the situation. A Massachusetts court declared Chad a ward of the state, and chemotherapy was resumed against his parents' wishes.

The Greens then petitioned the court to allow them to give their son vitamins and laetrile—a substance derived from the pits of apricots, peaches, and bitter almonds.

The Greens' attorney said they had a constitutional right to select medical care for their son. But the state government pointed to past instances in which courts had sanctioned intrusion into family life to prescribe a course of medical treatment preferred by the government. This argument proved successful, and the Massachusetts court asserted its authority over Chad by ruling that the way the Greens wanted to restore their child's health was “counterproductive.” The judge reaffirmed the state's role as legal guardian, but permitted his parents to retain physical custody of the boy as long as they continued to bring him in for chemotherapy. This decision revealed rather starkly the terrible benevolence of the liberal therapeutic state, for it compelled Chad's parents to helplessly watch their child suffer and ordered them to present him regularly for what the Greens had come to regard as useless torture.

Although a family “flight into Egypt” could have subjected the Greens to kidnapping charges—for traveling with their own son—the Greens left immediately for Mexico. They stressed that what should be at issue was not the efficacy of laetrile but the denial of freedom of choice in the United States. In Tijuana, Chad had chemotherapy, laetrile, and a vegetarian diet, and according to his Mexican doctor, the cancer went into remission.

Again the Greens decided to halt chemotherapy. In addition, according to the child's relatives, Chad was homesick for Massachusetts; the unfamiliar setting of Mexico was sapping his will to live. Chad's parents and grandparents explicitly blame his death on October 12 on the disruption caused by the family exile. His father told the press that doctors at the Mexican clinic had told him that Chad had become depressed because he wanted to go home to Massachusetts. Chad died “because he was not allowed to go home,” said Gerald Green with understandable bitterness.

At this point, Chad's grandfather revealed that Massachusetts authorities had told him that they planned to increase the charges against the Greens from civil to criminal contempt. He said, although the government subsequently denied it, that he had been notified that the state would seek commitment of Chad's mother to a mental hospital for one year. Likewise, he asserted, the government would try to send Chad's father to prison for one to two years.

When Presidential aspirant Jerry Brown, campaigning in Massachusetts at the time, learned of this news, he immediately offered the Greens refuge in California and promised not to sign any extradition order for them.

“I think it is an outrage that the medical establishment would attempt to dictate a family choice in this particular instance. It's an instance of the monopoly of healing practices that I intend to change . . . because I believe that the state has limited authority when it comes to parental responsibility,” Brown said.

Brown's straightforward comments and offer of asylum cut to the issue of family choice. He addressed himself directly to the point that government-certified technologists were here usurping control over a fundamental ethical decision. Though the Greens eventually decided to return to Nebraska, and debate still continues about chemotherapy and laetrile, Brown, as someone outside the Green family who recognized the justice of their cause, made an important contribution.

The government has been taking control of children and breaking up the family with increasing speed in the twentieth



century. The combination of compulsory attendance in schools and prohibition of child labor places children in the government's hands during their formative years. Separate juvenile courts demean the moral capacity of young people and combine a supplanting of family discipline with a rejection of youthful responsibility. The indecency of the attacks in the Chad Green case on a desperate and vulnerable family shows that the government is determined to hang onto control of family life. Here we have the epitome of government-knows-best in all its bloated arrogance. □

Welcome to America

The psychiatrist as gatekeeper

THE FIRST CONTACT THAT TRAVELERS returning from abroad and tourists entering the United States have with American officialdom is with an agent of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. In his capacity as guardian of the portals of entry to America, his primary function is to deny admission to the unworthy, particularly those lacking the proper documents. Additionally, under Section 212-A4 of the Immigration Service regulations, agents are charged with protecting our shores from dope fiends, anarchists, and other "psychopathic" personalities.

Exactly what a psychopathic personality is, the regulations do not specify. In effect, the decision of who falls under this category is left to the particular agent on duty. "Psychopaths,"

as the INS defines them, can presumably run the gamut from someone rushing wildly through an airport armed with an axe to an eccentric guilty of nothing more serious than wearing strange clothes. However, the term seems most commonly to have been used by immigration agents to deny admission to homosexuals.

This summer INS officials on three occasions attempted to bar travelers from entering the country on the grounds that they were homosexual. At San Francisco International Airport last June 14, Karl Hill, a British writer, was stopped by an official who noticed the words "Gay News" emblazoned on his T-shirt. In response to questioning, he admitted to being a practicing homosexual. He was then given the choice of leaving on the next plane or being compelled to submit to a psychiatric examination. He chose the latter, whereupon he was placed in custody until the test could be conducted. About a week later, a German man was denied entrance in Minneapolis when a gay-oriented magazine turned up in his suitcase and he said he was bisexual. On August 3, while the Hill case was being argued in court, inspectors at the San Francisco airport halted and detained two Mexican nationals because their bags contained cosmetics.

One's immediate reaction to these incidents is of course to deplore the pettiness, the invasion of privacy, and hatred of homosexuals that they indicate. The story, however, at first sight appears to have a happy ending. Surgeon General Julius Richmond announced on August 2 that no further physical examinations of suspected homosexuals would be conducted, since they are no longer considered to be suffering from a "mental disease or defect." The order arrived at a propitious moment for Hill and the two Mexicans, who were accordingly released to go about their business.

Although the government's decision to relent in these cases must be welcomed, closer examination reveals that the substance of the problem remains untouched. Richmond removed homosexuality from the list of taboos because the American Psychiatric Association, after heated debate and by a very close vote, had previously excised the condition from its list. Should the government or the psychiatrists have a change of heart, gays would find themselves back in their original predicament. Furthermore, the Surgeon General's démarche leaves entirely untouched the remaining categories of "psychopathic personality." As critics of psychiatric stigmatization like Dr. Thomas Szasz have time and again pointed out, the term is arbitrary; unlike a diagnosis of physical illness, the diagnosis of a psychopathic personality cannot be verified objectively. The government may, under this rubric, expel whomever it wishes. There has thus been no change of principle—merely a tactical retreat.

Even if a noncapricious definition of "psychopathic personality" could be found, a deeper issue would remain. Our immigration policy proceeds upon the assumption that "standards" of political, social, and economic behavior may be used as criteria for prospective entrants to this country, even if failure to meet them is no crime for those already citizens. When tests of mental health are held to be legitimate, probes for lapses in political health may not be far behind. Mexican Trotskyite Hector Marroquin has been denied asylum and now faces deportation for his political beliefs. Such blatant discrimination stands in sharp contrast with the historic free immigration policy of the United States in the nineteenth century. During the enormous immigration of that period, there were no psychiatrists on hand to turn away the mentally unfit. One suspects that we could get along without such professional advice today. □

LETTERS

Letters to the editor should be addressed to INQUIRY Magazine, 1700 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, California 94111. The editors reserve the right to edit letters for length when necessary.

Sugar in the courts

I THOROUGHLY CONCUR WITH Thomas Szasz's views on the Dan White case. I would like to point out some convergences between the arguments used to mitigate White's criminal responsibility and the rationales developed to deny the personal autonomy of devotees of "cults" [Thomas Robbins & Dick Anthony, "Cult-Phobia," Jan. 8 & 22, 1979].

According to Szasz, White's alleged heavy consumption of Coca-Cola and Hostess Twinkies was interpreted by psychiatric witnesses as both reflecting and contributing (via an excess sugar influx to the brain) to a state of unsound mind. Similarly, "Moonies" are allegedly induced by their leaders to consume vast quantities of excessively sugared Kool-Aid, which supposedly disorients them and renders them easier targets for "mind control." This technique has been called "sugarbuzzing."

Of course, after Jonestown it is hard to deny that there are indeed sinister cultist uses of Kool-Aid; nevertheless, I do not think high sugar consumption should either mitigate criminal responsibility or legitimate forcible restraint (as in "deprogramming").

THOMAS ROBBINS
New York, N.Y.

Today's SBA

IT IS, TO SAY THE LEAST, DISAPPOINTING that only a few accounts of my relationship with the Small Business Administration manage to get the facts straight.

First, my partner and I received a loan guarantee from the SBA. Not one dollar of federal money was involved. Indeed, the SBA holds a second trust on a piece of Washington real estate I own as insurance on the guarantee.

Second, it is well documented that the SBA guarantee was actually arranged by a bank in my South Dakota hometown only because the size of the loan ex-

ceeded its normal limitations.

Third, while the name "Tom-Tom" is irresistible to most of those writing about this matter, others who bothered to check learned that the name was in place well before we made application for a conventional bank loan.

Fourth, thank you for the salary increase. Would you care to pay the difference between what NBC pays me and the amount you have as my estimated salary?

TOM BROKAW,
NBC News
New York, N.Y.

LEONARD REED replies: I referred to the Brokaw loan as one of thirty-two transactions made by SBA under a program primarily designed for the disadvantaged, which was a correct statement. In fact, however, it makes little difference whether SBA makes a direct low-interest loan or is party to the transaction by guaranteeing the loan; in the latter case, the federal government is just as directly subsidizing the loan by relieving the lending bank of the risk factor and transferring that risk to the taxpayer.

There was surely no intention on my part of suggesting that the name Tom-Tom Communications was invented to pull the wool over SBA's eyes and if that impression was created I am genuinely sorry.

Bombs away

WHY DIDN'T YOU ANSWER Sheldon L. Richman's letter [Sept. 10]? He says that a defense "system that would kill even a few innocent civilians seems contrary to [the American] libertarian heritage." It may seem so but it isn't.

A libertarian analysis of violent encounters, personal or collective, sees a defensive retaliation as justified on grounds of the right to life and its protection, namely, self-defense. The aggressor, of course, can easily jeopardize the lives and welfare of innocents, by trying to use them as shields. Barring wanton slaughter—which by definition isn't defensive and retaliatory—a response to aggression may often involve the killing of the innocent since without such killing the party defending itself would fail to defend itself, period. The culprit, however, is not the defender but the attacker.

None of this should impute simplicity

to military strategy, but the moral idea is not so complicated as some might think.

TIBOR R. MACHAN
Santa Barbara, Calif.

We did not reply to the letter in question because we find it hard to defend the nuclear annihilation of innocent civilians. Apparently Mr. Machan has no such compunctions.

Mr. Machan is right about one thing: His argument is "not so complicated as some might think." In fact, it's so uncomplicated that even political leaders and generals thought to use it to justify the strategic bombing, nuclear and conventional, of Hiroshima, Tokyo, Dresden, and the like. They thought they were being patriots; little did they know they were being libertarians, too.

—EDITORS

Correction

John P. McCarthy, whose review of *The Streets Were Paved With Gold*, by Ken Auletta, appeared in the October 29 issue, should have been identified as a professor of history at Fordham University and author of *Hilaire Belloc: Edwardian Radical*.

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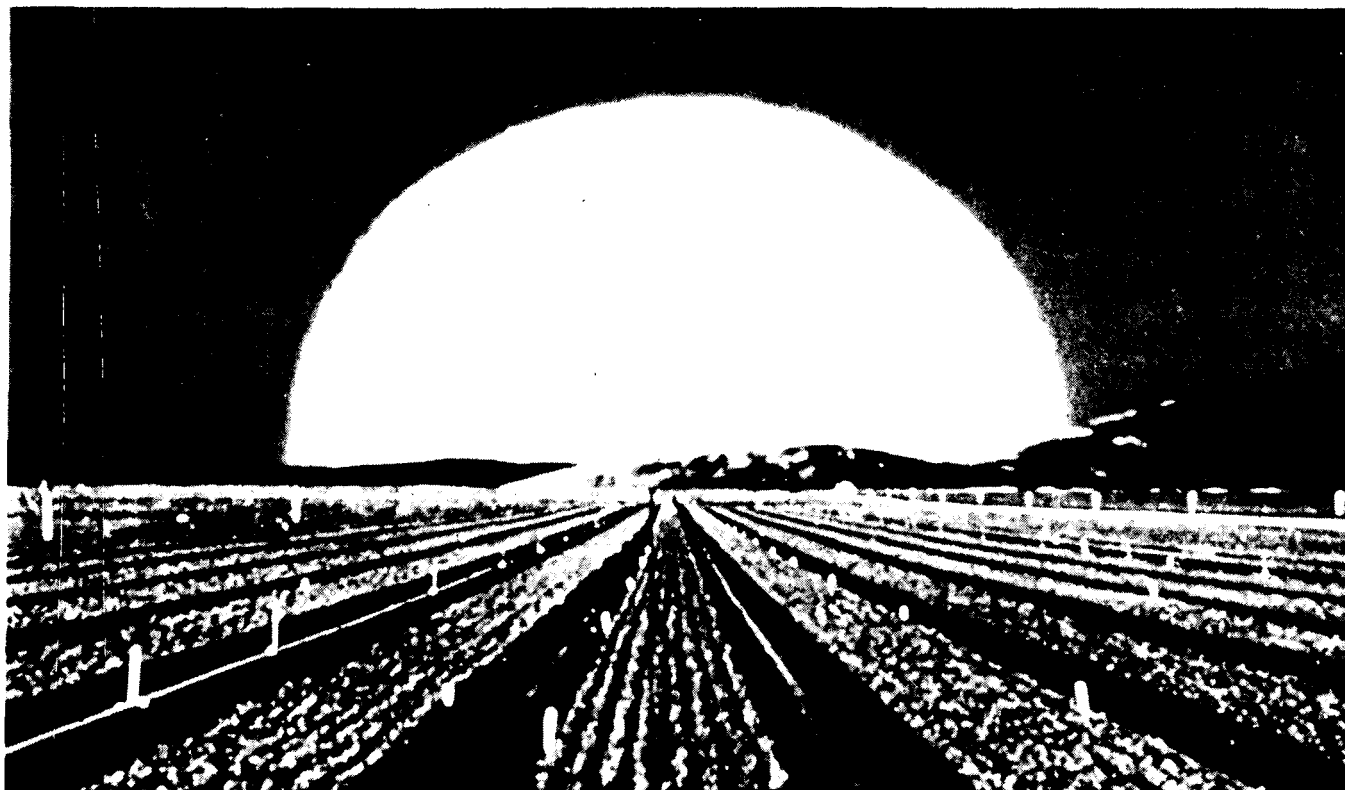
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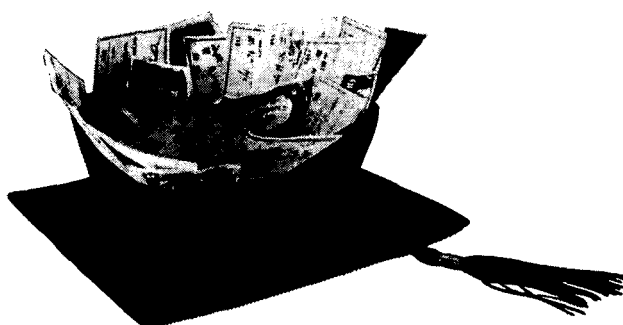
With more than 500 million people suffering from malnutrition, dawn, for many, is the harbinger of despair. Food is the world's number one priority.

College-trained experts have made giant strides by developing new strains of rice and wheat that feed millions more. But this is not enough. We need more college-trained minds to develop more solutions to this age-old problem.

But today, colleges have their own problems. Many are in deep financial trouble. Without your help, they cannot

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PHIL STANFORD

A tale of two bureaucrats

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT two high-ranking government officials. It has action, suspense, and for those of you who think that this column is occasionally too cynical, it even has a moral.

The name of the first official is Robert W. Komer. Komer first came to public attention in March of 1966, when Lyndon Johnson made him his special assistant in charge of pacification in Vietnam. He had caught Johnson's eye while serving as a member of McGeorge Bundy's White House staff for national-security affairs. Before that he had worked as an analyst for the CIA. Bright, enthusiastic, tough—just the sort of hearty intellectual you would expect to find at this particular place and time—Komer seemed perfect. As pacification chief Komer was responsible for what was at the time called the "other war." This was, of course, the nonmilitary campaign to bring about the economic and social rehabilitation of South Vietnam, to win—how can we forget?—the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. Obviously, this was a tall order, but already in September of 1966, barely six months after his appointment, Komer was doing a bang-up job.

In an 18,000-word report made public that month, Komer described the situation in Vietnam with what might be called cautious optimism. Although, as he said, he "would not overstate the program to date," it was nevertheless true that the South Vietnamese government, with the assistance of the United States, was making progress on the inflation front; the import program was also being revised to eliminate corruption. Moreover, the number of "secure" ham-

lets—those under the control of the South Vietnamese government—had risen from 3199 to 4054. This meant that 55 percent of the population was living in areas under government control. In addition, reported Komer, there had been considerable progress in constructing schools, training teachers, and delivering medical care to the Vietnamese.

Komer made another progress report in February of 1967. As of the first of that year, 77 percent of the main roads in South Vietnam were open during the daytime, up from 62 percent the previous June. "The outcome," said Komer, "is no longer in doubt." LBJ was so pleased with Komer's accomplishments that he named him acting ambassador.

In December Komer had more good news. The number of secure hamlets had risen to 5188, comprising two-thirds of the population of South Vietnam. Naturally, the administration presented these statistics as additional proof that steady progress was being made in the war. When this conclusion was challenged in Washington, a reporter for the *New York Times* sought out Komer in Saigon for an explanation.

The figures were arrived at, Komer said, through a system he had devised called the Hamlet Evaluation System. Under that system, each of the 12,600 hamlets in South Vietnam was given one of six letter grades, ranging from A (under complete government control) to V (under complete Vietcong control) according to its composite score on eighteen criteria. The criteria ranged from military security to social services. For example, said Komer, a mortar attack against a hamlet would cause the hamlet to lose points, while the arrival of a new teacher would raise its score. The ratings were determined by the answers to questionnaires filed from the hamlets by pacification teams. The Hamlet Evaluation System, said Komer, is "better than anything we've had before."

In early January 1968, Komer's pacification office reported that the percentage of the population under government control had risen to 67.3. Only 16.3 percent remained under the control of the Vietcong.

Within the month the Vietcong launched the Tet offensive. Under the

circumstances, a less enthusiastic man might have become disheartened. However, by April Komer was able to report that despite certain undeniable setbacks, the pacification of Vietnam was back on track. "We are definitely on a recovery curve," he said.

In November, just as he was leaving Vietnam to become ambassador to Turkey, Komer issued his final report as pacification chief. Sixty-eight percent of the population of South Vietnam was now "secure"—the highest score yet. To this day, Komer maintains that pacification was a success.

WE SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, think of Robert Komer merely as a comic character.

Just as pacification in Vietnam meant more than building new schools for the villagers, Komer was more than an intellectual playing games with meaningless statistics. As congressional testimony taken after Komer had departed Vietnam was to show, Komer was also the originator of the Phoenix program under which thousands of South Vietnamese village officials were kidnapped, tortured, and killed. The purpose of Phoenix, to use the official phrase, was to "neutralize the Vietcong infrastructure." There was more than one way to ensure the security of a hamlet.

In February of 1970, Komer's successor as head of the pacification effort in Vietnam, William E. Colby, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that during the previous year 6187 people had been killed under Phoenix. In 1971, the Saigon government claimed that the total had risen past 41,000. No figures are available on the killings that occurred during the time Komer headed the program (begun in July 1967 under the name ICEX, which stands for Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation), but that is a technicality at this point. Komer would hardly want to disavow the later accomplishments. To the end, Phoenix pursued the objectives he had set. As the *New York Times* reported in an article about the time of the congressional hearings, "It was Mr. Komer's view that a military victory, which was still an objective in those days, would be meaningless, even if attainable, unless the Vietcong's political structure could be destroyed." Sometimes deracinated logic ends in farce, sometimes in terror.

And sometimes it leads to promotions.

After sitting out the Republican interregnum at the RAND institute, Komer was summoned back to public service by

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