

## "Victor Charlie" versus the Gallant

*West to Cambodia* (Cowles, 253 pp. \$3.95) and *Bird* (Cowles, 206 pp. \$3.95), by S.L.A. Marshall, chronicle two phases of the Vietnamese war as seen through the eyes of a military professional. Books by Martin Russ include "Happy Hunting Ground: An Ex-Marine's Odyssey in Vietnam."

By MARTIN RUSS

HERE ARE TWO PINT-SIZED but worthy books for armchair warriors from that grand old Yankee militarist S.L.A. Marshall. *West to Cambodia* describes some Army attempts in 1966 to plug infiltration routes from the Cambodian sanctuary. *Bird* tells how two regiments of North Vietnamese overran but failed to crush an isolated U.S. base called Landing Zone Bird, also in 1966.

One of the strengths of the Oriental army is its disregard for the lives of its soldiers, and this is vividly brought out in *West to Cambodia* when an American unit is sucked into an ambush by live decoys. Six North Vietnamese soldiers pop up like cardboard silhouette targets on the skyline, leading the bemused Americans on. It is an electrifying piece of drama, ending in the death of the human lures. Both of these books, let it be said, are as dramatic as anything to come out of Vietnam.

Marshall is good at conveying the sense of astonishment and unreality that is combat, qualities which television fails utterly to convey. A mortar shell explodes near a group of at-ease soldiers, a sniper's bullet brushes the forehead of one; yet they continue what they were doing, unable to believe they're in battle. A soldier takes time out to pull on his boots, knowing that enemy skirmishers are approaching his tent. One wonders why the Army hasn't figured out some way to prepare the green soldier for this numbing and often fatal reaction, so strong that many soldiers gawk in wonder during a fire fight and never think to join in. True, men zapping one another is not your everyday Sunday sight—but even so. The most painful example of this combat surrealism in *West to Cambodia* occurs when two platoons convince themselves on no evidence that they're surrounded, and waste a desperate black-comedy hour pouring fire into the jungle, incidentally denying support to a platoon that needs help.

*Bird* describes a battle between a lousy American outfit and an even lousier North Vietnamese one. Landing Zone Bird was poorly chosen, poorly fortified, and poorly defended. The defenders' weapons were so dirty that

many of them jammed. Marshall doesn't say so, but it's clear the North Vietnamese would have won this Christmas-night battle if they hadn't beaten themselves. Their self-defeat arose from the habit Asian armies have of sticking to a battle plan even after it becomes inappropriate. Not that the troops attacking Bird were exactly élite to begin with. Marshall tells how, just as the U.S. position was being overrun, a squad of North Viets stumbled across a Christmas package and thereupon plopped down on their collective rear for a big feast of plum pudding, dates, candy and nuts. For all the palaver one hears about wily "Victor Charlie," the evidence of twenty years shows that while the Vietnamese Communist soldier is good *en masse* as at Dienbienphu, his efficiency is questionable below regimental level. As a guerilla he's unbeatable, of course. One peasant with a rifle and some jungle to hide in will always be able to discomobulate the lumbering mechanical elephant that is a U.S. infantry company.

ONE thing about these books may drive dovish readers up the wall: Marshall himself. He dedicates *West to Cambodia* "To all the good and gallant guys who fought for this country in Vietnam; and the back of my hand to the punks, professors, and preachers who ran about ranting that they were careless killers of women and children in a no-good war." Describing a napalm air strike, he says, "There were no anti-Dow Chemical Company preachers or undergraduate mobs to stop them." (Harumph.) To this cranky old party anyone who criticizes the war is "indecent and impudent."

Marshall's two books make good reading, though, if one happens to be a war lover. In one volume after another the retired brigadier has chronicled the adventures and misadventures of GI's action, showing a complete lack of interest in war as tragedy or abomination. Like most career soldiers, he is callous. Describing how a soldier pumped more than fifty bullets into an oncoming Vietnamese ("The shots tore his guts out—McLemore saw the abdominal cavity open and the intestines spill forth"), he quotes the man's wisecrack as his victim dies at his feet, which is all right—as American as apple pie and all that—but demands some sort of interpretation. Later on, he quotes part of a letter from the gunner's mom: "I taught David to be a kind and respectable person." Somehow this is not the way David comes across to the reader.



## Behind the Snow Curtain

*Tibet*, by Thubten Jigme Norbu and Colin M. Turnbull (Simon & Schuster, 352 pp. \$7.50), portrays an exotic land and an extraordinary people through the eyes of the elder brother of the Dalai Lama. In "Tibetan Venture," published by A. S. Barnes last March, C.G. Lewis, a young Anglican priest working in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, described his experiences with Tibetan refugees in India, where he taught at a school for incarnate lamas.

By C. G. LEWIS

ONE OF THE MANY CYNICAL side lights of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia was Chou En-lai's condemnation of it as "an abominable crime against the Czechoslovak people." If any modern parallel is to be found, it is the rape of Tibet by the Chinese. The invasion of Czechoslovakia, moreover, will ultimately have done no more than delay what is inevitable. Tibet, even if the Chinese were to leave tomorrow, has been irretrievably altered.

And yet Tibet's loss is the world's gain. The Chinese have driven into the gaze of the world from behind their curtain of snow a remnant of one of the most wonderful people on earth. Those who have had the privilege of living with Tibetans cannot fail to be influenced by their combination of spiritual depth and spontaneous gaiety; for those denied the privilege ample witness to these qualities has become available in books, not just as formerly from the pens of travelers but from Tibetans themselves.

Few such books deserve to be more widely read than *Tibet*, by Thubten Jigme Norbu, the elder brother of the Dalai Lama, and Colin M. Turnbull, author of *The Forest People*. Although they claim to have written merely "an image of Tibet as seen by one man," the history of the country can rarely have been related more comprehensively. Indeed, anybody not already captivated by Tibet and familiar with something of its past and religion might be swamped by the purely historical material.

Opening with a legend about the creation of the world—the wind "moving the face of the waters" is one of several clear parallels with Genesis—the authors describe the everyday life, before the Chinese invasion, of various classes of Tibetans from aristocrats to brigands. They then turn to the history of the country, beginning with the era of the primitive Bön religion, when Tibet was one of the foremost military powers in Asia. The growth of Buddhism in Tibet is traced, and its unique characteristics, including the differences between the

four main sects of Tibetan Buddhism, are clearly delineated. We learn in lucid detail how the concept of reincarnated lamas emerged, and how the Dalai Lama is chosen, and are told of the esoteric tantric practices that play such a large part in Tibetan religion. So devout are the people that even the brigands make pilgrimages to Lhasa of a thousand miles or more, measuring every yard of the way by lying full length on the ground and standing again where their foreheads have touched.

Happily avoiding the stylistic contortions often found in works of dual authorship, *Tibet* is enlivened by Thubten Norbu's own experiences and his contagious love for his country, a land of perilous storms and bitter cold as well as of tangible silence and exquisite beauty. The humor of the Tibetans is typified in Norbu's description of his efforts as a child to roast a potato over the sacred butter lamp on the shrine at his home.

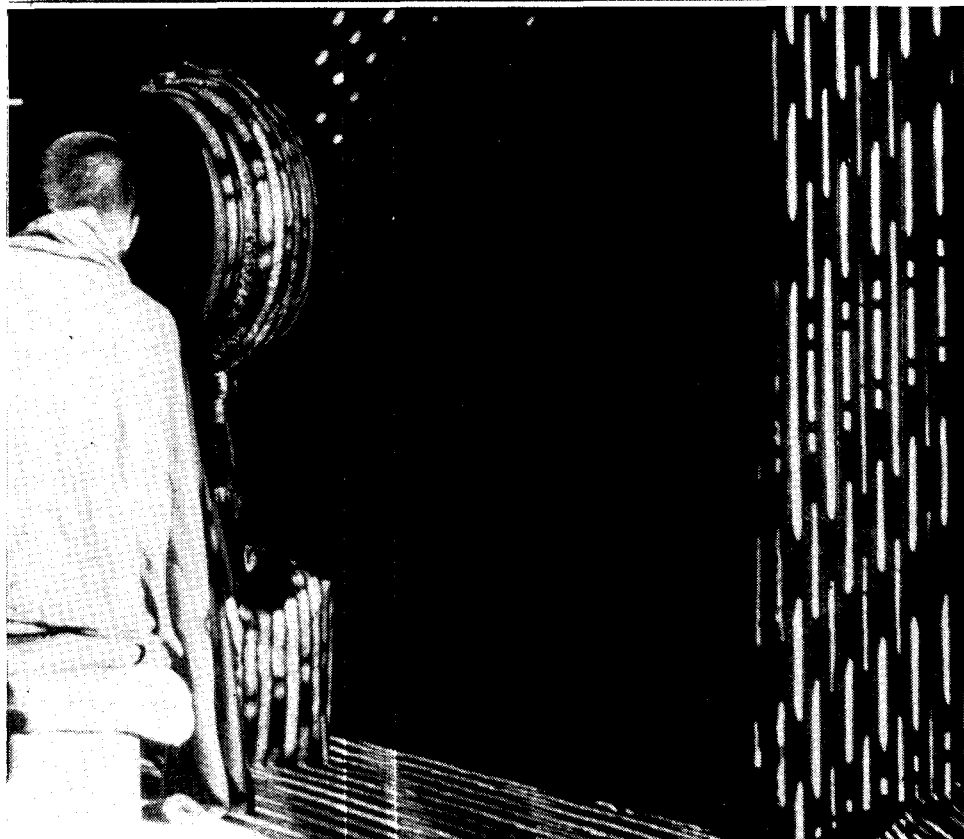
Norbu's sympathy and integrity are impressive. The first is illustrated by his attitude toward the sixth Dalai Lama, whom almost everyone save Tibetans regarded as dissolute because of his nocturnal visits to "little houses." Regardless of what actually happened between him and his paramours, writes Norbu, the Dalai Lama's poetry reveals the heights to which he raised his relationship with women:

I went to my teacher, with devotion filled,  
To learn of the Lord Buddha.  
My teacher taught, but what he said escaped;  
For my mind was full of compassion,  
Full of that Compassionate One who loves me.  
She has stolen my mind.

### ***Ocean of Wisdom***

HIS OWN PERSONAL REPUTATION, and the ever-increasing strength of the sect he ruled, soon brought Sonam Gyatso an invitation to visit the court of the great Mongolian ruler, Altan Khan. . . .

Mongolia, at this time, was by far the greatest political force in the East. In China the Ming dynasty was becoming weaker and weaker and could offer little resistance to the continual invasions of their land by the Mongol armies. The Mongols were a people much like the Tibetans had been before Buddhism came to Tibet. There was little room in their lives for compassion for fellow human beings, let alone for animals. Such feelings would have been considered almost criminal weaknesses. Yet the message that Sonam Gyatso brought was undiluted, uncompromised and uncompromising. He announced that the time had come for Mongolia to accept



—Rechelle Girson.

**Refugee Tibetan lama in Nepal—"spiritual depth and spontaneous gaiety."**

Norbu's integrity—one of the abiding memories of the book—impels him to share with the reader his doubts about whether he himself really is a reincarnation of the monk Tagster he is supposed to be.

Most people associate Tibet with strange and wondrous happenings, but anybody seeking such tales here will be disappointed. The author does not deny them, but for him they are unimportant: Whether they or other phenomena are true depends entirely on the indi-

vidual. If he believes in them they are true for him. That is all. What Norbu does say—and its impact is the greater for his restraint—is, "I have seen enough to make me understand that there are many things about ourselves that we do not know and many powers that lie hidden through ignorance or lack of proper teaching and training."

Were the West to take this message alone to heart, the Chinese invasion of Tibet would not have proved an unmitigated disaster.

the Buddhist religion and that from that moment onward there must be no further animal sacrifice, all images of the old gods were to be destroyed, customs such as the immolation of women on their husbands' funeral pyres were to be discontinued, there must be no taking of life, animal or human, for any reason, and military exploits must be abandoned. The latter command was of no small importance to Tibet, as well as China, for Tibet had been suffering for many years from the invasion of its northern territories by Mongol armies.

It is not easy to see why such an apparently unattractive message was even listened to with respect, yet it was not only heard, it was heeded. Altan Khan himself embraced Buddhism and officially proclaimed that it should be the national religion of Mongolia from thenceforth. Sonam Gyatso said that Altan Khan, in an earlier life, had been the great Kublai, who had been con-

verted to Buddhism by the Sakya, and that his destiny and that of Mongolia were thus inevitably bound to that of Buddhism. Sonam further enhanced his own position as Altan Khan's spiritual mentor by saying that he himself had been the Sakya Lama who had converted Kublai more than three hundred years earlier. Altan Khan, to show his recognition, bestowed on Sonam Gyatso the title of *Dalai Lama*, "Dalai" being a Mongolian translation of the Tibetan "Gyatso," meaning ocean, and the title therefore meaning Ocean of Wisdom. This is the title by which the leader of the Gelukpa sect has been known ever since, in China and in the Western world, but most Tibetans would not even know what it meant. In Tibet each head of the Gelukpa sect . . . is most often referred to as Gyalwa Rinpoche, or "Victorious One," or Kyabgon Rinpoche, "Precious Protector."

—From *"Tibet."*