

THE AIR

Television's War

SUMMERTIME now, or very nearly. Kids already gabbling about the last day of school. Women walking down East Eighty-sixth Street in those jouncy cotton dresses. Connecticut suntans. Air-conditioning in Schrafft's. "Daktari" reruns on the television. "Lassie" reruns. "Gilligan's Island" reruns. "Star Trek" reruns. Lots of baseball. (Not much doing on television in the good old, mythic old American summertime.) The other Saturday, just back from a trip, and for some reason conscious more pointlessly than ever of that miserable war, I made a mental note to watch, at five o'clock that afternoon, an N.B.C. program called "Vietnam Weekly Review" for whatever it might have to offer, and went outside (it was a nice day—warm, sunny, full of the first hints of summer's dust and laziness, of all those hammocks one will never swing in), toward Fifth Avenue and the Park, past which close to one hundred thousand men, women, and children were marching as part of a "Support Our Boys in Vietnam" parade. Lots of people in the streets. Lots of American Legion posts. Lots of those Catholic high-school bands. A flatbed truck went by full of teamsters, many of them holding aloft placards reading, "It's Your Country! Love It Or Leave It!" The Putnam County John Birch Society went by singing "America the Beautiful." An American Legionnaire went by in a wheelchair, carrying a placard reading, "Victory over Atheistic Communism." The crowd applauded. Somewhere up toward Ninety-sixth Street a band was playing "The Yellow Rose of Texas." Children all around me clutched American flags and looked the way children usually do, with or without flags.

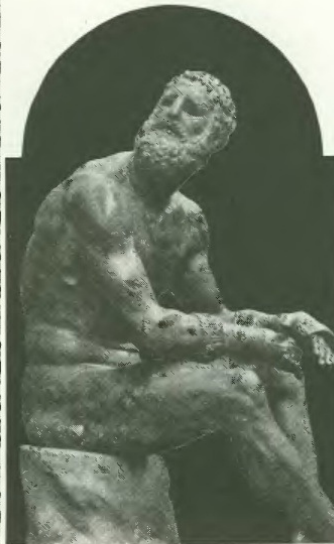
I went back home at ten to five, got out a beer, turned on the TV set. There was a baseball game in progress on N.B.C. (No "Vietnam Review" that week.) Not a bad game, either. Clendenon hit a long ball in the tenth and wrapped it up for Pittsburgh. I forget who Pittsburgh was playing, but you could look it up. From Fifth Avenue, two blocks away (you could hear it through the open window), a

band was finishing up "The Marine Corps Hymn," then started "Sister Kate." Sometimes I wonder what it is that the people who run television think about the war. I'm sure they think about it. Everybody thinks about it. I'm sure they care a lot. (At times, I even picture them sitting around in the



Communications Club after hours, brows furrowed in meditation, their tumblers of brandy and Perrier water barely sipped at. Finally, a voice is raised. "Well, hang it, Fred. I think Tom Hayden speaks for all of us.") Perhaps one is unfair. Perhaps not. In any case, there are good men who work

for television trying to tell us about the war. For example, the other Monday night, a little after seven, Walter Cronkite peered out at us pleasantly from the TV screen, said, "Today's Vietnam story in a moment," and then there we were, via film that had been taken twenty-six hours earlier, eighteen miles south of the DMZ, watching a Marine scout detail that had been sent out to look for North Vietnamese encampments. The film began routinely, with the C.O. briefing his patrol leaders (a sequence that always seems to be staged, although it probably isn't), and then we were watching a small group of men on their way up a thickly wooded hill ("They went up to investigate the distant voices," said the on-the-scene correspondent), and heard the sound of faraway small-arms fire, and suddenly men were running here and there in front of the camera, the small-arms fire became louder and more intense, and once again—in our living room, or was it at the Yale Club bar, or lying on the deck of the grand yacht Fatima with a Sony portable TV upon our belly?—we were watching, a bit numbly perhaps (we have watched it so often), real men get shot at, real men (our surrogates, in fact) get killed and wounded. At one point in the film, a mortar round fell near the cameraman, and for a couple of seconds the film spun crazily until it (and he) got straightened out again, and then we were looking, through the camera, at a young man—a boy, surely no more than nineteen or



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twenty—square-jawed, handsome, All-American, poised there on the side of the hill, rifle held in close to him, waiting on the side of the hill for the signal to move up to where the shooting was, and afraid. In the background, you could hear machine guns firing and the voice of the platoon sergeant, a deep-voiced Negro, calling, "Git on up there! Git! Git!" And the boy stayed there for several moments in the camera's eye, his own eyes staring straight ahead, his face so full of youth, fear, bravery, whatever else, until he finally moved up. One thinks of how one's memories of those other wars (wars one didn't fight in) exist for the most part frozen in the still photographs of the great war photographers—Robert Capa's picture of the Spanish Loyalist falling on the Catalonian hillside, Eugene Smith's Marine face-down on the beach at Tarawa, Margaret Bourke-White's St. Paul's Cathedral against the blitz, David Duncan's Marines advancing through the Korean mud. Vietnam is different, to be sure. Not quite so "exciting." Not quite so photogenic. But it seems to me that Kurt Volkert, the man who held and worked that camera, who caught the meaning of that face, is one of the best journalists of the war, and one could probably say the same for many of the other cameramen covering Vietnam for the American networks.

Another afternoon not long ago, I watched a routine film clip, this one taken by Vo Huynh, a Vietnamese who works for N.B.C., about a military engagement in the South: scenes of men moving in to attack, and attacking—scenes, in fact, of men living close to death and killing—with one heartrending sequence of a young soldier being carried out, his leg apparently smashed, screaming to his comrades, "It hurts! It hurts!" The special qualities of courage, energy, and strange, tough sensitivity that made men like Robert Capa so good at what they did—so good because so useful, so useful because they went in there (Capa's great pictures of the second wave at Omaha Beach were so blurred that you could barely make out the faces) and tried to show us what it was really like—are qualities that don't exist to any lesser degree in men like Kurt Volkert and Vo Huynh. They, too, seem to be trying to show us what it's like—at least, what the small, small corner allotted to them is like—and Lord knows there are mighty few other people on television who seem to be trying.

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vision's war," in the sense that this is the first war that has been brought to the people preponderantly by television. People indeed look at television. They really look at it. They look at Dick Van Dyke and become his friend. They look at a new Pontiac in a commercial and go out and buy it. They look at thoughtful Chet Huntley and find him thoughtful, and at witty David Brinkley and find him witty. They look at Vietnam. They look at Vietnam, it seems, as a child kneeling in the corridor, his eye to the keyhole, looks at two grownups arguing in a locked room—the aperture of the keyhole small; the figures shadowy, mostly out of sight; the voices indistinct, isolated threats without meaning; isolated glimpses, part of an elbow, a man's jacket (who is the man?), part of a face, a woman's face. Ah, she is crying. One sees the tears. (The voices continue indistinctly.) One counts the tears. Two tears. Three tears. Two bombing raids. Four seek-and-destroy missions. Six Administration pronouncements. Such a fine-looking woman. One searches in vain for the other grownup, but, ah, the keyhole is so small, he is somehow never in the line of sight. Look! There is General Ky. Look! There are some planes returning safely to the Ticonderoga. I wonder (sometimes) what it is that the people who run television think about the war, because *they* have given us this keyhole view; we have given them the airwaves, and now, at this critical time, they have given back to us this keyhole view—and I wonder if they truly think that those isolated glimpses of elbow, face, a swirl of dress (who is that other person, anyway?) are all we children can really stand to see of what is going on inside that room. Vo Huynh, admittedly, will show us as much of the larger truth of a small battle and of a wounded soldier as he is able to, and C.B.S., as it did some nights ago, will show us a half-hour special interview with Marine Corps General Walt, which is nice of C.B.S., but there are other things, it seems, that make up the Vietnam war, that intelligent men *know* make up the Vietnam war—factors of



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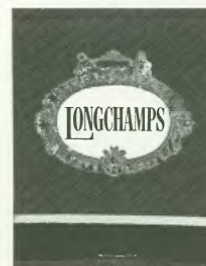
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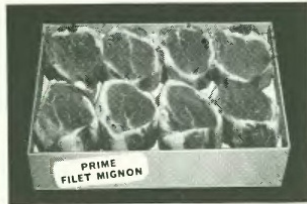
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doubt, politics, propaganda, truth, untruth, of what we actually do and actually don't do, that aren't in most ways tangible, or certifiably right or wrong, or easily reducible to simple mathematics, but that, even so (and even now), exist as parts of this equation that we're all supposedly trying so hard to solve—and almost none of them get mentioned. It seems almost never to get mentioned, for example, that there's considerable doubt as to the effectiveness of the search-and-destroy missions we watch so frequently on television. (The enemy casualty figures seem to be arbitrarily rigged, and the ground we take isn't anything we usually plan to keep.) It seems almost never to get mentioned, for example, that there's considerable doubt as to the actual efficacy of many of the highly publicized (on TV, as elsewhere) sweeps into territory that, if you read the fine print, you realize the enemy has often already left, and presumably will come back to when we, in turn, have gone. It seems rarely to get mentioned that there has been considerable doubt as to the effectiveness of our bombing, or that an air force that can't always hit the right village certainly can't avoid killing civilians when it bombs power plants in Hanoi. It doesn't seem to get mentioned, for example, that we are using "anti-personnel" weapons such as the Guava and the Pineapple more than the military appears to want to admit, or that any people who drop their tortures from planes flying at five thousand feet are likely to be regarded as no less accomplices than if they had stood in person in some village square and driven little slivers of metal, at high velocity, into the flesh of other human beings. It doesn't seem to get mentioned, for example, that "anti-personnel," "delivering hardware," "pacification mission," and "nation building" are phrases, along with "better dead than Red," that only a people out of touch with the meaning of language could use with any seriousness. It doesn't seem to get mentioned, for example, that when a senior member of the Administration states that he sees no reason for thinking we will have to send more troops to Vietnam this year he is probably not telling the truth, and that the fact of his probably not telling the truth is now more important than the fact of the troops. It doesn't seem to get mentioned— Well, enough of that. It is summertime now, or nearly. My kids were squabbling over bathing suits this morning, and who will learn to sail and who to ride. In summertime, we cook outdoors a lot, play coronary tennis,

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drink, watch pretty sunsets out across the water. This summer, I will almost certainly perfect my backhand, write something beautiful (or very nearly), read "Finnegans Wake," or something like it. This summer—already the streets outside seem quieter, more humane. A car rolls softly over a manhole cover—a small clank. All those quiet streets, all those brave middle-class apartments—and what lies beneath those manhole covers? Wires? Cables? Dying soldiers? Dying children? Sounds of gunfire? Screaming? Madness? My television set plays on, talking to itself—another baseball game, in fact. Juan Marichal is pitching to Ron Hunt. Hunt shifts his stance. Marichal winds up. The count is three and two.

—MICHAEL J. ARLEN

CAPPING PROCEDURE—CAP AND GOWN CONVOCATION

FRIDAY—MAY 5, 1967

On direction from Acting President Willard, all seniors will stand. He will then instruct those who entered their seats from the right aisle (rows C-E-G-J-L-N-Q-S-U-W-Y-AA-CC) to turn to their right to face the row behind them. Those facing the rear of the auditorium will have their caps placed on their heads by those facing them. In the rows facing the stage (those who entered from the left—rows D-F-H-K-M-P-R-T-V-X-Z-BB), the last person entering the row, will cap two people. The student capping two people will be the last person entering the aisle from the left, on Dr. Willard's right, and facing the stage.

Following this, those whose backs are to the stage will cap the seniors facing the stage. Since there is one extra seat in the rows where the students face the rear of the auditorium, the first person to have entered the row from the right will have no one to cap.

After everyone has been capped (except those in the first row who will cross the stage) and on signal from Dr. Willard, those who are facing the rear will turn to their right and face the stage. Those in the first row will then be asked to come forward.

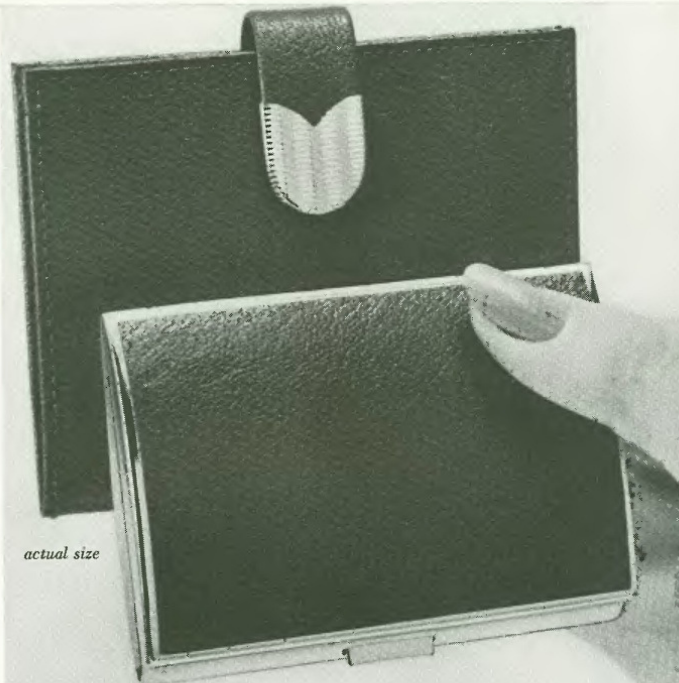
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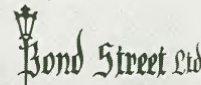
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