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Editorial

(The following editorial was written by Eric Sevareid, CBS News National Correspondent, for the TAC News Service. Please observe credit lines.)

ERIC SEVAREID'S ESSAY

This is a proper time to consider those young Americans who fight in heat and slime in alien places like Viet-Nam, in the kind of undeclared war of limited aim that is alien to our tradition.

They fight, as did their elder brothers in Korea -- not for loot because there is none; not for glory, for there is little of that around; their homeland is not threatened, their fellow countrymen at home make no companion sacrifices and no crusader's zeal drives them on. The question remains: what makes them do it and do it so well, beyond the minimum requirements that the uniform ordains.

In answer it has been said that they are professional soldiers; but boys of nineteen and twenty are professional at nothing, certainly not at managing the meeting of life with death.

They fight, they endure, even though they may not understand the geopolitics of this distant war; even though thousands of their countrymen tell them every day, in protest and parade, that the war they fight is a senseless war. They keep on, as they did in Korea, when these circumstances were much the same.

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The real answer must lie deep in the tissues of whatever is the substance that keeps America from becoming unstuck; it must have something to do with their parents and teachers and pastors, with their 4-H clubs and scout troops and neighborhood centers or gangs. It has to do with the sense of belonging to a team, with the dishonor of letting it down. But it also has to do with their implicit, unreasoned belief in their country and their natural belief in themselves as persons.

Whatever the full answer, it is a considerable thing that they are doing, when they stick at this kind of war, fighting without universal support and fighting for results obscured in the mist of the future.

Official weeks and days are impersonal symbols to take note of something intensely personal. But they provide an opportunity for the rest of us who are not covered with mud and weariness and nightly fear to pay a measure of respect. (PACAF NS)

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