

FOG OF WAR

The many faces of war are complex, some with frontlines which separate the participants easing the knowing of friend and foe. Though beset with clashing armies, day and night, often the battle becomes trenchlike; WWI and II evolved into this as did Korean War. The mix of Vietnamese within the battle area-combatant and non-combatant-exacerbated the problem of friend and foe. Iraq -an extension of the so-called War on Terror-is like this though, too, had moments of moving armies at the beginning easing recognition of the 'enemy'.

Haditha, a town in Iraq, where Marines are charged with killing of civilians, then covering it up reminds of My Lai, the infamous massacre of old men, women and children in the Spring of 1968 in Vietnam leading to disgrace of General Sam Koster and those in the downward chain to Lieutenant Calley-all of the Americal Division. Again a coverup. As in Vietnam the fog of war may blur forever the exact facts in either of these incidents. The record shows that My Lai was frequently re-attacked because the insurgency would break-out again, often aided by the non-combatants either through fear or dedication. Haditha has some similarities. A real problem to define friend and foe.

Every war has their share of atrocities- the war itself is an atrocity even though it may be necessary. The German and the Russian crushed Poland to start WWII with one or the other guilty of capturing the elite of Poland and summarily executing them left in unmarked graves. German SS troops during the

Battle of the Bulge captured a unit and killed most of them after they surrendered. Our unit-a tank company part of a Cavalry Group-in our last thrust to the Elbe River, WWII, captured villages intact and warned the 'civilians' to stay indoors, await orders, and do not fire on the outposting elements. Someone fired at my tank with a panzerfaust and missed. We as we warned burned the town down, killing many. So there are degrees of atrocities and some may be part of the terrible scourge of war.

In retrospect it appears that either Calley's company commander or Calley himself allowed soldiers saddened again by losing people in a town they had visited before to go amok. There was no need of this. An after-action report could have clarified the action and pre-empted any cover-up. Yet the fog of war... these 'civilians' were really wolves in sheep's gear but they did not deserve to die in a ditch having been already detained. Haditha may have some of the same ingredients and if it was covered-up, those involved should be charged and courtmartialed. A good commander-even though indiscriminate firing and a breakdown of discipline occurs- must halt the operation if he can and evaluate/report the findings.

We who have fought in wars know it is rarely chivalrous, often brutal, sometimes vindictive and has many of the rudiments of the bloodletting of Roman games where humans were sacrificed via battle with other humans and/or animals. A kill or be killed credo.

There is however, a higher honor and decorum which most of us practice.

