

Shrewd With Pen or Sword

By ANATOLE BROYARD

SWORDS AND PLOWSHARES. By Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor. 434 pages. Illustrated. Norton. \$10.

In his "Swords and Plowshares," Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor has fired off enough shots to start a private war. Among other things, he says that all too often the people who talk most about the Vietnam war know relatively little about it. He includes in this indictment many observers who are professionally concerned with the war because they work in government, in newspapers or in television.

Though this is what we might expect a general to say, we must keep in mind that this does not automatically invalidate it. A common view is that military men have a definite interest in war and cannot be trusted to talk or write about it without bias: it is not easy to fit General Taylor into this stereotype. He treats the waging of war as a business of cause and effect, as an attempt to carry out the government's orders with a minimum cost of lives, money and national prestige. His job has been to advise the three Administrations he served how best to get, through the exertion of the necessary military pressures, not what he wants, but what they want.

Failure of Communication

If, as popular opinion has it, military men cannot be expected to understand politics, it is a reasonable corollary of this view that politicians cannot be expected to understand military matters. To make things even more difficult, government officials are often unable to hear hard truths about the conduct of war because these are drowned out by the cries of their constituents. Failure of communication is a slogan familiar enough by now to be embroidered on samplers, and this is what General Taylor sees as the root of our current troubles.

A World War II hero and commander of the Eighth Army in Korea, General Taylor was appointed Army Chief of Staff by President Eisenhower. He incurred his disfavor, however, by opposing the Dulles doctrine of "massive retaliation," which, in his opinion, naively assumed that the threat of our nuclear weapons would suffice to deter Communist expansion or aggression. It had never been a question of nuclear weapons, says General Taylor, and the lessons of Korea, Cuba and Vietnam have borne him out.

President Kennedy argued with General Taylor's doctrine of "flexible response" as set forth in his book "The Uncertain Trumpet." After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the President recalled the general from the presidency of Lincoln Center to study that operation and find out why it had been such a humiliating failure. Working with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Adm. Arleigh Burke of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Director Allen Dulles of the C.I.A., General Taylor found that the failure of communications had been nothing short of "massive" on this occasion.

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report—to a group that included the President, Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of

Staff, McGeorge Bundy and senior C.I.A. officials—it was the first time that any of them except the President had had the entire operation laid out before him. A model of contrast was the President's handling of the Cuban missile crisis. Knowing exactly where he stood, having had all the alternatives evaluated, he did what he felt was necessary, and succeeded in calling Khrushchev's bluff.

The most explosive part of "Swords and Plowshares" deals, of course, with the Vietnam war. The general was our ambassador in Saigon in 1964-65. Our policy of "gradualism"—piecemeal employment of military force at slowly mounting levels of intensity—has "ended by assuring a prolonged war which gave time not only for more men to lose their lives but also for the national patience to wear thin, the antiwar movement to gain momentum and hostile propaganda to make inroads at home and abroad." The general feels that, to get the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table, we conceded away all our bargaining points—the various forms of military pressure—and thus arrived at the "poker" table in Paris practically broke. He described negotiation as "a changeling objective which was progressively replacing the freedom and security of South Vietnam as the controlling objective of American policy."

The author sees two alternatives to "gradualism" if we are faced with another such crisis. (He uses Israel as a possible case in point to demonstrate the difficulty of avoiding involvement abroad.) We can either "use military force swiftly and decisively and risk the international consequences," or we can "do nothing."

Speaking of the present conflict he says that, if anyone is guilty of prejudice, it is our media. By dramatizing that particular part of the war with which they are daily confronted, they encourage their readers and viewers to generalize on insufficient evidence—and, in fact, often do so themselves.

U.S. as 'Declining Power'

The general's parting shot is shrewdly calculated: he sees the United States as entering the '70's as a "declining power." Even if we were to achieve our original objectives in Vietnam, he says, "we cannot completely redeem the unheroic image created by many aspects of our behavior in the course of the conflict. The record of our violent internal divisions, our loss of morale, and our psychotic inclination to self-flagellation and self-denigration justifies serious doubts as to the performance to be expected from us in any future crisis..."

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that one would have to know more about military matters than General Taylor does himself to dispute most of the points he makes. If he is biased, it doesn't show: his tone is almost hypnotically reasonable. What he seems to be saying is that, if we are going to enter into wars for moral reasons, we must not let that same moral tenderness keep us from carrying them to a successful conclusion.

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