

inner life of *bêtes noires*. Rahv routinely gloated over his friends' misfortunes, for instance Lionel Trilling's discomfiture at witnessing E. M. Forster camp outrageously at a gay party. Yet Rahv clearly exerts a fascination that gets the better of Barrett's disapproval. In a judicious blend of exasperation and guarded affection, Barrett recognizes Rahv's demonic energy and verbal brilliance.

The decline of Schwartz is a sad story indeed, and Barrett's words add their gloomy weight to James Atlas's recent biography and to Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*. Schwartz's worsening lunacy is made more poignant by the fact that he gets off some of the best one-liners in *The Truants*; and since Barrett was his best friend for a while, we see Schwartz up close, everything from his habit of following modern poets "as intently as a stockbroker watches the ups and downs of the stock market" to his "point-blank impishness" while he was sane.

A moral that emerges from the book is the danger of a coterie, like the *Partisan* circle, sapping the will of anyone who wants to write seriously. Barrett reflects that "The writer is always seeking some seduction from the painful loneliness of his desk. The excitement of ideas and intellectual talk are potent temptations." Hence his praise for Bellow's dedication to his muse and his wariness of the New York scene. In a rueful admission to Barrett and to Schwartz, William Phillips put the risk more trenchantly still: "I pissed away my life in talk." Even so, I'm glad Barrett was such a ready ear in that circle of manic loudmouths, and even gladder that he was not seduced from his desk.

Correspondence

ON CONTAINMENT

To the Editors: I read with great interest Wilson Carey McWilliams's Under Cover column, "The Public and Limited War," in the April, 1982, edition of *Worldview*. Naturally, I was especially interested in his comments about *On Strategy*.

I take it that he received his impressions of my book from Drew Middleton's column in the 7 February *New York Times*. Through what, I am sure, is an unintended and inadvertent choice of words, Middleton unfortunately created the erroneous impression that I advocated an invasion of North Vietnam and the destruction of the North Vietnamese aggressor. As McWilliams correctly points out, such a position would have been a repudiation of our national policy of containment.

In fact, what I did advocate was that the military should have applied its resources in pursuit of containment—as President Johnson put it in 1968, "...to provide a shield behind which the people of South Vietnam can survive and can grow and develop." *On Strategy* specifically repudiates the notion that victory could not be achieved within the constraints of the national policy, for we had more than sufficient means to accomplish that task....

While I must disagree that my "real aim is the theory of containment," McWilliams is correct that that aim was "the practice of limited war." I believe that the greatest fallacy of the limited war theorists was that the American

Army could be committed to sustained combat without the support of the American people. Our Founding Fathers specifically created a "people's Army" that would be responsive to the will of the American people, and the Vietnam war merely revalidated the soundness of that decision.

I think McWilliams is right "that the U.S. public is the greatest limit on our capacity to wage limited war." But I also think this is as it should be in a democracy and that the strategist must factor this reality into his analysis.

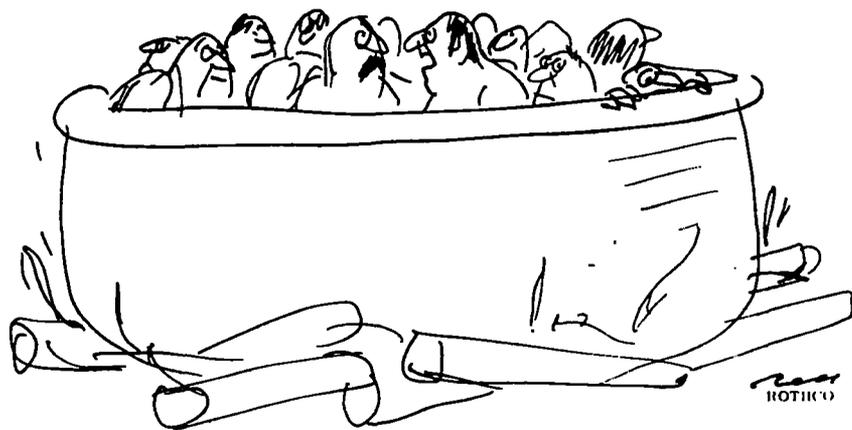
Harry G. Summers, Jr.
Colonel, Infantry

*U.S. Army War College
Strategic Studies Institute
Carlisle Barracks, Pa.*

Wilson Carey McWilliams Responds:
For any injustice to Colonel Summers's argument, I apologize. Nevertheless, I see, as Drew Middleton apparently did, a logic in Colonel Summers's position that leads in the direction of expanding limited wars. Colonel Summers and I agree on the main point—that the American public limits the capacity to fight any war. Colonel Summers applauds this as democratic; so do I, most of the time. Democracy is admirable when the people act wisely and not so praiseworthy when they don't. Our leaders need to recognize that democracy has limitations, that there may be desirable policies that one cannot persuade the public to accept. On the evidence, the price of public support for limited war is—Colonel Summers's intent aside—to strengthen the tendency to wider war.

In Korea, the American Government set out to mobilize mass support but found that the logic of its persuasions worked in favor of those who believed that "in war, there is no substitute for victory." In Vietnam, Johnson avoided that problem and its attendant difficulties, but wound up with too little public support to sustain the war. In both wars, the popular position was "win or get out," and since winning wasn't worth the cost, we had to accept less than desirable settlements (though the Korean armistice was an honorable one).

The American public has not been willing, so far, to sustain prolonged combat for limited objectives. Our leaders need to know, consequently, that such goals are probably beyond our reach.



"Remember, we're all in this thing together."