Art Buchwald

Checkup for Nuclear Phobia Makes Psychiatrist a Bogey

ONE OF THE things that Gen. Curtis LeMay said at his press conference last week was that Americans seem to have a phobia about nuclear weapons. This struck home because I have to admit I've had such a phobia for some time. But only after Gen. LeMay brought it up did I decide to do something about it. I went to see Dr. Adolph Strainedluff, a psychiatrist who specializes in nuclear weapon phobias.

"On the couch," he said. "Vat seems to be the trouble?"

"Doctor," I said staring at the ceiling, "I have this fear of nuclear weapons. I know it's silly, but to me it's very real."

"Aha, very hinterasting. Von did you first become aware of such a phobia?"

"I think it was around the time of Hiroshma or Nagasaki, I'm not sure which. I saw these photos of all these people killed and miles and miles of rubble and suddenly I got this thing about atomic weapons."

Dr. Strainedluff tapped a pencil against his knee. "So tell me, how does this phobia manifest itself?"

"In peculiar ways, doctor. I get the feeling if I ever see a mushroom cloud, I'm going to die."

"Very hinterasting, very hinterasting. You know it's all in the mind, don't you?"

"Of course. That's why I came to you. I don't want to do anything stupid."

Dr. STRAINEDLUFF said, "You are a very sick man. You think that just because an atomic bomb killed a few thousand people 23 years ago, you are threatened. You are manifesting infantile repressed hostility toward the weapons of war. In psychiatry we call this a military-industrial inferiority complex."

"I know I'm sick. You've got to help me," I begged.

"All right. First you haff to get over this absurd fear of nuclear bombs. You must think of them as just another weapon in our vast defensive arsenal. Ve haff Bowie knives and H-bombs, and in war, one is just as good as another. You're not afraid of a knife, are you?"

"Well, I don't think about it a lot."

"So why should you be afraid of an H-bomb? It's another form of a knife."

"I never thought of it like that."

"Okay, so now let's look at some facts straight in the eye. In Bikini we blew up twenty bombs in an experiment. So ve thought everything would be destroyed; that's how stupid ve were. Do you know that now after all the boom boom, the place is flourishing and the rats are fatter than they ever vas before?"

"It's good to hear."

"The coconuts are hanging from the trees, the fish are swimming in the lagoon and the voice of the turtle can be heard in the land. The only things that don't seem to be doing so good are the land crabs."

"I DON'T LIKE land crabs," I said.

"So, then you don't haff anything to worry about."

Dr. Strainedluff started playing with the hand grenade which was attached to his watch fob. "If you're going to be a happy, normal human being," he shouted, "you're going haff to stop with all these guilty peace feelings."

He was stomping around the room. "So get out of here with your lousy phobias, and all this stuff about being afraid to die. If you're not willing to take a little fallout for the good of the country, then go back where you came from!"

In spite of Dr. Strainedluff's final outburst, he did cure me of my phobia. I'm no longer afraid of nuclear weapons. Now I'm afraid of him.