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North Vietnam: Girding for

A Miniature Evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon Awaits

By Bruce Palling

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HANOI—After this year's final victory in the South, North Vietnam is slowly but steadily preparing itself for the peace.

The best evidence of this is the recent introduction of week-long sightseeing tours of North Vietnam for travelers from neighboring Laos. After several months of waiting, I was accepted for the second tour given. It was a controlled but enlightening peek into what was once Southeast Asia's most secretive state.

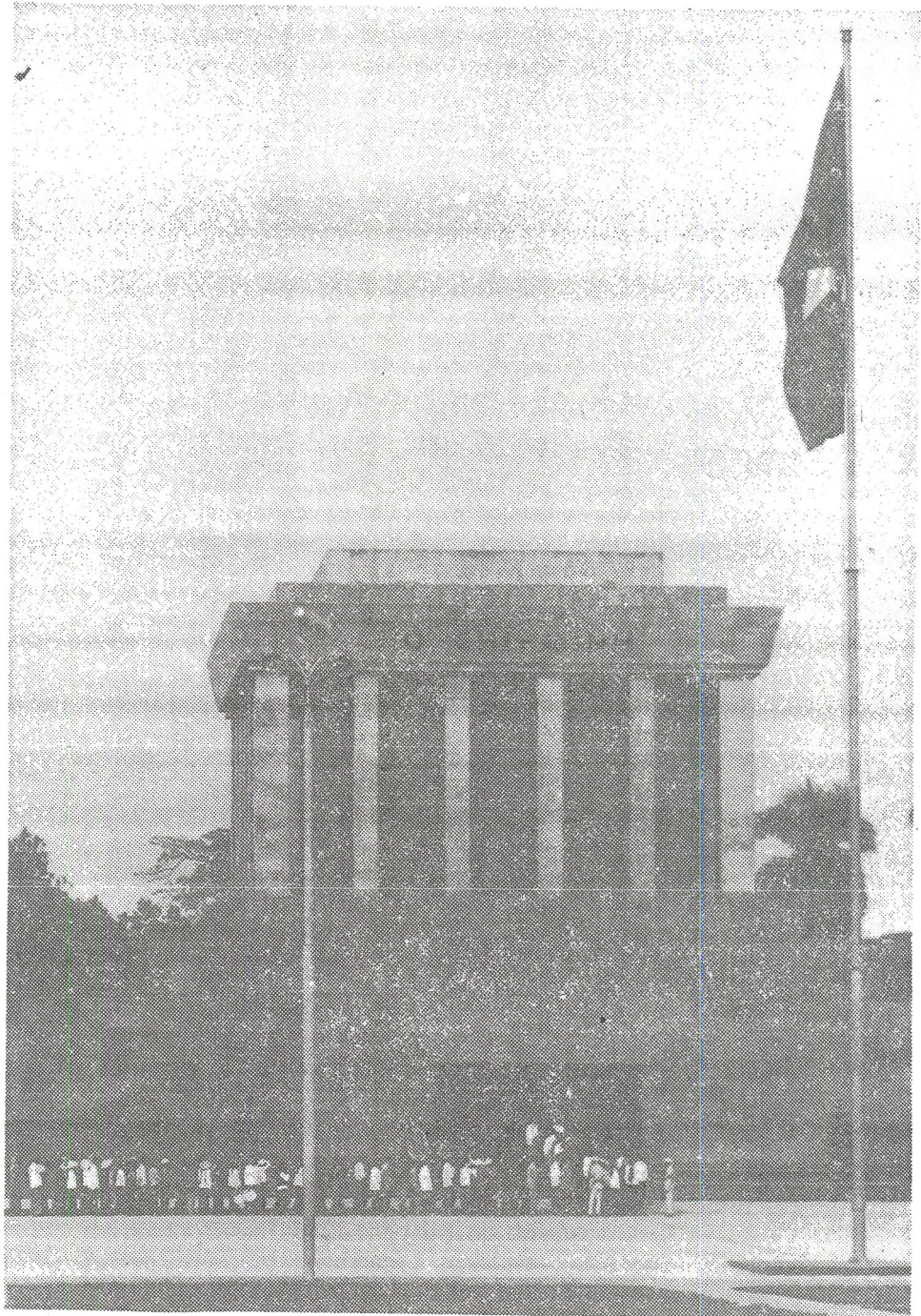
Six months after the collapse of the Thieu government in the South and nearly three years after the U.S. Air Force's Christmas bombing, Hanoi has lost most signs of a city under attack. Only gravel patches remain as evidence of the thousands of one-person cement air-raid shelters that once lined every city street.

Apart from its generally drab and run-down appearance, Hanoi must look almost exactly like it did when the French colonial administrators packed their bags and left 21 years ago. It is possible to drive past block after block of grand colonial buildings.

With almost no private cars but tens of thousands of bicycles, Hanoi is eerily silent even when full of people. The quiet is all the more complete when you realize that you never hear a dog bark. Dogs were banned from the Hanoi city limits some time ago for health reasons.

To add a sense of purpose to the streets of Hanoi, large colorful posters are strategically placed at crossroads with messages such as "Labor is the Source of Life—the Source of Happiness for All of Us."

While there has been a steady stream of captured Western goods entering Hanoi



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A crowd in Hanoi lines up outside the new Ho Chi Minh mausoleum.

Peace

Tourists

with the returning demobilized soldiers, they are not much in evidence. "I have only spotted one Honda from the South so far," quipped one diplomat familiar with the popularity the vehicle enjoyed in Saigon.

After 30 years of off-and-on wars, it is hardly surprising that Hanoi shops have no luxury items for sale. The most prominent local products are hand-made bamboo and cane baskets. There are also a lot of repair shops for bicycles, watches and mechanical goods, but little evidence of any new items.

Except for a multi-story hotel for visiting official delegations, the only other completed new structure I saw in Hanoi was the recently finished Ho Chi Minh mausoleum.

Despite the fact that Ho Chi Minh's will stated that he did not want any permanent edifice to his memory, a great

deal of time and effort has gone into his marble mausoleum, which, with its squat top and thick pillars, is architecturally straight out of Moscow.

Workmen toiled through the night to complete the mausoleum for the September anniversary celebrations in Hanoi. Now each morning hundreds of Vietnamese line up in single file for a fleeting glimpse of the frail bearded figure in the glass case surrounded by burly guards with bayonets.

The air of austerity and purpose in Hanoi is undercut by one thing — the charming inquisitiveness of the children. Although Russian technicians are not a rarity in the streets, it is still an event when one or two Westerners are spotted.

School children, sporting red scarves to show membership in the Communist youth organization' exclaim,

"Lien Xo—Lien Xo" which means "Russian." Often small boys will solemnly tap on their left breast and then point at you. This puzzling ritual stems from the Russian habit of giving the children small badges when they visit North Vietnam.

So far, the only non-Communists to respond to the challenge are diplomats from the Australian embassy. They report great demand from schoolchildren for their gold kangaroo badges.

The hardships of Hanoi affect the lives of the small number of Western diplomats. One Western ambassador greeted me clutching a bag of tools. He had just started putting down the new carpet in his official residence.

Much of our time in Hanoi was spent visiting the various museums. In fact, we spent several hours at the Historical Museum' the Army Museum

and finally the Museum of the Revolution. One notable thing about these visits was that exhibits of United States involvement in the Vietnam War were dwarfed in number by those exhibiting the struggle against the French. Often only one or two rooms would be devoted to highlighting American misdeeds while as many as a dozen rooms would show French atrocities.

While the Army Museum has the wreckage of a B-52 bomber on display' the

Historical Museum has an intact guillotine said to have been used to execute Vietnamese nationalists in the 1930s.

The Museum of the Revolution has as its chief attraction a complete mock-up of the Communist takeover of Saigon, complete with toy guns that emit smoke and rows and rows of Communist

tanks that emerge through the base of the display.

Before this final assault is made, one single helicopter supported on a string leaves the smoldering American embassy carrying Ambassador Graham Martin to safety.

It is difficult to gauge the full extent of the bombing damage in Hanoi, as our group was taken only to tourist spots.

On the approaches to Hanoi' there are still signs of the destruction to a large railway repair works that our guide said was wiped out three times during the air war.

Along one street close to the bombed Bach Mai hospital, there is evidence that many buildings were destroyed during the Christmas 1972 bombings. Our guide claimed' however, that this whole street was "razed to the ground." which was difficult to imagine' as many of the buildings appeared quite old and the rows of trees along the street were intact.

Now that the war in the South is over, the leaders in North Vietnam have to decide how they wish their society to develop. The only sizable assistance to come from non-Communist sources is a

Swedish pulp-and-paper mill soon to be built. About 300 Swedish workers are having their own accommodations built, complete with lavish sauna baths. North Vietnamese foreign affairs officials are discreetly discussing other possible aid projects with Western embassies in Hanoi.

Keeping closer to the Soviet model than to that of neighboring China' Hanoi has emphasized in recent broadcasts that "Socialist industrialization is the central task in the whole period of transition to socialism in North Vietnam"

The question of reunification with South Vietnam makes this task even more tricky. Some diplomats in Hanoi speculate that reunification would actually hinder progress in the South because it would mean every key decision taken in South Vietnam would then have to be cleared in the North.

Dealing with the problems of the South as well as attempting to rebuild North Vietnam's broken economy will obviously be a difficult task occupying the leaders in North Vietnam for some time to come.