

# The Critics Have Lost Their Cool

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

ROXBURY, Conn.—Any assertion that "our war in Indochina is based on killing civilians" is, I believe, completely and demonstrably untrue. If this charge of attempted genocide had been accurate, surely the populations of both North and South Vietnam would have been decimated by now. Instead, there has been an actual estimated increase of about 2,000,000 people in South Vietnam since 1965, and of estimated hundreds of thousands in North Vietnam.

The numbers of civilian casualties—and no one knows how many of these were "civilian" in name only—have been greatly exaggerated.

Have we so soon forgotten the holocaust of World War II, and—before that—of World War I, or for that matter, even of the Nigerian civil war?

In 1937, the Japanese Army slaughtered 200,000 to 300,000 civilians in the rape of Nanking. Millions of civilians died from starvation (imposed by the Allied blockade) or were killed in World War I. In World War II, scores of thousands died in the inferno of Dresden and other scores of thousands in the fire storm in Hamburg. U.S. bombers killed more people in one Tokyo fire raid (some 84,000 dead plus 41,000 wounded) than were later killed in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. At Nagasaki the second atom bomb added 35,000 to 40,000 more dead to the long, long toll of man's inhumanity to man. In World War II at least 6,000,000 Jews were destroyed by Hitler's Nazis; the number of civilian war dead, which will never be accurately known, could total as many as 15,000,000 to 38,000,000. The Nigerian civil war cost an estimated death toll of upwards to 1,000,000—mostly civilians.

Letter in reply by Edward M. Kennedy, NYTimes 15 Jun 71, this file.

Contrast these figures with those of Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Senate Subcommittee on Refugees, which has never been prone to understatement in its assessments of Vietnamese casualties and refugees. The subcommittee's estimates range from a minimum of 150,000 South Vietnamese civilians dead to 325,000. U.S. officials in Washington and in Vietnam consider these figures too high; in any case a large percentage of these casualties were caused by the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, and even the top estimate is far, far lower than the toll in many preceding wars.

All of this is not to justify blood baths, or unnecessary killings of anyone, but it is an attempt to put Vietnam—one of the most misunderstood and lied-about wars in history—in perspective. Civilian casualties have been far, far less in Vietnam in absolute figures than in many other wars—both ancient and modern.

Contrary to public impression, Vietnamese hospitals are not crowded with war wounded; for instance, in November, 1970, only 5.1 per cent of all admissions, or 2,511 patients were war-related. How many of these casualties were caused by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese can only be estimated. However, the "hard" statistics available—killed and wounded South Vietnamese civilians, whose deaths or injuries were directly traceable to the enemy—numbered from October, 1967 (when reasonably valid statistics were first available), through 1970 about 68,000 to 70,000, of whom more than 20,000 were killed. The deaths included Vietcong and North Vietnamese terrorist assassinations.

I visited a number of civilian hospitals in Vietnam and many of the burn cases—luridly laid at the door of U.S.-delivered napalm in many U.S. publications—were caused by attempts of South Vietnamese families to burn gasoline in their domestic cooking stoves.

The Kennedy subcommittee has estimated there have been a total of about 1,100,000 civilian casualties (dead and wounded) since 1965. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker has pointed out that this estimate was "based on extrapolations, which were in part based on earlier extrapolations."

Even, the Controller General's General Accounting Office, which made a study of civilian war casualties in Vietnam for the subcommittee, does not support these figures.

The G.A.O. reported that war-related casualties (not dead on arrival, but living admissions) in civilian and military hospitals from 1967 (when reasonably accurate data were first available), through the first three months of 1970, totalled less than 220,000. The subcommittee's estimate multiplied this figure by more than four.

In short, sweeping and misleading generalizations have been spun out of a thin fabric of facts. The end result is complete distortion—all the more deplorable since the grim figures of death and suffering so frequently publicized are rarely balanced by the positive attempts of the U.S. Government, the U.S. command in Saigon, and the great majority of our men in uniform to alleviate the lot of an unfortunate people caught in the maelstrom of war.

The extreme critics of the Government have lost their cool to such a degree that the Big Lie has become a part of our daily fare. The attempts to denigrate, to tear down, have one universal quality—to "poor-mouth" the United States, to attribute to our Government, our military command and our fighting men a rapacity, cruelty and ruthlessness that is a gross caricature of their true image.

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