

HANOI MAKES USE OF DOWNED JETS

MAR 15 1972

Visitor Is Told 'the Age of
Aluminum' Has Arrived

NYTimes

The writer of the following dispatch is a freelance journalist who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970 for his disclosure of the Mylai massacre.

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Special to The New York Times

HONGAY, North Vietnam, March 13—The villagers in this important coal-producing city, scene of heavy American bombing attacks five years ago, have a popular saying borrowed in part from a former Air Force Chief of Staff:

"Curtis LeMay says he will bomb North Vietnam into the Stone Age; instead he has bombed us into the age of aluminum."

Officials in this area about 95 miles east of Hanoi, along scenic Halong Bay, say that 184 United States planes have been shot down in the province, which lies on a line between the American aircraft carriers on Yankee Station 180 miles off in the Gulf of Tonkin and the 1966 and 1967 target areas of Hanoi and Haiplong.

It was in the bay itself, site of some 3,000 preternaturally shaped volcanic islands, that the first American pilot was shot down and captured in the North. The pilot, Lieut. (j.g.) Everett Alvarez Jr., of San Jose, Calif., was participating in one of a series of retaliatory raids ordered in 1964 after the much-debated attacks on United States warships in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Part of the Culture

The claim of destruction of American aircraft may be impossible to verify, but there is no question that aircraft wreckage has become a part of the culture in Hongay and neighboring villages. Nguyen Si Binh, head of the war crimes commission in Quangninh Province, which includes Hongay, cited the following uses for the plane material:

Engine and other mechanical parts have been used in repairs of bicycles and light equipment. Aluminum from the frame and wings is used to make pots and pans, knives and forks, chopsticks, cigarette boxes, combs, brushes, and hundreds of decorative devices, including earrings and bracelets.

Spare gas tanks, which are shaped like a projectile, have been turned into two-man racing boats and are widely used during the summer. Silk parachutes from flare canisters, used to light up the skies for the bombers, have been converted into blanket and quilt covers. Empty bomb casings have been turned into petroleum lamps or even flower pots.

"We have a saying," Mr. Binh said through an interpreter. "By getting shot down so much, the American pilots have forced us to take our meals with forks and knives, but we have forced the pilots to eat with chopsticks — and they don't do that so well."

It was impossible to ascertain how widespread the household use of aluminum was—foreigners apparently are rarely or never invited into a North Vietnamese house. But bicycle mudguards obviously made of aluminum were to be seen. At a handicraft exhibit dozens of utensils and decorations were made from the remnants of American planes.

Much of the bombing of Quangninh Province, Mr. Binh said, was aimed at crippling the transportation and shipping facilities for the coal mines, the biggest in the nation. But the official said that the facilities, which include a jetty, were never knocked out.

He also provided a graphic description of the capture of Lieutenant Alvarez, which he said took place in full view of hundreds of visitors from socialist countries who were at the nearby luxury resort of Baichou, built by the French during colonial days. Captured on Aug. 5, 1964, the lieutenant is still in a prison camp.

"We were going on as usual," Mr. Binh related. "Nobody expected any trouble. We were celebrating our fulfillment of the coal-producing quota and the foreigners, including the Ambassador from Cuba, were watching.

"At 2:30 P.M. more than 20 United States aircraft suddenly thrust into the sky. They split into five or six waves and some of them began to bomb and strafe the docks and jetties along the resort area. We had all the aircraft guns from big cannon to rifles firing. At the first moment we shot down three aircraft. Alvarez's plane began to flame and he ejected. There was a great cheer.

"At first the people had great hatred. Many people who came see him were carrying sticks and bamboo flails with the intention of hurting him, but we told them to leave him to the authorities. His hands were tied at first, but later we freed him and gave him coffee and soup.

"When a foreigner asked why we untied him and gave him food, I replied that when he was in the sky he was swooping down to do terrible things but now he had no way of harming us. He was very afraid of everything — all noises, even the bang of the start of the car."

After three hours in the resort area, Mr. Binh said, Lieutenant Alvarez was turned over to the central authorities. He said the raids destroyed a number of residential buildings and part of a hotel but failed to damage the coal facilities. A woman was killed, he said.