

Hai Phong Took a Beating, but Supplies Keep Flowing

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HAI PHONG, North Vietnam, March 12—North Vietnam plans to expand its harbor facilities here at least 50 per cent in the next year.

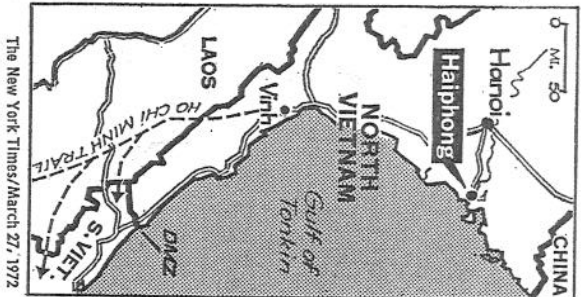
During a recent visit to the harbor, scene of 24-hour-a-day activity, this correspondent was told that the present berth space would be increased to 20 from 13 after the second major rebuilding program in five years. In 1967, at the height of the air war, it was said, the berth space was increased by an unspecified but substantial amount.

Le Quoc Khanh, a member of the Hai Phong war crimes commission, a Government agency that reports the effects of the American bombing, was official host during a day-long tour of this city of 500,000. He said that the average cargo ship could be unloaded within seven days by the around-the-clock crews.

Officials would not provide an estimate of how many ships a month could be handled by the increased port area, but a Western diplomat said that now as many as 40 ships were being unloaded every month. The increased facilities could mean that more than 50 a month could be unloaded.

The harbor, built by the French during colonial days, became one of the most controversial nontargets of the air war. Despite repeated pleas from American military men, the dock area never was made a target, although the nearby city was he subject of heavy bombardment beginning in 1966.

The harbor's strategic value is immediately obvious. About



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a dozen ships were in port, including at least five from the Soviet Union, each in about the 10,000-ton class. The dock is equipped with seven or more oversized cranes capable of lifting as much as 10 or 12 tons, say a light tank or a heavy tractor. Dozens of smaller cranes and derricks were also at work. Perhaps 500 workmen were unloading such supplies as sugar from a Cuban ship, iron ore from a Soviet freighter, tractors, trucks, plastics, steel plating and tubing. No military goods as such were visible, but there were large covered stacks of equipment nearby, perhaps artillery pieces or light tanks.

The amount of material accumulated in the harbor area was small, for much of it was put on trucks and moved from the dock area. Some of the heavier equipment was being lifted onto small vessels that had berthed alongside the cargo ships on the Cam River, the main link between the port and the South China Sea 12 miles to the east.

At least six large warehouses scattered along the dock area were tightly shuttered. Just outside the harbor was what seemed to be a storage area along the edge of a city park but only a few tons of steel girders were stacked up. A Western diplomat with much experience in shipping had high praise for the harbor. "First of all, it's fantastic the way they manage to get things out of the harbor," he said, in an interview in Hanoi. "After all, it's an old-fashioned harbor with a bad railroad. When I was at the harbor there was no backlog at all, which is very rare in shipping."

The Goods Are Moving
"There's no question," he added, "that they have a very big problem because of the poor facilities, but they seem to be mastering it. And there's also no question that the goods are getting out of Hai Phong and into the country."

According to Mr. Khanh, the Hai Phong official, perhaps 20 ships a week were being unloaded at the docks before the bombing began, but at its height in 1967 the figure was 35 a week.

The North Vietnamese official acknowledged that vessels in the harbor were struck only once or twice during the air war, perhaps by mistake, but he insisted that the over-all American policy "was to isolate the harbor from the city." That policy, he added, included heavy

bombings of residential areas. Vast bomb damage to what clearly seemed to be residential areas was apparent nearly two miles from the docks. Some parts of Hai Phong still have the appearance of bombed-out cities in Europe after World War II. Blocks were almost devastated in many parts of a densely populated area said to be house Chinese and many Vietnamese fishermen.

Damage to suburban areas was also described as heavy, with 150 of 161 hamlets bombed at one time or another. Hai Phong consists of five districts, separated by waterways. Most of the important bridges were destroyed at various times by American bombs, rebuilt and destroyed again, Mr. Khanh said, but supplies were moved by barge and pontoon, often at night.

The official said that 283 American planes were shot down in the area while flying roughly 4,000 sorties during 1,125 missions over the city.

Civilians Termed Targets
Mr. Khanh said that as many as 75 per cent of the air strikes on Hai Phong were aimed at the civilian population. "Why?" he asked. "We think intimidation was the purpose. As long as the Americans could not bomb the dock areas, he said, they attempted to prevent the workers from going to the docks."

The Americans eventually began using delayed-fuse magnetic mines, set to go off in the vicinity of metallic objects, Mr. Khanh said, and scattered them along the waterways late in the air war in an attempt to hinder the movement of war

goods. In addition, he said 2,700 antipersonnel bombs were dropped on residential market and work areas.

"They did create damage and difficulties for our people in the air war," he acknowledged, "but the people were very responsive, and therefore the loss of human life was limited. All of the women, children and schools were evacuated, and factories had to be dispersed throughout the area. Production was hampered, but it still met the essential demand of the people."

Very little heavy machinery was damaged, he added. "All of this," he said, "is why McNamara and his generals couldn't isolate the harbor from the rest of the city."

Mr. Khanh, reporting that American reconnaissance planes still flew missions over the docks at least one or twice a week, said antiaircraft gunners had shot down more than 30 pilotless Navy planes since the bombing halt of March 31, 1968.

Much of the city has again been put on alert, he added, because of the increasing number of attacks by American planes in the Panhandle area.

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