

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, June 11—Several weeks ago in this space there was a report from the North Vietnamese village of Phucloc. It describes the damage done when, as the villagers and North Vietnamese officials said, American planes bombed Phucloc at 2:20 on the morning of April 16. They said that of the population of 611, 63 were killed and 61 injured.

The Defense Department in Washington was asked to comment, to say how such a nonmilitary place could have been bombed. Phuc Loc is a village of mud huts, a small island in a sea of rice fields, about five miles south of Haiphong.

The Pentagon reply, received in due course, was a flat denial that American bombers had attacked Phucloc. A B-52 raid on Haiphong on April 16 had been announced shortly after it took place, an official said. But it was against Pentagon policy to bomb populated areas, he said, and there had been no raid on Phucloc.

There is an almost Alice-in-Wonderland logic to that Pentagon comment: We do not bomb civilian targets, so we could not have bombed Phucloc. In its blandness it really suggests that there was no bombing, that the whole affair was made up or a mirage.

The difficulty is that anyone who actually saw Phucloc after April 16 will believe otherwise. It would be extremely difficult to fake the bomb

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### AT HOME ABROAD

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craters that I saw there with my own eyes. It would be a remarkable piece of theater to stage the screaming women in the rubble, and the people who spoke of their families being killed. And others have seen Phucloc.

It would be one thing for a Pentagon official to say that no such civilian village is an American bombing target but that a mistake could not be altogether excluded that close to Haiphong. It is another to imply that there was no bombing of Phucloc at all—especially when United States intelligence photographs could well have shown the damage.

The Pentagon comment thus unintentionally illuminates one grave cost of this war to Americans: the damage to our candor and humanity.

It is not only Phucloc, of course. A number of Western correspondents over many years have reported on bomb damage to civilian facilities in North Vietnam, to schools and houses and hospitals. But American official policy is evidently to ignore all such reports, to brush them aside, to deny that mistakes can have occurred.

The official announcements continue to speak of B-52's raiding gasoline dumps and bridges and electrical plants, and of ships offshore shelling "Communist military targets." It is as if there were no human beings in-

involved at all. But common sense, like the eyewitness accounts, tells us that any large-scale bombing or shelling hits some innocent civilians. Why, then, does the United States Government ignore or deny it?

Some of those involved in the policy of heavy bombing and shelling must, unconsciously or otherwise, regard the Vietnamese as *untermenschen*, as creatures somehow not so human as us. Others, actually facing the truth about the human damage that American bombs and shells and chemicals have done, still think our political objectives are more important.

But many Americans, probably most, have simply tuned out. The continuing death and destruction in Vietnam are no longer in their consciousness.

That is why public opinion can be so inert when Seymour Hersh of The New York Times discloses secret findings that another massacre occurred on the same morning as Mylai in 1968. The official report speaks of "murder," and of "pretense" and "misrepresentation" in covering it up, but hardly anyone in Washington—in the military, in Congress or in the press—really seems to care deeply.

In a way, concealing the truth or not caring is worse than killing women and children at Mylai or bombing them by mistake at Phucloc. Nor does it help to say that the Communists have killed countless innocent people in Vietnam. Americans have to worry about their own souls.