

How We Bombed In North Vietnam



Arthur Hoppe

OUR CURRENT "Bombs for Peace Program" in North Vietnam, on which we had pinned such high hopes, now seems doomed to inevitable failure.

This grim news was announced last week by a senior U.S. Air Force official.

"We're eating the vitals of the country," he said, meaning North Vietnam. "There's nothing they can do about it. Nothing."

"If the bombing is permitted to continue for three or four months, there won't be a worthwhile target left up there," he told the Associated Press. "Every high-value target will have been destroyed with great precision and they can't stop it."

This gloomy prediction has stunned administration officials. After all, how can the President bomb the stubborn North Vietnamese to the peace table, if they have nothing left for us to bomb?

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WITH THE wisdom of hindsight, it's easy to say this disastrous predicament should have been foreseen. Here we are, the mightiest nation on earth, sending thousands of planes to drop millions of bombs day and night on a tiny, backward little country that never, unfortunately, had many targets in the first place.

Yet we went right on bombing them as though they'd never run out. Now what are we going to do?

Some faint hearts in the State Department are suggesting we have no course but to surrender. "If it's honorable to surrender when you've run out of ammunition," said one, "It's certainly honorable to surrender when you've run out of targets."

Fortunately, harder heads in the Pentagon are already working on two contingency plans to meet the emergency. They

were explained to the press by General Homer T. Pettibone, generally described as "the brains behind Bombing for Peace."

"Our first plan to solve the impending target shortage crisis, gentlemen," he said, thwacking his leather puttee with a swagger stick, "is to ship targets to North Vietnam so that we'll have targets there to bomb — power plants, oil storage depots, munitions dumps, things like that."

"Then we can go on blowing up their power plants, oil storage depots and munitions dumps until they agree to talk peace. It's as simple as that."

As precedent for this plan, General Pettibone cited World War II. "In that case, we blew up the enemy's targets and then, after the war, paid to rebuild them," he pointed out. "In this case, we will merely reverse the procedure."

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THE ONLY problem with this plan, the general said, was the U.S. target-carrying ships might be blown up trying to run the U.S. blockade of North Vietnamese ports. Consequently, he said, the Air Force was considering air-dropping targets instead.

Asked what kind of targets could be air-dropped, General Pettibone unfurled a large square of canvas on which was painted a red, white and blue bullseye. "These," he said happily, "will give our boys something to shoot for."

So every American can take patriotic pride in the destructive efficiency of our Air Force, the ingenuity of our planners and the inevitable success of our Bombs for Peace Program. Even if it takes another seven years.

No tiny, little backward country is going to lick us simply by running out of targets.