

Bombing of Dikes and Civilian Targets

To the Editor:

The charges by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake and Dr. Kurt Waldheim that U. S. planes are bombing North Vietnamese dikes are based on evidence considerably more substantial than, as the Rev. John McLaughlin wrote (Op-Ed) Aug. 28) * "a discredited 500-word news item"—presumably that filed by Jean Thoraval of Agence France Presse and "discredited" only by the Pentagon's own denials and aerial photographs.

Eyewitnesses on the ground who corroborate those charges include Jean Oberg, the Swedish Ambassador to Hanoi; Sean MacBride, a former Irish Foreign Minister; members of the corps of diplomats stationed in Hanoi; Prof. Yves Lacoste, a noted French geographer; Ramsey Clark and a whole battery of Western journalists.

The Rev. McLaughlin claims that "no target in which there is a substantial probability of significant loss of civilian life has ever been approved by U. S. policy." In response, may I cite just two from among the numerous instances of undoubted targeting of civilian areas that I saw during a visit to North Vietnam in May.

On May 23 I visited the village of Phuc Loc, six kilometers outside Hai-phong. It had been carpet bombed by B-52's at 2:30 A.M. on April 16. More

than sixty civilians had been killed and many more wounded. Within that village of less than one square kilometer there were at least 140 bomb craters, many of which I examined and filmed. The Pentagon vehemently denied this raid and claimed that stray SAM missiles caused the damage.

That evening, following an itinerary agreed upon four days earlier, I arrived at the provincial capital, Nam-dinh, which had been bombed just several hours earlier. Workers' residences and a textile mill had been destroyed, and the building I stayed in that night had been hit.

I was cautioned not to walk about outside the building, and the next day I saw several unexploded Rockeye No. 2 perforating bombs—traditionally antitank weapons but now used to penetrate underground air raid shelters and against dikes. As expected, the Pentagon denied their use in Nam-dinh, further demonstrating the worth of Pentagon denials.

Without challenging the veracity of the pilots the Rev. McLaughlin spoke with, let me relate another personal experience. In an interview on May 25, eight captured pilots told me that they had always believed they were bombing only military targets but that their subsequent experience in North Vietnam had convinced them that many civilian sites were regularly being hit.

The emphasis of the Rev. McLaughlin's argument suggests that he would find any targeting of the dike system unconscionable. Unfortunately, those scruples are not shared by his chief in the White House. In an interview given to The Times in August 1966, Mr. Nixon placed possible air strikes on the Red River dikes in a "gray area" because they might affect the civilian economy. He then added:

"On the other hand, if the purpose . . . is to reduce the flow of supplies . . . , I would say that a military justification might be arrived at." (Aug. 8, 1966.)

(Rev.) PAUL MAYER

New York Theological Seminary
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