

Excerpts from taped replay
of President Nixon's appearance
before meeting of American
Society of Newspaper Editors,
Washington, D.C.

16 Apr 71

transcribed from tape.

Excerpt from answer to question by Otis Chandler, publisher, Los Angeles Times:

"Well, Mr. Chandler, as you know, we have had some pretty bitter experiences with some Communist nations with regard to American prisoners, and we have had a very difficult experience with the North Vietnamese who have, without question, been the most barbaric in their handling of prisoners of any nation in modern history."

executive

Question by William B. Dickinson, /editor, Philadelphia Bulletin: Mr. President, just one more question on Indochina. Most of your comments on our Indochina policy have emphasized that it's saving American lives. But what I want to ask is, what about the lives of Asians and the many, many refugees created by the incursions into Laos and Cambodia?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Dickinson, let's look at the Asian lives. I think of the 50,000 South Vietnamese civilians who have been murdered by the North Vietnamese and VC since this war began. I think of the half a million - by conservative estimates - in North Vietnam who were murdered or otherwise exterminated by the North Vietnamese after they took over from the South. I visited South Vietnam just after the North Vietnamese took over in North Vietnam. As a matter of fact, I'm one of the few people, at least in public life, who's been to Hanoi; I was there in 1953 and then came back in 1956. I visited a refugee camp. A million refugees came from North Vietnam to South Vietnam and they came there because of the terrible atrocities that were visited upon them by the government of North Vietnam.

Now, let's talk for a moment, to put that in balance. We say, what about the people in Laos? As far as the activities in Laos are concerned, the bombing activities in Laos are concerned, look at that particular area, that is totally occupied by the North Vietnamese at this time. The number of civilians could be very, very small.* As far as civilian casualties in South Vietnam are concerned, from air strikes, they are very, very small, because the war has moved out of South Vietnam, the South Vietnamese now have taken it over. And as far as our activities are concerned, on balance I would say that the United States, by its actions in South Vietnam, and I say I understand the controversy, the difficulty, the moral concern that many Americans have about all wars, and particularly this kind of a war, so difficult to understand. But on balance, I will say this: that if the United States were to fail in Vietnam, if

the Communists were to take over, the blood-bath that would follow would be a blot on this nation's history from which we would find it very difficult to return. Now, it is not necessary. We are now in a position where we can - and I can confidently say - we are ending American involvement, we are going to end it in a way that will, we believe, give South Vietnam a chance - not guarantee it - to defend itself against a Communist take-over. And I believe that this will save many more thousands of Asian lives than it is contended were lost because of American activities.

Following estimate of civilian casualties by Senate Subcommittee on Refugees is based "official figures ... not disputed by Government officials," as reported by Neil Sheehan, Washington, NYTimes 15 Mar 71, filed Indochina.

* Laos: now exceeding 30,000 a year, including more than 10,000 dead.

** South Vietnam, 1970: 125,000 to 150,000, including 25,000 to 35,000 dead.

*** Figure disputed by D. Gareth Porter, who also calls "bloodbath" a myth. See this file , 12 and 13 Sep 72, George C. Wilson, Washington Post.