

Thousands of Soldiers Throng Hanoi

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HANOI, North Vietnam — Troops throng this capital city, crowding its stores and markets and idling in its lakeside cafes.

Officially, they are said to be on leave, but Western diplomats in Hanoi describe the presence of thousands of soldiers as unprecedented.

Here, as elsewhere in North Vietnam, a visitor returning after 15 months sees evidence of a shift from military to domestic priorities amid preparations for a continuation of war.

The current slogan, on banners in almost every street, exhorts "Vigilance on the Home Front!" meaning both in its defense and its development according to a blueprint for an industrial "great leap forward."

United States air strikes in November and the troop assault at Sontay are interpreted in Hanoi not as a reaction to the shooting down of American reconnaissance aircraft or to conditions in prisoner-of-war camps but as a deterrent to North Viet-

nam's sudden large-scale reconstruction.

After two years of sleepy security, Hanoi reacted in mid-December. Suddenly, the city was filled with posters urging, "Fight the enemy wherever he comes, and in whatever form and with whatever force he comes!" Antiaircraft guns materialized on roofs in the city center, and militia units drilled purposefully in street combat.

Change in the Militia

In one frenzied day's work, Hanoi's air-raid shelters, which had long been ignored and unusable, were cleared by so-called "Ho Chi Minh youth brigades," which perform emergency labor. The countless holes in the sidewalks, instant individual air-raid shelters with cement linings and lids, were freed of filth and frogs and again prepared for human occupancy.

Factory militia groups competed in daily keep-fit races. Previously, militia units in this city of more than one million consisted almost entirely of young women. Now one sees the armed young

male militia, ex-servicemen being redeployed to vital industries, it is said, after three or more years in the army.

But, apart from the heightened state of alert, it is still difficult to have much feeling of war in Hanoi. There is an effort to improve leisure facilities and material standards to ease the increased workload and mental strain imposed by reorganization of industry and changes in traditional life-patterns.

A new suburban housing complex, begun last February, is nearing completion; the Polytechnic Institute, which was closed in 1966, was reopened in December, and is said to be scheduled for expansion. Last month, the central food market, which had been closed for five years, also reopened, and more food has been promised.

"The needs of the war are secondary," said Le Duan, first secretary of the party. "Our main objective is reconstruction and future development."