

# Midway and Haiphong

By HERBERT MITGANG

WASHINGTON—In the great turning-point Battle of Midway that began just thirty years ago this week, the United States Navy fielded but three lonely carriers in its task force facing Japan's main fleet. The fliers who sank Tokyo's imperial dreams a thousand miles from Hawaii, and the American people, knew that the declared aim of the high-riding enemy was the conquest of United States territory.

In the current political-ideological battle for Haiphong and the other harbors, against North Vietnam's sampan "fleet" and Soviet supply ships, the United States Navy has deployed six carriers, three cruisers and more than 25 destroyers. The full fury and firepower of the Seventh Fleet are engaged in destructive actions against several hundred miles of remote but populous Asian mainland.

This latest escalation of undeclared warfare, proclaimed on television rather than in the halls of Congress, is costly in human suffering on both sides of the demilitarized zone. It has started American casualties up again after a period of relatively few losses. And it has intensified campaign debate in the United States over the billions of dollars being spent by all three armed services on global defense.

Of course, hopes for some turn toward a negotiated peace in Vietnam have been raised by the progress made on East-West détente in Moscow. A political accommodation in Indochina eventually would affect the soaring cost of American defense spending. But triumphant televised announcements from Washington must be watched with caution.

The President and Secretary of Defense Laird have promised that American troop strength in Vietnam will be reduced to under 50,000 men by the end of June, a tenth of President Johnson's half-million total. But there is a form of numbers game in this commitment. For the increased Navy and Air Force activities this month are not added to the number of Americans around Vietnam when the President talks of "meeting or beating" his withdrawal deadlines. Mr. Nixon avoids mentioning Air Force and Navy.

While ground forces leave South Vietnam, B-52's, fighter-bombers, carriers and other warships are increased in Thailand and Guam and the Gulf of Tonkin. There are more than 45,000 airmen at the half-dozen bases in Thailand; in recent days new squadrons have been added to fly hazardous missions against areas with Soviet ground-to-air missiles—resulting in new P.O.W.'s. In addition, there are

more than 41,000 Navy men stationed offshore in a fleet that outguns the Midway task force.

The increased number of support forces, reaching back to Hawaii, required to keep lines of communication open and supplies flowing to these Navy and Air Force increments, is not known. But when the escalated Vietnam war is regarded more accurately as an Indochina war, observers in Washington deduce that not 50,000 Americans but at least three times that number are currently involved.

The Vietnam war and Defense Department funds already are intertwined as campaign issues. The Navy League's publication, *Sea Power*, praises President Nixon for proposing an increase in defense spending after Vietnam while accusing Senator George McGovern, the longtime advocate of defense cuts, of wanting to reduce the United States "to second or third place militarily." Admiral Elmo Zumwalt Jr., the Navy's chief officer, talks of defense budgets in language indistinguishable from his White House commander in chief, warning that Americans should not "stand helplessly watching as the final sands of our hour of greatness [run] out."

A factual analysis of ambitious military budgeting in the wake of the Indochina war has just been made by the new Center for Defense Information. This private study group, directed by the recently retired Rear Admiral Gene R. La Rocque, is monitoring such multibillion dollar weapons as the Air Force's B-1 bomber and ULMS (Underwater Long-Range Missile System).

Admiral La Rocque says that the Pentagon is on a "power trip." In a ship-by-ship class comparison of the American and Soviet fleets, his center finds the balance heavily in favor of the United States, with little evidence to support the request for far greater naval power overseas. "If our Navy had not been in the Gulf of Tonkin," Admiral La Rocque believes, "we might not be in the Vietnam mess today." At the Pentagon Admiral La Rocque is not universally admired.

Nor, for that matter, is a parting salvo by President Eisenhower: "Every addition to defense expenditure does not automatically increase military security. Because security is based upon moral and economic, as well as purely military strength, a point can be reached at which additional funds for arms, far from bolstering security, weaken it."

These words have a special relevance this Memorial Day, with America cast in an imperial mold, three decades after Midway.

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