



## Do Some People Hate Good News?

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BY A CRUEL IRONY, a friendly letter from John Paul Vann arrived last Tuesday. Four days earlier, the tragic news had come that Vann, the single most experienced and prescient American in South Vietnam, had been killed in a helicopter crash in the line of duty.

This, then, must have been one of the last letters written by this brave and patriotic man. The letter also had a wider message, so those parts which are not overly personal deserve reproduction.

"It is true," wrote Vann, the American organizer of the defense of Kontum, in the central highlands . . . "We're going to hold Kontum . . . the enemy is beating himself to death against it . . . the best defense of Pleiku was to hold Kontum. We got (the reinforcement of Kontum) accomplished just one day prior to the enemy's opening assault . . ."

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MY 12 APRIL predictions (of enemy defeat) are holding quite well . . . and they were made without the certainty of the tremendously courageous and timely decisions by the President (concerning the North Vietnamese ports and the bombing, obviously). With those decisions, I now have absolute certainty that (the Hanoi leaders have) committed a blunder equal to or greater than that of Tet '68 . . .

"Barring a negotiated settlement at Paris, the enemy has had it — and will not constitute a credible threat for several years hence, which will then be irrelevant."

The letter closed, heartbreakingly, with word that John Paul Vann could not be in Washington "in July . . . could not

afford to miss the (a planned counter-offensive) we're going to have that month." One day after John Vann's letter, still another came from the chief American in command on the approaches of Saigon, Major General James Hollingsworth. General Hollingsworth was reporting on the failure of the North Vietnamese siege of An Loc.

"I would think the enemy is fully aware of their total disaster," he wrote. "Two and two-thirds divisions (of North Vietnamese troops) is one helluva rent to pay for 25 per cent of a small, inconsequential province capital for less than 30 days occupancy by two battered companies."

That letter arrived simultaneously with the news of the final relief of An Loc in the morning papers.

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BY ALL THE signs, despite the hideous North Vietnamese losses and heavy defeats, there are still battles to be fought. Battles can always bring bad news. Ad interim, however, even the newspapers utterly failed to convey how good the news was from An Loc.

ARVN's feat at An Loc appears more and more admirable, the more one learns. It was resolute, unyielding defense of a wretched perimeter about a thousand meters square, under much heavier artillery and infantry attack than the French suffered at Dienbienphu.

Suppose, in contrast, that An Loc had fallen instead of holding. That would have been made to seem truly catastrophic. In short, there seem to be some people who positively hate news of victory.