

War Closer To Hanoi Than Peace

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HANOI, North Vietnam, Oct. 18—"We must consider the front still nearer than peace," one senior Hanoi official said, apparently summing up the mood here at the moment.

"Understand that we are not bellicose," he went on. "We don't want to win by military means and exterminate each other. We would greatly welcome peace, but our experience is not to forget the front."

Officially, no optimism whatsoever is expressed here to the effect that a settlement of the war might be near.

Public ceremonies and exhibitions contain no hint of

settlement, only reminders of the front and of the duration of the struggle. These are exhibitions dealing with Hanoi's liberation from the French 18 years ago and with this year's Quangtri offensive, described as "an unprecedented 180-day action which proves the capacity of the resistance forces."

Today a special ceremony marked the shooting down of what was said to be the 4,000th American plane downed over North Vietnam, an F-111 over Vinh Yen province. Both pilots reportedly were killed. While newsmen were taken there to see the wreckage, in Hanoi thousands gathered round the central Little Lake as a rubber mock-up of an American jet with a tail of painted flames was raised aloft for all to see.

It took several attempts in high winds to inflate it, but the effort provided light relief for the crowd.

Outwardly Hanoi looks more part of the front than it ever has, with department stores closed in daytime, theaters permanently shut, crowds kept dispersed, and everywhere guns pointing skyward.

Occasionally sirens sound, but planes have not been heard near the city for a week now in what is presumed to be a bombing pause in the Hanoi area after the destruction of the French mission here on Oct. 11 during an American raid.

The recent bombing of North Vietnam has caused no apparent shortages. Judging on the basis of previous visits, supplies move as freely as ever, as a result of extra effort and of camouflage. In blockaded Haiphong, one eats king-size crab and canned delicacies from China, while suddenly in Hanoi there's French cognac at \$4 a bottle, insuring real celebration if peace comes.