

'Mr. Nixon Is Not Angry'

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Another Christmas, More Bombs

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Washington

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

"Air operations are being conducted throughout Vietnam," Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird announces on Monday, as full bombing is resumed.

The family of Captain Robert G. Certain is informed the next day that he has been shot down over Hanoi on his "last" mission. They were expecting him home Christmas Eve.

"He was going into the ministry after he came back," his sister said.

God rest ye merry, gentlemen.

On the third day of the bombing, Henry Kissinger appears at his favorite Washington restaurant, the Sans Souci (literal translation: "Without care"). He is with a pretty companion. It is a signal to the country. If the man who proclaimed that peace was "at hand" on October 26 can show his face, obviously the war's heaviest raids are no cause for national shame, or for interruption of civilized lifestyle.

The President, we are told on Monday, is bombing North Vietnam back to the Stone Age to "insure that the North Vietnamese would comprehend the extent of his anger."*

Two days later, the White House calls in some sympathetic correspondents to correct this impression. He is not angry.* And in proof of the equality of spirit in which he has commanded the new slaughter, he demonstrated his endless compassion for humankind by throwing the full weight of his great office against a blackout of television coverage of professional football games on Christmas weekend.

The man who has everything has given bombs for Christmas before. Last year, you remember, he ordered heavy "protective reaction raids" over the North to observe the coming of the Prince of Peace.

Hark the herald angels sing.

The White House press secretary explains on the first day that the bombing is to obstruct "an enemy offensive."

Saigon asks what offensive, and Ziegler retreats to a "contingency enemy offensive."

At the Pentagon, spokesman Jerry Friedheim rejects the term "terror bombing." He reels off military targets which have been struck, enough, in fact, to convince the patriotic American that North Vietnam, which has been masquerading as a peasant country, is, in fact, one vast Oak Ridge.

Friedheim admits that B-52s, which fly at 30,000 feet cannot always see what they are blowing up. But Friedheim is sure they are

not civilians. Radio Hanoi reports that the Cuban embassy has been hit, and lists civilian casualties.

Noel, Noel.

Kissinger's deputy, General Alexander Haig, is dispatched to Saigon with a stiff letter from President Nixon to President Thieu. The contents are leaked. No signing, no aid. No one asks Haig if he gave Thieu a wink with the letter. There is now no accord to sign.

Behind the scenes, officials sob out details of the deception. The tricky North Vietnamese have tricked innocent Richard Nixon into thinking they really want a cease-fire. The minute his back was turned they slipped in new conditions. That is, however, not the reason for the bombing.

Ziegler explains that it will continue until "all our prisoners are released."

Ten B-52s and a contested number of smaller planes are shot down. Fifty-five more Americans are lost or will be spending Christmas in North Vietnamese prison

camps as a consequence of these missions of mercy.

Joy to the world.

On Thursday, Radio Hanoi announced that American planes have struck an American prison camp, the one known familiarly as the "Hanoi-Hilton."

The Pentagon is momentarily stunned. It puts out "no comment." Friedheim then comes with the week's most mind-bending line.

"We have not targeted any place we feel prisoners might be located."

By the time of the evening news shows, the Pentagon is counter-attacking. The North Vietnamese, it says, are to blame for "violating the Geneva Convention by exposing prisoners to the hazards of war."

All is calm. All is bright.

* William Beecher
NYTimes 19 Dec 72

** George Sherman
Washington Star-News,
in New Orleans
States-Item 21 Dec 72

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