

Good Will to Men



Anthony Lewis

By Anthony Lewis

LONDON, Dec. 24—The only blessing we can really hope for on Christmas is self-perception. Miracles are not to be expected: only the chance of seizing on the symbol of Christmas to look within and see who we are. That was what the Spirits did for Scrooge in one night.

On this Christmas, Americans inescapably think of Vietnam. We do, at least, if we have the courage to look into ourselves and not avert our eyes from what we see.

I think of a ten-year-old boy I saw in Haiphong, North Vietnam, last May 17. His name was Hoang Dinh Phong. Early one morning some weeks earlier American planes had bombed the

AT HOME ABROAD

workers' housing block where his family lived. His father and one brother were killed. He was badly wounded in the skull.

When I saw Hoang Dinh Phong, he was lying unconscious in a hospital bed, the top of his head covered with a bandage and a striped cloth. His sixteen-year-old brother, Hoang Dinh Nam, stood at the foot of the bed twisting a blue peaked cap in his hand.

The little boy had had two operations, in a hospital that had itself been bombed on April 16. I asked the director of the hospital, Dr. Nguyen Duc Lung, whether the boy would live.

"Today he is better," Dr. Lung said.

Human torment, mutilation and death are easier to understand singly than in the mass. Germans who said they knew nothing about the concentration camps were moved by Anne Frank. Some day, in the same way, Americans will read about Hoang Dinh Phong or others like him and wonder

how they can ever make up for the horrors their country committed.

It is a Christmas of horrors. The Red River Delta of North Vietnam is one of the most populous areas on earth. On any road there is an endless stream of peasants bicycling along or walking with baskets balanced on poles over their shoulders.

For the last week, the week before Christmas 1972, American planes have been pounding the villages and towns of the Red River Delta day and night. Their mission, in the words of the leading French newspaper *Le Monde*, is "terror . . . blind murders . . . localized exterminations." The London Daily Mirror calls it a policy of "insane ferocity."

Americans are used to regarding themselves as the good neighbors of the world, innocent and helpful. How terrible it is to realize this Christmas that in the eyes of most of the world the Christian peace offered by the United States is the peace of the inquisition: conformity or tormented death.

That is what Americans will see this Christmas if, like the redeemed Scrooge, they look honestly into themselves. Many millions of Americans do understand and are tortured by their apparent inability to stop their Government's madness. But it hardly needs to be said that those who need salvation the most, the men who hold power, will not listen to the spirits in the night.

By now they have to be reckoned men without humanity. They talk about football while arranging to impose on little countries that thwart them the punishment of mass death. They cover terror by lies and evasions.

In the sentimental myth, Christmas is a time of forgiveness. But only saints can forgive mass murder. For some Americans, for many, it sticks in the throat this Christmas to say, "God bless us every one."