

... and a Hazard to an Unweakening People

HANOI—It is Christmas Eve, and in an hour Joan Baez and I will conduct a Christmas service. Afterwards, there will be Mass at the cathedral

The writer is Assistant Dean of the Yale Divinity School. His account of the bombing of North Vietnam was written for Newsday.

and then a party. It could be beautiful tonight. But the last six days have been horrible.

Monday afternoon, we walked around Hanoi among the thousands of bicycles that crowd the streets. Children everywhere were smiling at us, playing in the streets of what still looks like a lovely French city.

Then, Monday night, the bombs fell. No one expected them. I stood on the balcony with the French reporter, watching tracer bullets and an occasional rocket cut across the sky.

Then, to the north, the sky grew red and smoke billowed against a full moon. Then the sky grew red to the west and I heard the sound of jets overhead. My own fear mounted and the Frenchman led me to the shelter.

The sirens sounded again and again as wave after wave of bombers passed over. But the worst was around 5 a.m., when I was sure the hotel was next.

TUESDAY, we saw the first pilots captured during last week's bombing, apparently still in a state of shock. One had bandages around his head. They looked so confused, hurt and lost. We were no longer anonymous to them nor they to us.

Since then, the Vietnamese have shown us no more. They don't want to humiliate us, they say, and I believe them.

Afterwards, we saw the first site—the little village of Noc, west of the central city. Little shacks and rice paddies were all blown to bits and the ruins were still smoking from the fire. People were wandering about aimlessly, picking up their few belongings. I found it terrible and very painful to see. Bombs fell again that night and through Friday.

Wednesday, we saw 12 POWs. A bomb had fallen next to the camp and the ceilings of their rooms had caved in. I think they were as scared as we were. Joan and I conducted a brief Christmas service, took their names and promised to call their families.

But the worst was Friday, when we saw Bach-Mai Hospital—Hanoi's largest—totally destroyed. There were unexploded bombs here and there, and people were working to uncover the

shelters where victims were still trapped. Some of the workers could hear their cries.

A Vietnamese man, helmet on his head, passed by. He had a notebook over his face to hide his tears. I was crying too.

THE CHIEF DOCTOR talked to us in a voice touched with hysteria. No one will say how many died in the raid, but I am sure there were many



This photo, released by an official North Vietnamese source, purports to show the bombed ruins of Bach-Mai Hospital in Hanoi.

We saw collapsed buildings, rubble everywhere, enormous bomb craters—some enlarging those from a previous raid this fall. And everywhere little groups of people standing, their faces blank with pain.

Most of the principal services in Hanoi are gone. There is almost no electricity for the city. The railroad station has been destroyed and the airport is only semi-operational.

That afternoon we saw the village of Anduong. A housing project built in the '50s for working people was totally destroyed.

I saw an old man standing in the ruins of his house, putting on his coat and taking it off again endlessly, as if the ritual act could recreate his past. There were impassive faces but also many tears.

Friday night was supposed to be our going-away party, but it was interrupted by the bombers and we finished it in the shelter, packed in like sardines. Joan sang freedom songs and two Vietnamese women sang folk songs among a ragtag group of Vietnamese and foreigners. We couldn't hear the bombs above the music.

So life goes on here. The streets

still are full of bicycles and the children still smile as we four Americans pass by.

But many people are being evacuated. They say everything of any strategic worth has long since gone.

There are only the people, and I see no signs of weakening. They say they have fought for independence for 1,000 years and they won't stop now.

This afternoon I visited the Domini-

can Church. They are putting up decorations for Mass tonight, Chinese lanterns and light bulbs. What little electricity there is here is going for church decoration.

Over the altar a freshly painted sign in latin, "God has made His dwelling with men."

They say not as many people as usual will come tonight, but they will say Mass with or without bombs. We will be there, too.

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