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The Bombing Of Queens

By Herbert Mitgang

Any resemblance to reality in the following dispatch is purely coincidental

QUEENS, N. Y.—For the first time in history, an American city came under direct enemy aerial bombardment yesterday. The main target, according to the official Hanoi spokesman, was the Sunnyside marshaling yard in the Borough of Queens, now in shambles, but other damage to non-military structures is reported. There are 185 known dead, three times that number have been hospitalized and, say Police Department sources, "a couple hundred commuters" are trapped in the wreckage of upended trains outside the bombing carpet.

Guided by the torch of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, three TU-18B's, latest Soviet-made supersonic bombers, attacked at 7:05 P.M., following the long stream of lights from bumper-to-bumper vehicles on the Long Island Expressway. Army intelligence declined to answer questions about where the bombers originated or who flew them, but weather analysts at La Guardia Airport disclosed that radio transmitters had picked up voices of Vietnamese fliers and surmised that North Vietnam had perpetrated this bombing of unarmed civilians.

One TU-18B was shot down by alert anti-aircraft batteries near the Throgs Neck Bridge and fell into Flushing Bay. Two of the North Vietnamese fliers parachuted to their deaths on Queens Boulevard, a block from the Elks Hall. They were alive upon landing but a crowd of local residents, including several who expressed resentment about American POW's and MIA's, beat them into bloody pulps.

Both lanes of the Grand Central Expressway between Forest Hills and Kew Gardens show considerable damage. In an obvious effort to bolster the morale of their own people, Hanoi Radio boasted that the "brave pilots" had succeeded in closing down one of New York's main auto and truck roadways by what it called "retaliatory cratering." After consultation with Jerry W. Friedheim, Defense Department spokesman, the Queens Borough President declared Hanoi's claim was propaganda. "Those aren't bomb craters," he said warmly. "They're pot holes."

High-level bombing from seven miles up apparently could not be fully controlled by even the most advanced Soviet lasers, computers and sensors in the hands of fliers who are essentially peasants. A stick of bombs fell haphazardly on the empty field at Shea Stadium, knocking down both goalposts and punching holes in the heretofore impregnable twenty-yard lines. Groundskeepers reported that next Sunday's exhibition game was definitely canceled. President Nixon himself, through his third press secretary, was said to be infuriated, and had ordered all possible humanitarian aid to the stadium and fans.

Speaking for the North Vietnamese Government, Le Duc Tho told a corre-

spondent for Le Monde that "only military targets had been targeted" in the People's Borough of Queens. Reminded that many American civilians had been killed and wounded in the historic bombing, he replied that these "unfortunate byproducts" of the raid could have been caused by "imperialist anti-aircraft shells" that had failed to hit the TU-18B's and had fallen back to earth.

"I can assure you," said the well-known Politburo member, "that the aim of this drastic action was to speed the negotiations and bring peace for a generation. All we are looking for is some sign, however vague, however tenuous, however indirect, that the United States is willing to negotiate seriously. We do not desire to bomb a pitiful, helpless giant, but we must keep our goodwill options open."

A major TV documentary on the Queens bombings that was being prepared for broadcast this evening over the combined facilities of the commercial and public networks has been replaced by one blending the best of the adventure yarns of Jacques Cousteau, distinguished underseas explorer, and Lowell Thomas, America's foremost newscaster. It includes segments on friendly as well as man-eating sharks and the Himalaya's latest footprints (in color) of the Abominable Snowman.

The originally scheduled broadcast, "Queens Can Take It," was canceled at the last moment after the networks checked it with their affiliates who, in turn, checked it with Clay T. Whitehead, director of the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, who said it smacked of "ideological plugola."

One stray antipersonnel bomb has, temporarily, darkened the Statue of Liberty's torch.

Herbert Mitgang is a member of the editorial board of The Times.