

Victor Lasky

## Time for a Calm View of The Bombing

Washington

**N**OW MIGHT be an instructive time to recall the extraordinary outcry which greeted the U.S. heavy bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong last month.

From Sweden's Olof Palme to New York Congresswoman Bella Abzug, the cry was the same: President Nixon was no better than the Nazis in engaging civilian targets in North Vietnam. The New York Times led the media pack in denouncing the President for "acts of barbarism" which shamed the American people.



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The TV news shows, instead of seeking balanced reporting, went overboard in interviewing congressional critics, assorted peaceniks, presidential rejects as well as overt friends of Hanoi. Supporters of the President were given short shrift on the air waves. But Senator William Saxbe (Rep., Ohio), a former hawk, became an overnight celebrity on the tube because of his hip-shooting comment that the President had taken leave of his senses in ordering the bombing.

No wonder, then, that most Americans — whether or not they agreed with the President — were led to believe that the bombing had wiped out a considerable portion of North Vietnam's population, just as a few months ago we were led to believe that the U.S. was deliberately bombing North Vietnamese dikes.

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**A**CTUALLY THE death toll in the recent bombings was insignificant. According to Radio Hanoi, in a broadcast taped by Western monitors, 1318 persons were killed and 1261 wounded in the ten days of bombing which began last December 18.

But, judging from the hulabaloo stirred up in much of our media, one would have thought that the death toll almost approximated the several hundred thousand destroyed U.S. atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Radio Hanoi further reported that U.S. planes had flown more than 1000 sorties in that ten-day period. Half of them were by the much maligned B-52s. In all, according to Hanoi, some 40,000 tons of bombs were dropped.

These figures are encouraging for several reasons. For one thing, they demonstrated the accuracy of U.S. bombing of industrial and military sites in heavily populated areas. For another, they showed how well the North Vietnamese had prepared their own people in civil defense measures.

What is surprising, however, is that the fact that Hanoi's figures were almost thoroughly ignored by the principal news outlets in this country. This was, after all, front page news. Instead, the media—with a few notable exceptions—maintained its phony posture of viewing the "terror" bombings with alarm.

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**O**NE OF THOSE exceptions was Smith Hempstone of the Washington Star-News. Hempstone, one of the few who refuses to be panicked by the liberal juggernaut in this town, had this to say about Hanoi radio's figures:

"If you will take the trouble to divide out those figures, remembering that they are Hanoi's, not President Nixon's, you will see that slightly more than one person was killed and one wounded in each attack. In contrast, Allied bombers during World War II frequently inflicted tens of thousands of casualties in a single night on German and Japanese cities."

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**A**ND WHILE THIS writer passes out his rare posies, Howard K. Smith should not be forgotten. This brilliant, urbane anchor man for the American Broadcasting Company has not joined the hate-Nixon propaganda indulged in by a few rival commentators.

One of them, incidentally, in my presence at a dinner party, yelled at the top of his voice that Richard Nixon is a "murderer." The gentleman in question has a nightly access to tens of millions of Americans with his supposedly objective news commentaries.

Day in and day out these biased commentators help form a distorted public opinion in the name of freedom of the press. No wonder then that the Nixon Administration is concerned. But, in the final analysis, it will be up to the American people themselves to demand fair coverage of controversial issues.

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