

The Ferocious Pounding of Haiphong

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

HAIPHONG—The Haiphong metropolitan area has taken a ferocious pounding from the air and two-thirds of the population has now been evacuated.

This port city and its suburbs normally had a population of 1.8 million, the largest urban area of North Vietnam, with 300,000 people in Haiphong proper.

Even a day's tour of the area illustrates part of the impact of what Mayor Le Duc Thinh says were "more than 10,000 tons of bombs" dropped on it from Dec. 18 to 29 by American B-52 bombers and other planes.

He says: "As you have seen, they dropped bombs indiscriminately everywhere." where."

Bombs did hit many residential sections of the city

where homes often are intermixed with workshops. Although the bombing ended three weeks ago there are still pathetic sights of grandmothers and tiny children scraping through the mud for bricks and other construction materials to build huts or lean-tos.

Elsewhere in the city, however, there is also evidence of a return to normal conditions with volleyball and other games being played in the parks.

Although the bomb damage was first described by the original group of newsmen permitted to enter the area, the vast destruction inflicted on the industrial zone west of the city where thousands of workers also lived is startling.

Standing out on the horizon are the blackened ruins of North Vietnam's single largest industrial complex,

dominated by a huge cement plant that is a shambles but which reportedly has some small continuing production.

Nearby are shattered factories and petroleum storage tanks. But in between some productive work still continues.

Along the 60 miles of still intermittently damaged road between Hanoi and Haiphong, there is in sectors a parallel, single track railway. The supplies for the war and civilian life still flow down the railway.

Steam locomotives puff through the dark after the

ox-drawn carts and trucks thin out. Hundreds of medium and heavy trucks are parked on the edges of the road and there are miles of unopened packing crates, earth movers, cranes, stacks of steel sheeting, iron rods and other supplies.

Over an excellent Vietnamese dinner the 45-year-old mayor, who is sophisticated as well as efficient, points to the brimming platters and the beer and liquor.

Allowing himself a twinkle of accomplishment, he says, "As you can see they haven't succeeded in paralyzing us."