

“WE HAVE STUDIED the limits of human endurance.” The words were spoken not boastfully, but confidently, as an architect might explain to a layman how he solved a difficult problem of calibrating the weight that a structure could support. That is just what the North Vietnamese official, speaking in Hanoi, meant in a human sense, as he discussed the load-bearing capacity of a nation that has known little else but war for more than 30 consecutive years.

In 1971, after the publication of the Pentagon Papers, former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, trying to explain the inability of the United States to bring the war to a successful conclusion years earlier, said: “I personally, I think, underestimated the persistence and the tenacity of the North Vietnamese . . .” That was a widespread miscalculation of American strategists, which extended from the Johnson years into the Nixon years.

Perhaps more than any other underdeveloped nation in modern times, North Vietnam for a generation methodically engineered its society for war. In recent years, the problem was how to prepare a poor Asian country of less than 20 million people for war of unlimited duration against the most powerful, most technologically advanced nation in the world.

Today, when a fragile cease-fire pro-

jects the prospect—or the illusion—of peace, it is important for the United States to probe for deeper understanding about how North Vietnam functions if the two hugely disproportionate nations are to attain any degree of normalized relations.

One starting point can be an examination of what the two nations did to each other—or think they did to each other—in their last, extremely violent physical exchange that preceded the cease-fire accord reached in Paris last month.

To the United States, as presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger indicated in a television interview Thursday, the extraordinarily massive American B-52 bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong region in December represented the effective shock usage of military power to break a diplomatic impasse. Kissinger said the order for the unprecedented B-52 strikes was President Nixon’s most difficult and “lonely” decision. The fact that the casualty count announced by North Vietnam was so low, said Kissinger, is itself evidence of the American effort to avoid great loss of life in the raids that extended from Dec. 18 to Dec. 29, except for a 36-hour respite over Christmas.

To North Vietnam, according to statements by its officials in interviews in Hanoi and Haiphong during a two-week period last month, the B-52

FEB 4 1973

WSX POST

FEB 4 1973

# North Vietnam: Taking Pride In Punishment

By **Murrey Marder**

Washington Post Staff Writer

*The writer recently returned from a two-week trip to North Vietnam. This is the first of several summary reports.*

raids produced exactly the opposite of the intended result: a “victory” for North Vietnam over an American attempt to bring Hanoi “to its knees” at

the bargaining table in Paris; a triumph of North Vietnamese combat skill, tenacity and ingenuity that enabled them to shoot down unexpectedly

large numbers of B-52s, disperse the population and limit casualties.

IT IS NOT UNUSUAL in warfare for adversaries to have totally different perceptions of what happened. The reality often rests somewhere between the opposing claims of victory, and historians will spend decades sifting the record of the still-unfinished Indochina war.

As a report on what is visible in North Vietnam to a non-Vietnamese-speaking newsman in the aftermath of the American air raids, and as an illustration of North Vietnamese thought processes, perceptions and contentions as their officials portray them to the outside world, the following information is presented without any claim, or indeed any conviction, that it represents historic truth.

Probably no other nation in the world, Communist or non-Communist, can exude such pride as the disciplined people of North Vietnam do in expressing their ability to absorb punishment. Communism alone does not evoke such stoicism elsewhere in the world as the fiercely nationalistic North Vietnamese profess.

On several occasions in Hanoi and Haiphong there were official variations on a favorite theme: "Can the world imagine the Vietnamese people with their bare feet shooting down a B-52?"

The fact that B-52s were shot down by Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missiles furnished with Soviet technical guidance, or that North Vietnam is totally dependent on the Soviet Union, China and other Communist nations for its weaponry, does not lessen pride in the accomplishment.

North Vietnam, through its relatively sophisticated information and propaganda machinery, has instilled in its citizenry at every opportunity a cult of accomplishment achieved against overwhelming odds. When this reporter arrived in Hanoi on Jan. 13, two weeks after the bombing stopped, placards, banners and posters had sprung up over each site of major bomb damage, hailing victory over American airpower, exhorting the population to sacrifice greater efforts to pursue the struggle for "independence and freedom," fully prepared to risk, in the late President Ho Chi Minh's words, the total destruction of Hanoi and Haiphong, their two largest cities.

As far as an outsider can detect, the people grimly appear to accept the premise. While burdened with woe and scraping through wreckage, they do not have the crushed, glazed, automaton look seen among the people of Communist societies imposed in Eastern Europe in the post-World War II period.

See VIETNAM, Page C4

#### VIETNAM, From Page C1

Western newsmen familiar with China similarly report that the people of North Vietnam, even in a state of war, appear more relaxed, more individualistic, than fellow Asians in Communist China. People smile on the streets, even though most are up hours before dawn as stores open at 4:30 a.m. to permit shopping before the regular workday begins at 6:30. Thousands of bicycles, without headlights, glide through dark streets in the pre-dawn hours, somehow avoiding collisions at intersections.

Pretty girls on the street are not too shy to follow visitors with their eyes for unusually long distances by Asian or Western standards, even if they cannot sort out the foreign nationalities. Hanoi never has had a curfew, residents report, even at the peak of the bombing. What it has had is tight district, neighborhood and block-by-block control over evacuation, air raid shelter supervision and total direction of the use of manpower.

#### "Resolve to Die"

HANOI'S MAYOR, Tran Duy Hung, an extremely energetic man of 61 who was a physician before becoming mayor and watched over the health of Ho Chi Minh during the 1945-1954 war against the French, takes revolutionary satisfaction in the slogan that Ho gave to the capital city: "Resolve to die so that the Fatherland lives." Mayors elsewhere might not regard such a slogan as inspirational, but Hung says Hanoi's history extends 4,000 years and "we feel we must exert every effort to carry out heroic work."

"In 1964," said the mayor (the first U.S. air strikes on North Vietnam hit its coast briefly in August, 1964, as retaliation for the disputed Gulf of Tonkin incidents) "we began discussing preparations for air raids on Hanoi. In 1965 we put the plans into practice, and we prepared our minds for the coming fierce battle against the enemy."

The entire population of Hanoi, normally 720,000 in the city proper and 1,200,000 including its suburbs, has assigned functions. Hung, speaking through an interpreter, said, "Every family has its own plan, with assistance of the trade unions, district administrative councils, mass organizations.

"One part of the population is prepared to fight to defend the city, and the other part is for the aftermath of the battle and to prepare for continued production and maintenance of facilities—running water, electricity and so on, and at the same time, to insure the beauty of the city, including the growing of flowers."

Industry was dispersed around the city and into the countryside to salvage some capacity no matter how heavily Hanoi was bombed. Nearly half of Hanoi's population consists of children under the age of 15, said the mayor, and special precautions were taken to evacuate them in advance of any bombing.

When American bombs struck in De-

cember, he said, two-thirds of the city's population had been evacuated. "This explains why, despite the B-52s, few people were killed."

"During these 12 days and nights of fighting," Hung continued, "it was a quiet, fierce battle. The main thing was the spirit and organization of the fight.

"For example, when the Kham Thien section (a primarily residential area for poorer families, with a normal population density of 75,000 people per square mile) was hit the night of Dec. 26, workers in charge of parks and trees went through first to cut off the damaged trees and sanitation workers went through to clear the streets."

## "New Strength"

**H**UNG, WHO COMMANDS the city's defenses as well as its civilian life, said that when the B-52 bombers reached Hanoi on Dec. 18 they met a wall of defensive might. "The whole city is a net of firepower," he said, "not only the (SAM) missiles, but aircraft."

In the city proper, said Hung, "about 180,000 square meters (roughly 19,000 square feet) of buildings and residences were destroyed."

"When we made public the figures of our people killed and wounded (by 'preliminary' count, 1,318 killed and 1,261 wounded)," he said, "the Pentagon felt that they did not bomb our populated areas."

"In fact," he continued, "they dropped tens of thousands of bombs on our populated area but only about 2,000 people were killed or wounded. But this was thanks to our evacuation plan and not because they did not bomb populated areas."

"There was no sign of weakness among our population," he said, "but their hatred, their wrath, increased very sharply. But if they know 'genuine' American people come, they will not show any signs of wrath. For example, our attitude toward B-52 fliers: Our people had the right to do brutal things to them because they committed crimes against our population, but instead, they treated them properly."

"Not only has our life returned to normal, but the spirit of our people increased a lot . . . It is not true that our Hanoi city was knocked out by the B-52s, but on the contrary, the people are living with new strength."

There is widespread skepticism among foreign observers who have inspected the damage about the accu-

racy of the official casualty figures for Hanoi. An official of the Commission on Investigation of U.S. War Crimes in Vietnam, as the North Vietnamese style their combined reporting-propagandistic agency, acknowledges that "We can recognize that this is not the most exact figure." He said the continuing digging in the rubble — and most casualties resulted from crushed air raid shelters, burns, concussion and suffocation from the air being sucked out of underground shelters by the bomb blasts, or drownings in flooded shelters — still is unearthing more bodies of victims.

## Songs for Morale

**M**AYOR HUNG and all other officials insisted that there has been no concealment of casualty figures for purposes of maintaining public morale, as some outsiders suspect.

"No, we have never concealed the figures," said Hung; "otherwise, the people will ask us, why? Why should we understate the figures? Why should we conceal the crimes committed by the United States?"

One of North Vietnam's leading publicists for the official party line, Luu Quy Ky, whose nominal title is secretary general of the Vietnamese Journalists Association but who also is described as the foremost trainer of propaganda cadre, said: "An American socialist (Communist) advised us, 'announce that the American bombs killed 10,000 people — and the whole world will rise up.'"

"I said," replied Ky, "if later on the people of the world came to visit us, what can we tell them? And I said if later there would be 10,000 killed, no one would believe us. But what is more dangerous, our population would not believe us. In this way we could not carry out the people's war."

Instead, the official line followed the opposite tack. The relatively limited number of casualties, and the losses inflicted upon the attacking aircraft, were hailed as a smashing victory for the heroism of Hanoi's defenders.

Said Mayor Hung: "Immediately after the explosion of the bombs, songs were heard, although of course in those areas hit by the bombs there was only a show of wrath. Never before had our artists composed such timely fighting songs. Immediately after the bombing our artists came to those areas to propagate new songs."

"Despite the bombings, despite the evacuations," said the mayor, with administrative satisfaction, as a result of the dispersal of the means of production into small factory sections, with relatively few of them underground, "the industrial production of Hanoi is still one-third of the industrial production of the nation."

"You have heard the famous words of President Ho," said journalist-propagandist Ky, "'Even if Hanoi and Haiphong will be destroyed . . .' It is better to say in this way that Hanoi is so strong that no one can harm it."

"So it is not good to say," added Ky (chuckling over the American assertion, in explanation of the U.S. aircraft losses, that the capital's air defense was the most intensive ever encountered) "that our defense is the best in the world. If Hanoi is not destroyed, it would be better. But if it is destroyed, the spirit of the people would be maintained. We understand our people."

## A New Capital?

**M**AYOR HUNG said that what was particularly "terrible" about the

American bombings in December was "that they struck areas newly built, so that each family would have its own home."

Now, he said, the priority is on erecting temporary housing in the destroyed areas. He said "each cooperative" in the surrounding area "will provide one temporary house," in the form of bamboo walls, pre-fabricated in rudimentary assembly line fashion and shipped into the capital, "until our architects and engineers will design permanent construction to be built when the opportunity arises."

According to the East German news agency ADN, on Thursday, several days after this reporter left North Vietnam, Mayor Hung said at a news conference in Hanoi that there are now plans to build a "new capital" about 37 miles from Hanoi when time and resources permit. Hung was quoted as saying that Hanoi itself will be rebuilt, except for two bombed-out areas to be preserved as memorials to the war, but present priority is assigned to housing thousands of homeless.

The nation in fact has long been ruled from secret evacuation sites outside Hanoi, in mountainous and rural areas less exposed to American bombing. High officials have traveled back to the city from these secret sites only when necessary, to meet with foreign diplomats, newsmen, or for other contacts with the outside world, before and even for days after the cease-fire accord was signed.

### Aimed at Outskirts

**N**ORTH VIETNAMESE officials claim that more than 100,000 tons of American bombs were dropped on their country during the 12 days of bombing in December that centered on the Hanoi-Haiphong region.

They insist that "the first characteristic of this big-scale attack," as Ha Ngoc Que, an official of the so-called War Crimes Commission described it, "was to hit Hanoi-Haiphong and the most populated areas in the Red River delta of North Vietnam."

"The forces mobilized by the U.S. Air Force," said Que, "were very great . . . the peak of escalation. By the reports of our military, the U.S. Air Force mobilized up to 140 B-52s . . . and 30 F-111s and from 500 to 700 tactical aircraft. They flew about 5,000 sorties of every kind, including 1,000 sorties of B-52s."

"These forces dropped more than 100,000 tons of bombs. That is equivalent to five atomic bombs of the size dropped on Hiroshima at the end of World War II."

"Half of the 1,000 sorties of B-52s were against Hanoi — 532 of them," Que continued.

"Secondly," he said professorially, "the method of attack against Hanoi and Haiphong was very significant . . .

"As a result of evacuation, there were more people in the outskirts of the city and the surrounding area than in the center of Hanoi. This was where the heaviest damage occurred. Why so?"

"In our commission, we established that they wanted to kill more people. That was the scheme of the U.S. Air Force: to attack the maximum number of people and to avoid the center of Hanoi and so, terrorize the people."

"The terrorization purpose of the attacks was shown by the fact that they came closer and closer to the center of the city . . ."

*American officials adamantly deny that their strategic objective was to*



*At the Bach Mai hospital, Dr. Do Thi Thang Loi, a staff supervisor, points out bomb damage in the operating theater.*

kill masses of people. In the Hanoi and Haiphong areas, the bulk of the industrial facilities are located on the outskirts of the cities, where the bombing strikes began. Kissinger on Thursday said civilian casualties were unintended but unavoidable.

Que said that a B-52 was shot down near the presidential palace on Dec. 27, "carrying many unexploded bombs." This bomber, he contended, was intended to hit the center of the city, "and maybe the presidential palace."

## A Moon Landscape

**N**EXT," HE SAID, pointer in hand directed at a map, "Haiphong, our major port city."

"In Haiphong the method was the same, nearer and nearer to the center. The total bomb weight dropped in Haiphong was less, 15,000 tons—in Hanoi, 40,000.

"Look at the heaviest bombed section of Haiphong, at Thong Ly, a devastated area 11 kilometers (about 7 miles) long—a landscape on the moon!"

"The plan of the United States was to annihilate Hanoi and Haiphong!"

*Haiphong's Thong Ly area does indeed look somewhat like a landscape on the moon. It also adjoins the heaviest industrial concentration in North Vietnam, with workers' living quarters bracketed by a large oil depot, a huge cement plant, railroad sidings, warehouses, factories and other installations, now blackened and twisted and shattered.*

"Examine the target areas," continued Que, spiritedly.

"Note," he said, "our broadcasting centers" (for radio Hanoi).

One site is near Bach Mai, where the widely publicized, bombed hospital of the same name is located. This radio station reportedly has been bombed nine times. Another, at Metri, on the outskirts of Hanoi, has been hit five times in recent years, according to director Trang Lam.

(Lam, a vigorous, sophisticated man of 52 who was a "liberation fighter" during the 1940s, has run North Vietnam's Communist radio establishment continuously since 1945 "when we seized power in Hanoi" and moved "to the jungle" during the French Indochina war. Said Lam with a grin in explaining his unbroken tenure as radio director, "we never experienced any overthrow of our government." In December, said Lam, "B-52s struck our stations four times in three days and nights, but we were only off the air nine minutes before we shifted to standby transmitters.")

## A News Blackout

**N**EXT, CONTINUED War Crimes Commission official Que, giving his version of the prime targets of American bombs, "the power station, the central railroad station and our biggest hospital, Bach Mai."

*The large Bach Mai hospital installation, one of the largest in North Vietnam, a complex of joined build-*

*ings, had 900 beds before the bombing, according to supervisory staff now on duty, and included 250 doctors and 800 medical students at peak operation. The hospital complex covers an area of 41.5 acres.*

*Ruins of the hospital are now displayed to visitors as the most callous example of "American aggression," totally free of any "military target." Adjoining the hospital grounds, however, there is a major railroad line, a Radio Hanoi site beyond it, and some distance away, the Bach Mai airfield and, according to Pentagon accounts, military barracks on the edge of the*

*airfield. At 30,000 feet in the dark of night, B-52 bombers facing a hail of missile and anti-aircraft fire hardly would seem likely to hit military targets with surgical precision. The Pentagon originally disclaimed any knowledge that the Bach Mai hospital was hit, belatedly acknowledging later that it may have been damaged. It has been massively damaged, by multiple bomb hits.*

"The U.S. command in Saigon blacked out news of these attacks," Que went on. "They wanted to shut our voice and cut our communications with the outside world by also cutting off Gialam International Airport—a unique airport—our contact with the outside world."

*According to North Vietnamese officials, Politburo member Le Duc Tho, whose negotiations with Henry Kissinger reached an impasse on Dec. 13 in Paris when the United States suspended negotiations on grounds that Hanoi had turned them into "a charade," arrived back at Gialam airport on Dec. 18 at 4 p.m. At 7 p.m., according to Hanoi officials, the first American bombs hit Gialam. "They didn't even give Le Duc Tho time to consult with our officials," a North Vietnamese functionary said bitterly. American officials denied any attempt to knock out the Gialam airport, which still bears scars of bombing.*

The U.S. objective, Commission official Que claimed, was "to leave a city of one million people without any electricity, traffic or relations abroad, and its voice shut—a complete blockade by air, not only the sea blockade."

"It was terrible," he said, "it was a nightmare. And it was a big plan, a very cunning plan, to completely isolate Hanoi from the outside world." However, he said, "we have very many little power stations everywhere," and other standby facilities.

## "Dienbienphu" of the Air

**L**OOK AT the casualty ratios," Que continued, "there is something very unusual about them. The ratio is 1 to 1; one killed, one wounded."

"We have studied this very carefully," he said. "There are only two cases in history where the ratio was the same, 1 to 1—Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

"In Dresden (in World War II) the ratio was 1 to 4 or 5. In tactical attacks generally, the ratio of dead to wounded is 1 to 6 or 7. Normally the highest rate is 1 to 3.

"Why 1 to 1? Carpet bombing. That makes it even more than 1 against 1.

"They mixed heavy and light bombs bombs that exploded on the earth and bombs that exploded under the earth. Such bombings killed all of many families. In Kham Thien district we counted more than 100 families completely killed or wounded, many by concussion, blast or building collapses, causing great rescue difficulties."

"Luckily, the B-52—the trump card—was downed in such numbers. If we had not shot down so many, we would not know what our situation would be today. So our papers called the B-52 attacks a Dienbienphu of the air. I think the U.S. commanders were quite surprised. Without such a defeat, I don't think Nixon would ever have come to terms in Paris."

## Claims of Victory

**T**HROUGHOUT Hanoi and Haiphong, and in towns and villages in between, posters and banners proclaim that in 12 days of fighting, North Vietnam destroyed 81 American air raiders including 34 B-52s, 5 F-11s and 42 other planes. The B-52 claim is more than double the American count.

To the North Vietnamese, whose nation is comprised largely of peasants in thatched huts, with water buffaloes pulling ancient wooden plows, the notion of knocking down a massive eight engined B-52—which weighs over 200 tons fully loaded—has been exhilarating, even if also frightening when a plane crashes with a great explosion. The official line boasts that they indeed have "defeated" the world's mightiest air power and their press and radio tell the people that all the world acclaims their "tremendous victory."

How does North Vietnam explain the great discrepancy in its downed B-52 figures and the official American count?

"In this war," replied publicist Ky drily, "there are two who know and who have the accurate figures on the air losses. That is the United States and North Vietnam.

"The figures that the United States made public came from its own viewpoint. Our figures came from our viewpoint. Our viewpoint we already told you—the truth. And later in the future, history will tell . . . We always say that these are preliminary figures and after the check, if it is less than that, we will make that public."

Until, and if, that day comes, North Vietnam is making the most of its claims. It has been said that in war there is "no substitute for victory." But in politics, in diplomacy and in the psychology of nations, there is a tolerable substitute—the claim of victory. It is a claim to which all sides in the struggle now engage—North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the United States. Victory claims have become the psychological prerequisite of any hope for ultimate peace in Vietnam. Perhaps it is a fitting paradox for decades of exhausting struggle in Vietnam: In a tragic war in which all have lost grievously, all need to claim victory.



Workers salvage bricks to rebuild a Hanoi factory destroyed by bombs. Photos by Murrey Marder—The Washington Post



Shoppers buy flowers for the Tet holiday from street stalls in Haiphong.