

Editor's Report

The Secret Hanoi Papers

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BALTIMORE—It is an unfortunate fact that our press, when preoccupied with a big breaking news story, often ignores or underplays other stories whose equal or even greater importance harried editors fail to recognize.

An outstanding example of this judgment failure, in my opinion, took place last week smack in the middle of all the continuing headlines over the secret Pentagon Papers and the Supreme Court validating their publication.

Editors handling the reams of incoming copy on these developments naturally did not have as much leisure as a hospital patient—meaning me—to consider the implications of a fairly brief news item as heard in a radio broadcast.

Just the same, while recuperating here at Johns Hopkins from my second highly successful cataract operation, the story which hit my ear so briefly from my bedside radio at about 7 o'clock Tuesday morning made an instant impression. As a long-time reporter and editor, I immediately envisioned the headlines it would cause.

Those headlines, I thought, would disclose the existence of secret Hanoi papers whose historic importance might well exceed those of the secret Pentagon memorandums and aide-memoires now being blown up by the papers who are opposed to the President's plan for ending the war in Vietnam.

Instead, the second story of the week which got the



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big play was the couple of so-called new proposals by the North Vietnamese in Paris. These proposals were immediately given a big hoopla by McDovern and his ilk.

One proposal — if we get out of the war they release our prisoners.

Big deal. It's fairly customary for countries at war to release all their prisoners when the war is over. So there's hardly anything about this over which to go into paroxysms of gratitude to the North Vietnamese warlords.

The other old point of the proposals was that we force a change in the South Vietnamese government.

They overlook entirely the fact that the Thieu-Ky government was elected by the people of South Vietnam and that we are fighting there for that very principle, namely self-determination.

Despite the absurdities of the suggestions McDovern, Hatfield and all the other little cooing peace-at-any-pricers think it's just too, too generous for words and should immediately be accepted.

I wonder what the families of the men who lost their lives over there fighting for this country's national policy of resisting totalitarian aggression of any kind, whether Nazism, Fascism or Communism, would think if we now declared that all of that whole principle was a lot of malarkey, and the whole tragic affair had never really been taken seriously.

Pardon this divergence, but to get back to the secret Hanoi papers, unhappily for The Hearst Newspapers the story was an exclusive dispatch to one of our rival publications, the Los Angeles Times, by its correspondent in Saigon, Arthur J. Dommen.

Summarized, the dispatch said that a top secret North Vietnamese document obtained by Mr. Dommen revealed that Hanoi had officially decided on escalating the war in South Vietnam — with its own troops, if necessary — more than a year before the Johnson Administration committed American combat troops to the conflict.

Never before made public, the document was the text of a resolution passed in December of 1963 by the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party — Hanoi's rulers then headed by the late Ho Chi Minh.

It declared that the Communist goal would henceforth be military victory over all resisters in the South — and that this goal would be pursued no matter how many troops the United States and our Allies might send to stop it.

Maybe I'm way off base. But if that document obtained by Mr. Dommen isn't significant big news, then I don't know a big story when I hear it.

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One of the major points belabored by the Pentagon Papers is how the Johnson Administration had a terrible time explaining U.S. involvement in Vietnam during the critical year of 1964.

The problem was how to prove that North Vietnam's intentions and actions constituted clear aggression against the South Vietnamese government. The firm evidence available at the time consisted mostly of arms furnished by Hanoi to the Viet Cong and the capture of North Vietnamese prisoners.

If the secret resolution passed by the ninth session of the Central Communist Committee in Hanoi in December of 1963 had been known to us at the time, then there would have been no problem whatsoever in justifying our reaction to the outright aggression which followed.

The secret Hanoi document thus is far more than a recital of contingency plans and interpretations of how and why men acted under pressure — as are the Pentagon Papers.

It is a flat declaration of united purpose by the Communist regime in Hanoi to take over the South by aggression at any cost.

It scotches in toto the beloved argument by our home-front doves that the fighting in South Vietnam was a kind of civil war in which we had no business.

It was, further, virtually a declaration of war upon the U.S. and a defiance of our commitment to defend victims of aggression anywhere.

The nuts and bolts of the whole mess today seems to involve determination of who are the bad guys and who are the good guys in the Vietnam showdown.

Our anti-war newspapers, in printing the voluminous Pentagon Papers — with their all but endless documentation of high-level doubt and confusion — tend to give a calculated impression that our motives were suspect and our actions less than honest.

The secret Hanoi papers, consisting of only 25 pages, show beyond doubt how we were justified in going in to halt the invaders — and in fact were justified to have done so more than a year before we actually did.

It saddens me that the Hanoi document — a matter of such great importance — got so little general attention when the story broke.

In the long rear view of history, however, I am confident it will amount to much more than the inconclusive footnotes provided by so much of the Pentagon Papers.

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That's all for today — an Independence Day which marks a happy event in my life since they are finally springing me from the hospital this weekend.

Hope you all feel as good about this holiday and enjoy it as much as I expect to with my rejuvenated eyesight.