

Hanoi Films Show No 'Carpet-Bombing'

By DREW MIDDLETON

Aerial photographs of the results of the heavy United States bombing of Hanoi last December show damage to military targets, to a hospital near a military airfield and to a commercial and residential area close to the main railroad station and yards.

The photographs, taken by reconnaissance drones after the 12-day bombing offensive and made public by the Defense Department, include one composite picture of Hanoi. This does not support charges made during the offensive that United States Air Force planes subjected Hanoi to the kind of carpet-bombing employed against German cities in World War II.

A senior Air Force officer commented that the pictures "confirmed what we said at the time, that with one or two exceptions, we were on target and that we were doing extensive damage to military targets."

Hospital Is Shown

Bomb damage to the Bach Mai hospital was the focus of much international criticism. The composite photograph indicating damage to 13 military targets and five civilian areas in the attacks on Hanoi shows the proximity of the hospital to the Bac Mai military airfield, which was heavily bombed by B-52's, F-111's and F-4's. The runway was cut at two points and 10 support buildings and 10 barracks were destroyed.

But what were described as premature bomb drops severely damaged several buildings in the nearby Bach Mai civilian hospital.

A high proportion of the 1,000 sorties flown during the campaign—a sortie is a single flight by a single plane—were directed at the main railroad station and yards near the



Photo of Bach Mai hospital complex, near the airfield

Kham Thien commercial and residential district

The area was attacked by F-4's with laser-guided "smart" bombs. Warehouses, support buildings, the main terminal, the administration building and loading platforms were destroyed or damaged, and five railroad tracks were cut.

Damage to Airfield

However, other attacks by planes that were said to be carrying gravity-drop bombs fell short and destroyed or damaged a long strip of civilian buildings in the Kham Thien area.

The photographs show extensive damage to the Gia Lam airfield—both the commercial airport of Hanoi and a MIG-21 base—and to the city's thermal power plant. According to the Air Force, only "light" damage was done to civilian structures near the plant and this appears to be borne out by

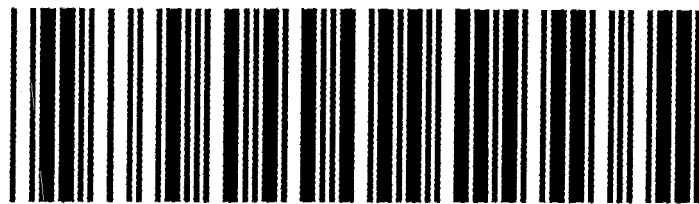
detailed bomb-damage photographs

The photos show no damage, however, to Ly Nam De, the prison where American prisoners of war were housed, known as the Hanoi Hilton. It had been reported hit.

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Commentary

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Vietnam: New Light on the Question of
American Guilt

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Guenter Lewy

UNDER Executive Orders 10501 and 10816 promulgated by President Eisenhower, and Executive Order 11652 issued by President Nixon on March 8, 1972, the secretaries of the military services have discretionary authority to allow access to classified defense information to qualified researchers from outside the executive department. This essay is the first analysis of the war in Vietnam to make use of these classified records of the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps—after-action reports of military operations, command directives, field reports and staff studies of the pacification effort and the Phoenix program, intelligence reports, investigations of war crimes, and the like. Not intended for public consumption, these documents throw important new light on aspects of the war that until now have largely been kept out of public view.

*GUENTER LEWY teaches political science at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and is the author of *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* and *Religion and Revolution*. The present essay will appear, in somewhat different form, in Mr. Lewy's new book, *America in Vietnam*, to be published later this year by Oxford University Press. In addition to containing a fuller discussion of the issues taken up here, the book also provides the first systematic analysis of the course of the war, the reasons for the failure of American strategy and tactics, the travail of Vietnamization, and the causes of the final collapse of South Vietnam. Scholars interested in the archival location of documentary materials on which the present essay is based, or in bibliographical information on other works cited by Mr. Lewy, will find the references in *America in Vietnam*.*

TO LARGE numbers of Americans, the defeat of their country's arms in Vietnam not only represents a deserved national humiliation in an ill-advised foreign involvement, and not only proves the political and military ineptitude of those who waged the war, but also constitutes just retribution for what amounts to a moral outrage. This view of the American record in Vietnam is by now very widely accepted, especially among younger people, for whom the American role in Vietnam appears to stand as the epitome of evil in the modern world.

I have just spent five years studying the record, including classified documents not previously examined by any outside researchers. My conclusion is that while the charges of American political and military ineptitude in Vietnam can be sustained by all the available evidence, and while the question of the overall prudence or justice of the American involvement is not easily resolved, the charges of officially condoned crimes and grossly immoral conduct are without substance. It is to this last class of issues that I address myself here.

Every war has its share of atrocities, and Vietnam was no exception. Every war also causes large-

scale death and suffering to the civilian population on whose territory it is fought. But the horrors and outrages inherent in war are often ignored when the fighting is crowned with success and when the conflict is seen as morally justified. Thus, despite the fact that the Allies in World War II engaged in terror bombing of the enemy's civilian population, and generally paid only minimal attention to the prevention of civilian casualties, scarcely anyone on the Allied side objected. The war against Nazism and fascism was regarded as a crusade in which the Allies could do no wrong, and the fact that it ended in victory further vindicated the use of means that were questionable on both legal and moral grounds.

The Vietnam war, on the other hand, dragged on for years without a real decision, and it was never perceived as a clear-cut struggle between good and evil—unless it was they who were good and we who were evil. And this indeed is how the conflict was seen by many: a heroic underdog fighting the world's strongest and best-equipped military power. Moreover, on the Allied side the war took place in a fish bowl (the Communists barred all observers except those known to be supportive of

bombing of North Vietnam was resumed following the 1972 Easter invasion of South Vietnam, there were once again charges of deliberate attacks on hospitals, schools, and other civilian targets, charges that were no more substantiated than those made during Rolling Thunder. Reconnaissance photos showed bomb craters on several dikes, but these were all in close proximity to other targets of high military value; no major dike was breached or functionally damaged, and the high-water season passed without significant flooding.

A BREAKTHROUGH occurred in the long-stalled peace talks in Paris when Hanoi dropped its insistence on a coalition government and the resignation of Thieu. On October 23, 1972, President Nixon, in a gesture of good will, suspended all bombing north of the 20th parallel. On October 26, Secretary of State Kissinger told a news conference that "peace is at hand." But this announcement was premature, and by November 23 the negotiations in Paris had reached a new deadlock—the result of sloppy drafting of the text of the projected agreement, new objections from Thieu, and a withdrawal of several important concessions by Hanoi. On December 19, Nixon ordered the resumption of full-scale bombing of North Vietnam and there followed the so-called Christmas bombing—code-named Linebacker II.

Linebacker II lasted 12 days, though the weather was clear enough for visual bombing for only 12 hours. During these 12 days there were 729 B-52 sorties and about 1,000 fighter-bomber attack sorties; 20,370 tons of bombs were dropped over all of Vietnam. A total of 26 planes were lost, including 15 B-52's. The bombing was concentrated on targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong complexes and included transportation terminals, rail yards, warehouses, power plants, airfields, and the like. By the time the bombing was halted on December 29, North Vietnam's electrical power supply had been crippled and extensive damage had been caused to all other targets as well. North Vietnamese air defenses had also been shattered; during the last few days, American planes roamed the skies with virtual impunity.

Thanks to the new "smart" bombs, accuracy in most cases was almost surgical, but on account of the extensive utilization of B-52 bombers there was some spillage of bomb damage to adjacent residential areas. It was estimated that in 90 per cent of all B-52 missions, one or more bombs, because of bent or damaged fins, escaped the normal bomb train and landed outside the target box. This incidental civilian damage and the overall extremely destructive impact of Linebacker II gave rise to predictable outcries of terror bombing. The December bombing, Hanoi charged, surpassed the atrocities committed by the "Hitlerite fascists" and represented an "escalation of genocide to an all-time high." In only 12 days,

"the Nixon administration wrought innumerable Oradours, Lidices, Guernicas, Coventrys. . . ." Anti-war groups in America and many others joined in the worldwide chorus of denunciation.

These charges are disproven by evidence available then and by later reports from the scene. The North Vietnamese themselves at the time claimed between 1,300 and 1,600 fatalities, and even though both Hanoi and Haiphong were partially evacuated, such a number of victims is surely not indicative of terror bombing. Attacks explicitly aimed at the morale of the population took place against Germany and Japan during World War II and killed tens of thousands. According to an East German estimate, 35,000 died in the triple raid on Dresden in February 1945; the official casualty toll of the bombing of Tokyo with incendiaries on March 9-10, 1945 stands (as already mentioned) at 83,793 dead and 40,918 wounded. The Hanoi death toll, wrote the London *Economist*, "is smaller than the number of civilians killed by the North Vietnamese in their artillery bombardment of An Loc in April or the toll of refugees ambushed when trying to escape from Quang Tri at the beginning of May. That is what makes the denunciation of Mr. Nixon as another Hitler sound so unreal." Part of the death toll was undoubtedly caused by the North Vietnamese themselves, for they launched about 1,000 SAM's, many of which exploded in the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong and took their toll on their own people.

Among the civilian facilities hit was the Bach Mai Hospital in Hanoi. The North Vietnamese cited the extensive damage to this hospital as proof of American criminal intentions, and the charge of deliberate attacks on civilian targets was accepted as true by Dale S. DeHaan, counsel to the Kennedy committee on refugees, who visited Hanoi in March 1973, and by Senator Edward Kennedy himself. Yet other observers offered a different explanation. The hospital was located about 1,000 yards from the Bach Mai airstrip and the military barracks, which were heavily bombed. The attack, wrote Telford Taylor after visiting the site in January 1973, "was probably directed at the airfield and nearby barracks and oil-storage units." Murray Marder of the *Washington Post* and Peter Ward of the *Baltimore Sun* concurred in this view, and aerial photographs released by the Defense Department in May 1973 further confirmed that the hospital had been hit by bombs escaping the normal bomb train.

Damage to residential areas in Hanoi and Haiphong, too, was clearly the result of gravity-drop bombs which had fallen short of the railroad sidings, warehouses, and industrial plants targeted and destroyed. Malcolm W. Browne of the *New York Times* was greatly surprised by the condition in which he later found Hanoi, and wrote that "the damage caused by American bombing was grossly overstated by North Vietnamese propaganda. . . ." "Hanoi has certainly been damaged,"

noted Peter Ward of the Baltimore *Sun* on March 25, 1973 after a visit, "but evidence on the ground disproves charges of indiscriminate bombing. Several bomb loads obviously went astray into civilian residential areas, but damage there is minor, compared to the total destruction of selected targets."

The Question of Genocide

In 1967, the second session of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal adopted a statement on genocide that was formulated by Jean-Paul Sartre. The U.S. government, Sartre maintained, was engaged in "wiping out a whole people and imposing the Pax Americana on an uninhabited Vietnam." In the South, specifically, American forces were conducting a "massive extermination" of the people of South Vietnam, killing men, women, and children merely because they were Vietnamese; this represented "genocide in the strictest sense."

The Russell tribunal was not alone in charging the U.S. with genocide. The new military technology used by America in Vietnam, wrote Theodore Draper in 1967, "produces a dehumanized genocide"; American policy-makers, argued Daniel Berrigan, have, "for some time now, legitimated murder and expanded murder into genocide." According to Frances FitzGerald, although no one in the U.S. government consciously planned a policy of genocide, in fact the policy of the military commanders "had no other military logic, and their course of action was indistinguishable from it." The specific violations of the law of war, held Professor Richard A. Falk, may have "a cumulative impact that can fairly add up to genocide." Scorched-earth tactics and the use of cruel weapons against the civilian population "appears to me to establish a *prima facie* case of genocide against the United States."

A convention against genocide was adopted by a unanimous United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948; it came into force on January 12, 1951. The U.S. signed but so far has not ratified the convention; however, it probably can be assumed that the prohibition of genocide is today part of customary international law. In the convention, the crime of genocide was defined as committing, "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such," acts such as "killing members of the group," "causing serious bodily or mental harm," "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." The prototype of genocide which inspired the convention was, of course, Hitler's attempted extermination of the Jews of Europe, designed to bring about "the final solution" of the Jewish question.

If genocide consists of the *destruction* of a people *in whole or in part*, the first place one should look in assessing this charge is at population sta-

tistics. According to figures compiled by the United Nations, the populations of both North and South Vietnam increased steadily during and despite the war, at annual rates of change roughly double the rate of the U.S. This fact alone makes the charge of genocide a bit grotesque.

In order to establish the crime of genocide, one must also be able to demonstrate *intent* to destroy a certain group of people in whole or in part. With regard to North Vietnam, as I have attempted to show, the bombing never deliberately aimed at the population and therefore cannot be adduced as evidence of genocide. As for the fighting in the South, the evidence available makes it similarly absurd to argue that the U.S. at any time in the war had the intent of destroying the people of that country. Indeed, quite the contrary can easily be shown to be true.

WHILE the American way of war undoubtedly took the lives of many noncombatants, these casualties were never inflicted as a matter of policy. The concern of the American military command with the prevention of death or damage to the civilian population led to the promulgation of rules of engagement aimed at minimizing such casualties. American advisers, too, were told to "make every effort to convince Vietnamese counterparts of the necessity for preservation of the lives and property of noncombatants. Counterparts must be encouraged to promulgate and implement parallel instruction." In an instruction program established in 1965, newly arrived soldiers were taught that respect for civilian life was not only a matter of basic decency and legality, but was also essential for winning the "hearts and minds" of the people. The intelligence gained from a population willingly assisting in the war against the Communist insurgents, they were told, could save their own lives. It is true that until the My Lai incident, the rules of engagement were not as widely known as they should have been, and the American command can justly be faulted with failing to take all possible measures to enforce these rules. But such negligence is a far cry from having a genocidal intent to destroy the people of South Vietnam.

Moreover, American aid programs contributed substantially to the improvement of public health and the availability of medical care. Between the early 1960's and 1972, AID provided funds for the provision of 29 surgical suites, and for the construction of more than 170 district, 370 village, and 400 hamlet maternity-dispensaries. In addition, about 15 per cent of occupied beds in American military hospitals were used by Vietnamese civilians. These measures gradually alleviated the overcrowded conditions created in the early years of the war by the load of civilian war casualties. Under contract with AID, 774 American physicians served 60-day tours of duty in a Vietnamese hospital; under the Military Provin-