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...they over the United States in the war.

Indochina war, and that the American bombing attack on Hanoi and Haiphong in December, 1972, despite demonstrable Communist losses in striking power, provided them a second major triumph.

Neither conjectural assessment can yet be regarded as conclusive, yet, in both cases, it is apparent that purely material aspects of strategic actions turned out to be secondary in importance to psychological and political aspects.

The Tet offensive was disastrous to the Communists from a battlefield viewpoint. After their initial successes and repression in the temporarily captured South Vietnamese city of Hue, the Communist forces were defeated with immense casualties. Saigon's army and regime proved they could fight.

But incalculable damage done in the crucial sector of U.S. public opinion and criticism of President Lyndon Johnson set in motion an intense reaction that favored Hanoi, starting with intellectuals and university students. This ended with Mr. Johnson's political retirement.

President Nixon subsequently initiated U.S. bombing of the northern centers after an original tough response to Hanoi's March, 1972, offensive and also after attacks on Communist positions in Cambodia and Laos which had kept alive the savage opposition of those who detested the war's impact on America itself.

The bombers struck following a breakdown in Paris peace negotiations and during a lapse in Congressional sessions. But, just as the defeat of Communist forces in 1968 was politically counterproductive, the December, 1972, air raids also were politically counterproductive.

The American and West European press filled swiftly with stories about "murder bombing" and "terror bombing." Since most humans laudably favor any underdog, within little time emotional adversaries began to compare Mr. Nixon with Hitler and the raids with Nazi slaughterhouses.

Hanoi's official figures, according to the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris, say that 1,318 people were killed in Hanoi by the December B-52 raids. Haiphong municipal authorities, according to Agence France Presse, say 305 were killed in Haiphong. Blood cannot be measured; nor can the exquisite and precious gift of life.

...in the "initial bombings" of December compares with Saigon's official statistics of 2,500 persons slaughtered, principally by throat-cutting or burial alive during the Communist occupation of the South Vietnamese city of Hue in February, 1968.

The second point in this coldly dreadful numbers game is in terms of comparison with other bombardments. During World War II, 135,000 deaths were caused by Allied bombing of Dresden on Feb. 14 and 16, 1945, and 83,000 in Tokyo on one firebomb raid in March, 1945. This does not mention the ghastly results of atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

There are certain dismal deductions to be made, U.S. raids on North Vietnam obviously avoided use of those incendiary bombs which so easily destroy Asiatic cities like Tokyo—or Hanoi. Secondly, although the enormous tonnages dropped by B-52's blatantly exceeded World War II attacks, they produced relatively lesser results. They certainly weren't aimed at North Vietnam's vulnerable dikes.

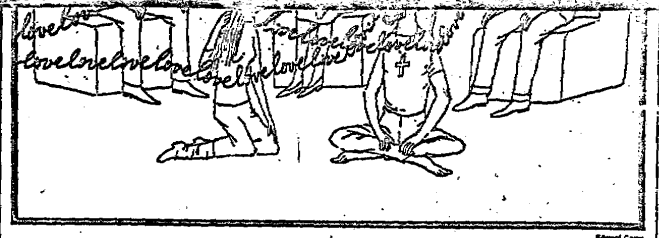
These subjects have not been adequately discussed in the angry Western press. One has enormous distaste for quantifying pain. Yet the fact remains that, in contrast with spirited criticism published in democratic organs, the Soviet and Chinese expressions have seemed relatively restrained.

All this having been said, there isn't the slightest doubt that the United States is eager to end this unfortunate war, so tarnishing to its image. It seems doomed to the distasteful choice between accepting an unhappy compromise—even less palatable than that hoped for before the bombing started—or an even unhappier fallback strategy.

The North Vietnamese have employed all kinds of devices such as mistranslations of the word "mien" or "zone" of Vietnam to obfuscate even the implication of a South Vietnamese authority in Saigon, in order to confuse any agreement.

They have guilefully used U.S. prisoners to blackmail Washington into exercising pressure on Saigon—preferring to press for a United States role of open hostility to President Thieu rather than a mere U.S. withdrawal.

At this moment, the American people seem stuck with an awful choice of conditions. They possess immense military power to impose their national policy; and they possess little political will or moral desire to use this power.



Edward Sorel

A4T
Jan 12 1973

The Siege of Hanoi: III

Reading, Writing and Raids

By Telford Taylor

The long-continued war, and especially American bombing in North Vietnam, have naturally had a profound impact on the educational system. For some time the big new Polytechnic, and other buildings of the University of Hanoi, have been closed, as well as most of the city's secondary schools. Faculties and students have left the city, but the educational process for North Vietnam's six million students continues in the provinces, under a system described by the minister as "dispersed concentration"—a phrase by which he meant to describe student-faculty study groups of ten to twenty persons.

How much this dispersal has affected the quality of education, I have no means of judging. For college students, there has been a trend toward an Antioch-like system of alternating periods of academic work and of "practical services" to be performed in the region to which the study group was sent. Of course, education is not the only enterprise which the Vietnamese have been obliged by the bombing to disperse. It is probable that the disruption has been much less keenly felt in a nation which never has been highly centralized, and where much of the administration has always been carried out at the village level, than would have been the case in more metropolitan countries.

In view of the recent time of student unrest, and demand for increased student authority, in Western countries, I was of course interested to know whether there had been anything comparable in North Vietnam.

In North Vietnam the channels for the exercise of student influence follow the Communist pattern, and lie outside the educational hierarchy. There is no direct student participation in educational administration, but in the Communist (Lao Dong) party students and teachers stand equal, and it is within the party that students evaluate teachers and discuss budgetary and other questions.

Like the United States, North Vietnam has had its problems with the draft — surprisingly comparable in some respects. Secondary school students who qualify by competitive examination for higher education are exempted from military service until they have completed their studies, after which some are selected for permanent exemption. However, not more than two children from any single family may be given educational deferments, with the curious result that if the two eldest qualify, the younger children, no matter how promising, are barred. Military education for career officers is given in separate colleges of military science.

Keenly aware of the scientific requirements of what Winston Churchill once called the "wizard war," and of their own lack of adequate facilities, the North Vietnamese annually send about 10,000 students abroad. Of these, I was told, 6,000 are in the Soviet Union, and the rest in other countries of the "Socialist camp"—presumably East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the other East European countries.

When I inquired about educational relations with China the Minister of Higher Education, with a fine show of blandness, replied there were no North Vietnamese students there, because the Chinese "cultural revolution" had brought about a situation requiring "internal reforms." For centuries past, of course, China has been the wellspring of Vietnamese culture, but extrapolation of the minister's statement suggests that this is no longer the case. And so one result of war and revolution—and perhaps by no means the least important for future years—is the rapid "Westernization" of North Vietnam, under Soviet scientific influence.

Telford Taylor, professor of law at Columbia and former chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crime trials, was in Hanoi during the December bombings.

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W.W. Rostow w... Johnson.

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