

VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

Vol. II, No. 3 PUBLISHED INDEPENDENTLY BY STANFORD STUDENTS Jan. 23, 1967

AMERICA'S PREDATORY WAR

Rudolf Augstein

Translated from DER SPIEGEL, Hamburg

OUR AMERICAN friends avoid us and we them. We meet their glance in the mild hope of not having to discuss politics. There is no longer any agreement between us. The war in Vietnam divides us from them and probably will for a long time.

The war in Vietnam is changing an entire nation and our relations to it; it is splitting the West into two camps. De Gaulle and U Thant are as one in their rejection of what the United States is doing.

On television we see how entire regions in South Vietnam are forcibly evacuated and whole villages blown to pieces. Petrified by this incomprehensible "defense," women and old men submit to being led away from their homes, leaving behind a trail of scattered possessions which have fallen out of their hurrying carts.

Crops are destroyed by special chemical sprays. Napalm burns ten noncombatants to death, and a child is always one of them, before one Vietcong guerrilla is killed. Day by day, the number of the quarry bagged is counted up.

Seriously wounded, half-dead prisoners are interrogated by American officers. Weapons not covered by the Geneva Convention are being tested with great success. There is no longer any doubt: war crimes are being committed, not by German barbarians, not by Asian Communists (though they do too), but by the wealthiest, the most powerful and most democratic republic in the world.

In North Vietnam, dikes and irrigation canals in the thickly populated coastal delta have already been bombed. General Maxwell Taylor has said that the ring around the capital, Hanoi, is being drawn tighter and the air attacks will "raze everything that North Vietnam has built up in the last ten years."

Until now the Americans have waged but few and minor predatory wars. They have never sanctioned torture till now. They have never before engaged in military operations on behalf of a puppet regime which they, and they alone, sustain. But this is what they are doing today.

Two years ago most people in this country would have tended to blame any violations of the truce on the Communists. It is probably no longer so. Today the Americans are just as likely to be blamed for shooting first, for official American statements are no longer taken on trust here. That is one of the by-products of the war. In the United States, where the phenomenon is naturally causing even more concern, it is called the "credibility gap." We always used to be told that American bombing crews were both scrupulous and skilled in confining their aim to military targets. Mr Harrison Salisbury

has described what he has seen in North Vietnam—the "block upon block of ordinary housing" destroyed by repeated bombing raids. And on Tuesday the Defence Department admitted that civilian areas do get hit.

The Defence Department still insists that its policy is to bomb only military targets, "particularly those which have a direct impact on the movement of men and supplies in South Vietnam." Yet Mr Salisbury tells of a repeatedly bombed town with none of those targets but only a textile mill and other factories. What cause has the Department given us to believe its own spokes-

Sorry 'Bout That

New Republic, Jan. 7, 1967

The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense and numerous subordinates wish they could supply us with some reasonably accurate estimates of civilian casualties in South Vietnam, but they can't, it is beyond them. They have even less information on casualties in the north caused by our air raids. For evidence on that matter, we must rely on what Hanoi claims, supplemented by reports just beginning to come in from the few credible American correspondents admitted to the north. The first of these, Harrison Salisbury of *The New York Times*, reported last week that contrary to initial Pentagon denials, our planes have caused extensive damage in and around Hanoi to civilians, to their homes, and their places of work. We are bombing more than bridges, rail yards and infiltration routes.

The question has been asked. In February of last year, Senator Claiborne Pell wondered why it was so difficult to get any reliable statistics. Secretary Rusk replied: "I just don't know. I have not myself seen any such figures." On April 20, during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee interrogation of Secretary McNamara, the question was again put by Senator Pell. Mr. McNamara replied: "I re-

ceived a report from General Westmoreland this morning just before coming over here which stated that the total number of civilians killed inadvertently through US military operations in South Vietnam amounted to 137."



There have been, of course, unofficial estimates. The AP reported last December 22 that "figures from Vietnamese and American public and private sources indicate that this year's civilian death toll has averaged about 1,000 a month, with at least three times that many wounded." The AP cited one instance of a US-conducted, one-day check last fall, which showed that "more than 1,600 of nearly 10,000 patients in 60 hospitals were being treated for wounds connected with war. Not included were the hundreds of civilians cared for at provincial dispensaries, village aid stations, and at home."

Christmas lesson from Vietnam

Manchester Guardian Dec. 29

man rather than Mr Salisbury?

Indeed, why should we believe the recent promise of support for U Thant's peace efforts, or the Manila Declaration, or the Honolulu Declaration, or the Baltimore speech, or any of the other words which deeds have contradicted while they were being uttered? More to the point, why should the Hanoi Government or the National Liberation Front believe them? That President Johnson may himself have believed them is no consolation; on the contrary, if the world is to be safe it is important that he should be less deluded than anybody.

Thailand

A WAR UNDER WRAPS

by Carol Brightman

The United States is not in Thailand to roll back a local insurgency or to manufacture another showcase for democracy. Her real interest in the place would seem to lie in precisely what she denies. In deference to this basic clue to American diplomatic strategy in Asia, Harrison Salisbury recently commenced his survey of the U.S. interest as follows: "Officially, Thailand is not involved in Vietnam. Officially, Thailand is neutral.... Officially, the U.S. has no bases in Thailand. Officially, the U.S. has no armed forces in Thailand, except for small training missions" (*N.Y. Times*, 9/4/66). In reality, Thailand is providing the launching pad for a major part of the U.S. air raids on North Vietnam and the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. In reality, the military investment in Thailand is far more durable, with greater long-term significance, than in Vietnam.

Let us review present operations first. In mid-1965, it was revealed that the U.S. 13th Air Force, together with the Thai Air Force, had been actively engaged in bombing Pathet Lao concentrations in Laos for some time. In late 1965, it was reported that U.S. Air Force bombers were freely attacking alleged infiltration routes through Laos and southeastern North Vietnam as well. According to Murray Marder writing in the *Washington Post* on October 3 of this year, U.S.-Thai bases are now fielding over 80% of the land-based air power that strikes all of North Vietnam. About a week earlier, the London *Daily Mail's* Bangkok correspondent, Arthur Cook, reported that more than half of all the air attacks on North Vietnam now originate in Thailand.

Cook referred to the fact that none of these flights are reported in military briefings, and that in explanation of this, both U.S. and Thai officials note that "no war has been declared on North Vietnam." For this reason they maintain that they are not violating international law, and, presumably, that they are not officially bound to make public the results of Thai-based raids.

This secrecy has a double significance. First, the United States explanation for it demonstrates just how seriously the President took the Tonkin Resolution as a mandate for general war. Second, it renders the official estimate of the strategy of bombing North Vietnam meaningless, and suggests that far more severe losses in aircraft, and pilots have occurred than has been admitted, and that the lack of success in fulfilling tactical and political objectives is more glaring than supposed.

One section from *Viet Report*, II:7

B52s

From Thailand?

SAIGON (UPI)—U.S. B52 bombers today attacked North Vietnamese troop concentrations in the demilitarized zone (DMZ), and it was learned that the mighty Stratostrongholds now are stationed at a new base in Thailand.

The B52 bombing strike today was against a regular Communist force which intelligence sources spotted in the DMZ that divides the warring Vietnams. It was not known if the bombers took off from nearby Thailand or from their regular station 2,500 miles away in Guam.

Informed sources said, however, B52s already are on station at U-Tapao Air Base in Thailand and bombing runs either have begun or will shortly. The proximity of Thailand cuts down air-to-air refueling requirements and could result in a step-up in attacks by the high-flying bombers.

A Pentagon spokesman in Washington denied any B52s were flying from bases in Thailand against Communist targets in Vietnam. He said "no bombers were there and we have no bases for them. We have not authorized B52 bombing to operate from Thailand."

New Republic, Jan. 7, 1967

Pictures in Our Minds

The United States is prepared to fight a major war with China. So says an *NBC News* documentary, seen by millions, called "The Battle for Asia." It describes Southeast Asia as "a ruthless tangle of animosities, more unfathomable and bitter than the mountaineer feuds of the Kentucky hills," where "no neighbors are friends" and "a thousand scores remain unsettled." Americans are fighting there, in Vietnam and Thailand, and "the simple fact is we can't stop now." Why not? Because, says *NBC News*, the region tempts "700 million Chinese neighbors who are short of food and resources, in addition to embracing a political creed that demands they conquer the world." That is why the US is putting billions of dollars into military installations in Thailand, "the most succulent country in Southeast Asia." Also, "most of our air war against North Vietnam is flown from Thailand," where "not since the Japanese were guests of the Thais during World War II has there been so much military activity and construction." It's all part of the build-up against China, the *NBC News* documentary explains; "the 35,000 American troops today in Thailand are making it into a US bastion in the Battle of Asia," and in this battle "Thailand is our ally . . . to escape Chinese domination."

The documentary insists that "Thailand, like Vietnam, is under attack by an Asiatic brand of communism, resolved that its expansion is inevitable, its violent methods irresistible." In the script, however, 700 million Chinese crunching on Thai succulence soon dwindle to 4,000 Vietnamese (out of 40,000 living in Thailand) who are said to be waging guerrilla warfare against the Bangkok government in nine northeast provinces which are called "the Appalachia of Thailand" because "the rice yield is 40 percent below the national average." Lest this disclosure breed doubt,

the NBC documentary sturdily contends that "what makes this battle different from Vietnam is that the Thai government is both concerned and capable" and is "trying to reinforce its military operations by befriending the people." How? The documentary proceeds: "As the children meet their government for the first time, their playground becomes a landing zone for US helicopters carrying US armed and advised Thai soldiers. . . . In this and other military operations, 10 percent of the total Thai population has been arrested, imprisoned, sent to rehabilitation centers or shot on the spot"; "The youngest communist prisoner is 18 months old."

In the circumstances, NBC News has to admit that "Thailand, once called Siam, is not a democracy or even a free country," but "is run by a military oligarchy" that for seven years has kept rejecting drafts of a new constitution because the drafts have all been "too democratic." However, "most Thais seem to like things the way they are"; perhaps because, according to NBC News, "opportunism is . . . part of Asia's culture" and "violence and pain have been developed to an art form in Asia."

Defoliation in Vietnam

SAIGON (UPI) — Take an area the size of the state of Rhode Island, strip it of every leaf, blade of grass, vegetable and flower, and you will get some idea of what American pilots have done in Vietnam during the first nine months of this year.

The pilots are members of the 12th Air Commando Squadron, the unit assigned to defoliate Viet Cong base areas and routes of communication with chemicals. They also destroy crops which are grown by, or for, the Viet Cong.

Dec. 17, 1966

Excerpts from The Air War in Vietnam

By Frank Harvey

"Dixie Station [on an aircraft carrier off South Vietnam] has a reason. A pilot going into combat for the first time is a bit like a swimmer about to dive in an icy lake. He likes to get his big toe wet and then wade around a little before leaping off the high board. So it is fortunate that young pilots can get their first taste of combat under the direction of a forward air controller over a flat country in bright sunshine where nobody is shooting back with high-powered ack-ack. He learns how it feels to drop bombs on human beings and watch huts go up in a boil of orange flame when his aluminum napalm tanks tumble into them. He gets hardened to pressing the firing button and cutting people down like little cloth dummies as they sprint frantically under them.

"On Yankee Station, some hundreds of miles to the north, the shoe is definitely on the other foot. When you fly into North Vietnam against the triple-A [anti-aircraft] and the SAMs (surface-to-air missiles), when the air is so full of flak bursts you can't see how you possibly can go through them unhit, the experience earned on Dixie stands you in good stead. Warm-up lasts a week to 10 days before you steam north into the real hell."

Before I left the Delta, I spent five days and nights in the operating rooms and wards of the Can Tho civilian hospital. Usually two people shared a bed and sometimes the emergency room was using all three tables at the same time and people were lying on the floor and even outside on the porch. Most injuries were from gunshot, mortar or napalm. Dr. Frank Camp, the director of the Air Force Surgical Team and boss of this huge old hospital, told me they treated more civilians there than the Arvin hospital next door treated wounded soldiers. . . . Of the hundreds of casualties, a very high percentage were women and children. . . .

They Admire "Charlie's" Courage

The shop talk of the Huey [armed helicopter] pilots was grim, colorful and to the point. "I shot up Charlie in the paddies today," one of them said. "I ran that little mother all over the place hosing him with guns but somehow or other we just didn't hit him. Finally he turned on us and stood there facing us with his rifle. We really busted his ass then. Blew him up like a toy balloon." Another pilot commented on this. "You got to hand it to those little mothers. They got the guts. If we had them on our side, we'd wrap up this war in about a month." . . .

"I saw bright aluminum cigars detach from his belly and tumble end over end. Two cans of napalm hit without exploding. Then more cans hit and the village was obliterated in a great rolling cloud of flame. Involuntarily I looked away. When I looked back two of the huts were burning brightly. 'Couple of duds,' the F-100 jock said disgustedly over his radio. 'The damned igniters must have goofed.'

"Now the two jets were setting up their strafing pass. They took their time. There was no hurry. Nobody was shooting back. One at a time, they made a deliberate race-track pattern and a long careful final. Then they flashed over the village at 40 knots and walked their 20mm shells through the houses in a flurry of dusty explosions. When they had fired out their ammo and pulled off the target, I asked Col. Goldsberry if he would please take me home as I felt a little queasy. He was a very considerate man. He said he would indeed.

"A FAC [Forward Air Controller] must be very sure of what he's doing before he calls in the jets. He can kill a lot of innocent people if he makes a mistake, which sometimes happens. I met a FAC who had been directing gunfire from Navy destroyers against hootches [native huts—IJS] and VC concentrations for several months. The destroyers were many miles offshore in a rolling ocean. This young man had been relieved of duty because he had openly declared himself guilty of assisting in the killing of many civilians because the long-range guns had fired wild so often, hitting houses and people in the vicinity of the target coordinates. It was impossible not to feel the agony this boy was suffering. 'I just want to go home and forget it forever,' he said.

"Another FAC who had just flown his last artillery-directing mission over a nearby village was in the bar at the Eaton compound in Can Tho. He said he was going back home to the States the next day. He had been ordered to direct artillery against a village because 'three VC were reported there this morning.' He got over the village, he said, and looked down and all he could see were men, women and children walking around. He radioed back to the Arvins [Army of South Vietnam—IJS] and told them he didn't see anybody who resembled a VC but that there were civilians in the village. Did the province chief really want this place hit? They radioed back that the province chief did, and to send the coordinates. 'I sent them,' this young FAC told me and drained his drink.

"You must have seen a lot of people killed," I said.

"No," he said. "No people got killed. Nobody was in the paddy where I directed the artillery fire."

November, 1966
Flying Magazine

Refugees

By KENNETH L. WHITING

SAIGON (U) — More than 10 per cent of South Vietnam's 15 million people are war refugees. Another half million are expected to pour into refugee camps this year.

The flood of refugees has created problems for the Saigon government and American advisers. It has also created hardships for the Communist guerrillas.

"Whenever villagers flee, the Viet Cong are denied coolie labor to haul their supplies, and rice growers and taxpayers," said Edward L. Lawrence of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"The refugees are people who vote with their feet. They are voting against the Viet Cong just as those who fled East Germany voted against the Communists there," he said.

Vietnamese statistics show there were 1,616,663 refugees in this country from January, 1964, to December, 1965. More than half million of them have been returned to their villages or have been resettled in 412 government-sponsored hamlets. The Saigon regime provides 200 temporary camps — most of them crowded and unsanitary — for 754,709 who are still homeless.

Most were driven from their homes by the climate of brutality and uncertainty which lies over Vietnam.

Some fled excessive taxation, forced labor or impressment of their young men into military service — either by the Viet Cong or the Saigon military junta. Some are politically motivated. Some fear reprisals. Most flee to escape the crossfire of war.

Jan. 13, 1967

The refugee flow increases sharply during and just after a major battle. The heaviest concentrations of Vietnamese in temporary shelters are along the central coast stretching north from Cam Ranh Bay to Da Nang.

Bin Dinh province, with 187,755 in temporary camps, is the leading refugee concentration. A number of vicious battles were fought in Binh Dinh in the past two years and the province has been hammered by U.S. bombers.

Military action has been increasing largely in the fertile Mekong Delta where almost half of all South Vietnamese live. Refugees will increase in the delta because of large scale military operations now under way, experts said.

BECOME PERMANENT

Temporary refugee camps grow into permanent hamlets if there is sufficient arable land. Where farmland is scarce relief officials hope to retrain refugees to hold technical or semiskilled jobs.

Refugee centers near Cam Ranh Bay are training Vietnamese to work in the sprawling U.S. installation. They are needed now for the war effort and officials expect they will provide a labor force when it is converted to peacetime usage.

Refugees are questioned closely when they turn themselves in. They are issued an identification card which serves as an emergency ration card. A duplicate is kept by authorities as a security check.

The homeless each get 10 piasters (about 7 cents U.S.) per day for a month. In emergencies, this payment is extended for two or three months.

SEEN AS TOOL

Diem planned to build 100 agrovilles, each holding 4,000 people and self-sustaining. The idea was suggested by the Chinese commune system, and Diem viewed it as a tool for the economic development of rural areas.

The program failed.

Diem then set out on his most ambitious scheme to win over the population. He would do this with strategic hamlets, a program administered with fanatical zeal by his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

The American view of the strategic hamlet differed considerably from Ngo Dinh Nhu's. The relocation of millions of the rural population, the building of hamlets surrounded by barbed wire, mud walls, a double row

of spiked bamboo sticks and a moat, were seen by Americans as an opportunity for meaningful and systematic social welfare work. The phrase "winning the hearts and minds of the people" became popular in those days.

Nhu saw the hamlets differently. They were ideal for population control, for gathering taxes, keeping dossiers, checking loyalties. Patronage was distributed to those who collaborated.

RED ACTIONS

The Viet Cong fought the program vigorously, burning down hamlet fences or enlisting the aid of disgruntled settlers to destroy the hamlets they resented. The Viet Cong took over many of them. The program was staggering to failure late in 1963 when the government was overthrown and Diem and Nhu were killed.

Mekong

Jan. 13, 1967

Things went quickly.

The battalion flew in to Rach Kien, a few days before Christmas and encountered the first problem. There was no place to bivouac the troops other than in the houses within the village of Rach Kien itself. The countryside is so lush that every inch of ground is planted in rice.

OCCUPY HOUSES

So the Americans moved into about half the village, occupying 30 houses. Some had been abandoned over the year, others still held families.

FORTIFIED

The Americans have built up the homes they occupy into sandbagged fortifications, with machine guns poking out from

doorways and windows.

Gillis says he realizes the danger to the town now that U.S. troops have taken half of it over. "If the Viet Cong attack through that part of town which we don't occupy then I know I might have no choice but to smash the homes to pieces with mortars and heavy weapons fire," Gillis said.

In that case, the civilian population would have to fend for itself.

Gillis and his officers hope that they can cut down the sniper fire and drive the Viet Cong out of the area before they have to reduce the whole countryside to ashes.

10,000 New Refugees

Jan. 14, 1967

Saigon

Allied forces in South Vietnam have mounted the largest combat operation of the war in an effort to disrupt the organization which directs insurgent activities in the Saigon area, military spokesmen said

last night.

Military officers said they expect that during the operation up to 10,000 South Vietnamese peasants will be moved from the region into government controlled areas.

pacification

Jan. 13, 1967

By PETER ARNETT

SAIGON, South Vietnam (U)

The history of pacification in South Vietnam is a chronicle of grand schemes crumbling, of the boundless energy of talented advisers evaporating.

It is also a tale of the corruption of officials at the grass roots destroying what a series of paternalistic and inept Saigon governments were reluctantly trying to implement from the

top. The battle "for the hearts and minds of the people" in Vietnam has often been a travesty of misdirected and incomplete effort, of statistical illusions and false optimism.

These harsh judgments have been borne out only too well by recent history.

continued next column

VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

Box 4525, Stanford, Cal.

Editor: David Ransom

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