CHAPTER 5

ROLLING THUNDER SUBSIDES

In 1968 the lunar new year began on January 30. As usual the South Vietnamese prepared to celebrate for several days before and after Tet (new year's day), but the government bowed to American pressure and announced a cease-fire lasting only thirty-six hours. Although the communist National Liberation Front had advertised a cease-fire extending an entire week, General Westmoreland was persuaded that this time they might break their word with even greater abandon than in the past. For months intelligence reports had warned of an impending offensive. Westmoreland was particularly concerned about the I Corps area, the northern quarter of South Vietnam, where two North Vietnamese divisions were besieging a Marine outpost in the hills at Khe Sanh; he canceled the cease-fire for American forces in I Corps.[1]

Before the sun rose on the morning of Tet, communist forces attacked government facilities in seven cities, only two of them in I Corps. These premature beginnings of a much larger offensive gave the Americans and the South Vietnamese time to cancel the cease-fire throughout the country and

recall soldiers before the onslaught of the following night. Then the communists used perhaps 80,000 men to attack their enemies in Saigon itself and more than a hundred other cities and towns. Despite the surprising number and intensity of the assaults, which brought large-scale fighting into the cities for the first time, American and South Vietnamese forces required less than a week to blunt the offensive. Only in the Citadel at Hue in I Corps did communist attackers manage to hold an important objective until late February. For the first time the communists had shown themselves in large numbers under conditions which did not permit them to slip away into the jungle. General Westmoreland thought that his men were winning the greatest victory of the war.[2]

Few American reporters saw an American victory in the Tet offensive. Many of them had long since grown cynical about Westmoreland's claims of progress. Now the war had come to Saigon in a way that both shocked them and confirmed their cynicism. Since most of the reporters assigned to Vietnam were in Saigon, much of their initial coverage concentrated on that city and the story of nineteen communists penetrating the wall of the American embassy compound and remaining on the grounds for several hours before being killed or captured. The suicidal nature of such attacks won for the communists much admiration and sympathy, especially when Americans saw on television and on the front page the image of the Saigon police director, Brig. Gen. Nguyen

Ngoc Loan, shooting a captive. Little noted was the fact that communists had just killed one of Loan's men as well as the man's wife and children.[3]

In the weeks that followed the offensive, military public affairs officers took Saigon reporters on field trips to other cities where attacks had been repelled. A casual reading or watching of the resulting stories could give the mistaken impression that the offensive continued to rage throughout South Vietnam. Even when American and South Vietnamese forces were given credit for quickly defeating communist attacks, the heavy use of firepower came in for severe censure. After one of the early field trips to Ben Tre in the Mekong delta, Peter Arnett of the Associated Press quoted an unidentified American major explaining that it had been "necessary to destroy the town to save it."[4] Perhaps even more damaging to the Johnson administration was the verdict of CBS's influential news anchorman, Walter Cronkite, who after a brief visit to South Vietnam told his television audience that the Vietnam War was a "stalemate" with no end in sight.[5]

The news from Vietnam inverted a recent upturn in President Johnson's Gallup approval rating, which now dropped from forty-eight percent to thirty-six percent of Americans polled (slightly lower than it had been in early November before Westmoreland's pep talks in Washington).[6] Since 1968 was a presidential election year, Johnson had ample incentive to change his Vietnam policies. But it was not at all obvious what changes would improve Johnson's domestic political situation, let alone improve matters in South

Vietnam. As so often in the past, the administration debate over Vietnam policy focused on bombing and troop deployments. In many respects this debate was a rehash of the one that occurred in May 1967, except that with respect to bombing the outcome changed. This time Secretary of Defense McNamara's old proposal to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam to south of the twentieth parallel was reborn as Secretary of State Rusk's proposal and finally got the President's approval--shortly after Johnson had replaced McNamara with Clark Clifford, a Washington lawyer and presidential adviser since the Truman administration.[7]

McNamara might well have got his proposal approved by Johnson in the spring of 1967 had it not been for the Senate Armed Services Committee. When Senator Symington called for hearings under the auspices of Senator Stennis's investigating subcommittee, the President dropped consideration of a bombing cutback and approved new targets, including Hanoi's Doumer Bridge. But the committee did not repeat that performance after the Tet offensive.[8]

The first member of the Senate Armed Services Committee to react publicly to Tet was a Republican, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, who was speaking on the floor against a civil rights bill when he was given the news. He put aside his prepared remarks and began to talk darkly of the connection between events in South Vietnam and the seizure only a week before of the Navy's radio intelligence ship Pueblo by North Korean patrol boats. In his view

the origin of America's problems in Vietnam was the acceptance of stalemate in the Korean War; it was high time the United States started using its power. "Use your power to close the port of Haiphong," he urged. "Use your power to bomb them so they cannot take it--the kind of bombing we did in World War II, if necessary."[9]

Subsequently Thurmond and his fellow committee members had little more to say in public about expanding the bombing campaign. Nor did they come forth to dispute the lead editorial in the Sunday *New York Times*, which declared that if the "spectacularly successful" Tet offensive proved anything, it proved that the bombing of North Vietnam had failed to reduce either the enemy's will or his capacity to fight.[10] Of course the committee's own longstanding criticism of the bombing's inadequacy was well known, but none of those senators had ever said that the current level of bombing was making no contribution at all.

Three days into the Tet offensive, the Senate Armed Services Committee began previously scheduled closed hearings on the defense authorization bill for the next fiscal year. The opening witnesses were Secretary of Defense McNamara, who still had a month to serve in the Pentagon, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler. Since Senator Russell was ill, Senator Stennis was in the chair. He was even more gracious than usual, going so far as to say that McNamara was the "most effective Secretary of Defense I have ever seen or known."[11] The same senators

who had grilled McNamara on the air war in August, now barely raised the subject. They did ascertain from General Wheeler that the Joint Chiefs still favored mining Haiphong.[12]

Three weeks later, after the initial shock of the Tet offensive had worn off, the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff appeared before the committee. During the morning session Senator Stennis warned General McConnell that after lunch he would be expected to discuss the restrictions under which the bombing had been conducted. Later when reciting the rules of engagement, McConnell said that he did not want to express disagreement with "policies or restrictions which are imposed by the President."[13] That statement bothered several members of the committee. While lecturing McConnell and Secretary Brown on the importance of speaking out, the senators suggested that the public silence of the Air Force leadership had contributed to a dire situation with implications for the credibility of air power that spread far beyond Southeast Asia.[14]

This criticism disturbed McConnell so much that he dropped his usual cordiality to confront it. He protested that he had made his position clear to his superiors and that he had answered the committee's questions honestly. "When I have done that," he concluded, "then I have done everything I should do, and I should not go out and try to convince the American people what my attitude is."[15] But what would the general do in North Vietnam if he had a free hand? McConnell's answer demonstrated the degree to which he had tailored his

speaking and perhaps his thinking to political realities in Washington: "If I were given a free hand to do everything I wanted to do in North Vietnam, I don't have the slightest idea of what I would do, Senator, because that would be a responsibility which I have never considered having thrust upon me."[16]

For all their frustration with the Air Force Chief of Staff's willingness to go along with administration bombing policy, the senators on the Armed Services Committee did not themselves try to arouse the public on behalf of more bombing. While the Senate Armed Services Committee met in closed session, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met before the television cameras to interrogate Secretary of State Rusk for two days. Not since 1966 had Rusk agreed to appear before that committee in open session, and in turn the Foreign Relations Committee had refused to meet with Rusk in closed session. Now the chairman of Foreign Relations, Senator Fulbright, made the most of his opportunity to attack the administration before a national audience. Although Fulbright's tie bore an image of doves and olive branches, they did not symbolize his attitude toward the Secretary of State.[17]

The Foreign Relations Committee and the Armed Services Committee had only one member in common, and he was the one most closely associated with the Air Force because he had been the service's first secretary in 1947. Increasingly disenchanted with the war, Senator Symington had returned from each of his trips to Southeast Asia less inclined to support the administration. By the summer of 1967 he had favored hitting North Vietnam hard or getting

out of the war. After the Tet offensive, he emphasized the latter half of his proposal. He took his turn during the televised hearings to explain the change in his thinking. The war had become too expensive for the American economy, he thought, and the American policy of gradualism was a failure partly because Americans had underestimated the "durability and patriotism of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese."[18] Nevertheless, he continued to believe that the United States could have destroyed "the enemy's capacity for aggression" if air and sea power had been used in "normal fashion" during 1965. But he indicated that this was no longer as attractive an approach, because "it is probably true that the defenses of North Vietnam have been built up to a point where it is now the most sophisticated defense in world history."[19]

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A problem for many bombing advocates was that they no longer wanted to risk over North Vietnam the one type of aircraft capable of delivering a lot of bombs in bad weather--the B-52. Even General McConnell had indicated his own reluctance during the Stennis hearings in August, and the Stennis subcommittee's report had not recommended using the B-52s.[20] Without using B-52s, there was little that could be done over North Vietnam to respond to the Tet offensive, since the weather would minimize fighter operations at least until the middle of April.

Within the administration, B-52s had long been out of the question as one of those rash moves which might lead to a wider war. The President's

national security adviser, Walt Rostow, did suggest mining Haiphong harbor as something that could be done in bad weather.[21] Rostow's principal source of information on mining was an Air Force officer, Brig. Gen. Robert N. Ginsburgh, the Joint Chiefs liaison to the White House. Ginsburgh told Rostow that mining North Vietnam's harbors might prove to be a good bargaining tactic, since they might be able to get the North Vietnamese to negotiate merely by offering not to renew the minefields. Mining was also a lot less risky than other options like invading North Vietnam, bombing the flood control dikes, or destroying North Vietnamese cities from the air after warning the inhabitants to evacuate.[22] But of course mining Haiphong was a step that the President had often rejected before, and its impact on the North Vietnamese would be much reduced if the railroads from China to Hanoi could not be interdicted at the same time. They could not be, at least until the northeast monsoon abated and permitted the fighter bombers to operate more effectively.

Any interest President Johnson might have had in taking more extreme action was dampened by speculation in the press that he was contemplating using nuclear weapons at Khe Sanh. Johnson was upset to learn that his subordinates had in fact been looking into this possibility. Recalling that the use of nuclear weapons had been discussed as a way to break the Vietnamese communist siege of the French position at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Walt Rostow had raised the matter with General Ginsburgh, who raised it in turn with General Wheeler, who sent a message to Admiral Sharp and General

Westmoreland. The commanders in Hawaii and Vietnam were already having the option studied, but they replied that they did not think it would be necessary to use nuclear weapons. Meanwhile General Eisenhower, who had been urging Johnson to step up the bombing of North Vietnam ever since the seizure of the Pueblo, now indicated to the press that nuclear weapons should not be ruled out at Khe Sanh (even though as President he had not used them at Dien Bien Phu). President Johnson had to assure a press conference that he had received no recommendations to use nuclear weapons, and Secretary McNamara had to call several concerned citizens to convince them that there would be no such recommendation.[23]

Talk of employing nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia reinforced President Johnson's determination not to make any dramatic increase in his use of air power. Although the Joint Chiefs hoped that the Tet offensive would lead to an enlargement of their bombing authority, they assumed that Johnson would veto mining Haiphong harbor and did not ask to do it. They could not guarantee that mining Haiphong would not lead to a confrontation with the Soviet Union, but the Chiefs did hope to persuade Johnson there was now less cause to be as careful of civilian casualties when bombing North Vietnam. After all, many South Vietnamese civilians were dying at the hands of the communists. The Chiefs asked Johnson not only to remove the prohibition on bombing fixed targets in Hanoi and Haiphong, but also to permit armed

reconnaissance of water, rail, and truck traffic nearer to the centers of those cities.[24]

Since the summer of 1967, the President had permitted armed reconnaissance on the principal routes radiating through his Hanoi and Haiphong "donut rings," that is in each case the portion of his restricted bombing zone lying outside his prohibited bombing zone. The Hanoi restricted zone (within which fixed targets required Presidential approval) had a radius of thirty nautical miles, while the Hanoi prohibited zone (within which no bombing had been permitted originally) still had for this purpose a radius of ten nautical miles. In January the President had established a new prohibited zone with a radius of five nautical miles, but armed reconnaissance was held outside the ten nautical mile limit. With respect to Haiphong, however, January's new prohibited zone radius of five nautical miles extended further than the old one of four nautical miles, pushing the inner edge of the donut ring outward (while the outer edge remained at ten nautical miles, the radius of Haiphong's restricted zone). Discussions of this matter tended to be somewhat confused, and the Joint Chiefs hoped to simplify it in a way that would give them a freer hand. They wanted to replace all the old zones with one new one for each city, Hanoi's having a radius of three miles and Haiphong's a radius of one and a half miles.[25]

General Wheeler proposed the smaller restricted zones to the President at the first Tuesday Lunch following the onset of the Tet offensive. Secretary

of State Rusk objected that this might lead to large civilian casualties. Secretary of Defense McNamara added that aircraft losses would go up and the military effect would be slight. Wheeler protested that the North Vietnamese had a fine warning system which sent the civilian population into shelters. Any increase in North Vietnamese casualties would not compare with the "butchery" of South Vietnamese. Clark Clifford, the Secretary of Defense in waiting, weighed in on the side of Wheeler with the argument that the Tet offensive was a clear rejection of President Johnson's offers to negotiate. Rusk then proposed as a compromise that the President remove his recent prohibition on bombing fixed targets within five nautical miles of the center of each city, and authorize again those fixed targets which he had authorized in the past. Johnson took this advice, giving the Air Force its old targets in Hanoi (including the Canal Bridge and the Doumer Bridge) and the Navy its Haiphong targets.[26]

Since little good bombing weather could be expected until late April, the Joint Chiefs could only hope that any new target authorizations precipitating out of the Tet offensive would remain in effect for at least three months. Meanwhile the airfields were the only targets in North Vietnam about which the Joint Chiefs felt much urgency. Il-28 light jet bombers had returned to Phuc Yen air base, where they had not been seen since the spring of 1967. Unlike the newer and smaller MiG-21 fighters at Phuc Yen, the Il-28s had sufficient range to reach Danang without staging out of a base in the North

Vietnamese panhandle. When General Wheeler raised this problem with the President on February 7, Johnson expressed immediate interest in attacking Phuc Yen and Wheeler assured him that it would be attacked as soon as weather permitted.[27]

Seventh Air Force did not wait for good weather. General Momyer had already given the order to destroy the Il-28s, and the very next day the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Ubon Air Base, Thailand, launched a daring low level raid. A single flight of four F-4s entered North Vietnam as if on a reconnaissance mission. While half the flight announced their presence at high altitude by turning on their radio identification transponders (which the North Vietnamese were thought to be capable of interrogating), the volunteer crews on board the other two F-4s skimmed across Phuc Yen at 250 feet. The attackers thought that their cluster bombs must have damaged at least one Il-28. The North Vietnamese were not sufficiently surprised, their flak crippling one engine of the lead F-4, which still managed to get to Laos where Capt. Tracy K. Dorsett and Capt. John A. Corder bailed out, evaded enemy search parties, and scrambled aboard a rescue helicopter. Back at Ubon they were reunited with fellow volunteers Maj. Larry D. Armstrong and First Lt. James H. Hall. All four received the Air Force Cross.[28]

Two days later, the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing made a second novel attempt to eliminate the Il-28 presence at Phuc Yen. A large formation of sixteen F-4s with cluster bombs (escorted by eight other F-4s and eight F-105s)

managed to strike Phuc Yen in bad weather without suffering any losses. This feat was accomplished by having the strike F-4s pull up five miles from the target and loft their bombs.[29]

On February 14, 1968, the Ubon wing launched yet another raid against Phuc Yen. This time a single flight of F-4s was to use their onboard radar to drop their bombs, but Valentine's Day brought the clearest weather in a month and they were able to dive bomb. Neither then nor subsequently were the Il-28s or MiG-21s caught on the ground. Nor were they ever sent to attack targets in South Vietnam. Henceforth the North Vietnamese kept only two Il-28s at Phuc Yen, and these would fly north and orbit at the approach of American aircraft. Five other Il-28s were at bases north of the Chinese border with the bulk of North Vietnam's MiG force. Since the airfield raids of the previous year, North Vietnam had based more than a hundred MiGs in China, while fewer than twenty remained at Phuc Yen, Gia Lam, and Kep airfields (with some others thought to be hidden in the nearby countryside and hauled to the bases by helicopter when needed).[30]

Although the Valentine's Day raid on Phuc Yen caught no MiGs on the ground, several were encountered in the air. As usual a couple MiG-21s attempted to hit-and-run from above 30,000 feet (without success this time since they were spotted early) while at least five MiG-17s waited below 15,000 feet. The MiG-17s did manage to draw each of the F-4 escort flights into separate skirmishes, but the MiGs won no victories and suffered two losses

(one to gunfire and the other to a Sparrow radar-guided missile). Maj. Rex D. Howerton and Col. David O. Williams, Jr., shared the credit for these last Air Force confirmed air-to-air victories of Rolling Thunder with their backseaters, 1st Lt. Ted L. Voight II and 1st Lt. James P. Feighny Jr.[31]

In addition to the planned raid on Phuc Yen, Seventh Air Force used the rare day of clear weather to attack Hanoi's Canal Bridge, one of the targets President Johnson had again released only a week earlier. Since the bridge raids of December, the Canal Bridge had returned to operation while the Doumer Bridge over the Red River was still down. Late in the afternoon, strike forces from Takhli and Korat converged on the bridge from opposite directions. Sixteen bomb-laden F-105s from the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing at Takhli came down Thud Ridge from the west with eight F-105 escorts to threaten the SAM sites and eight F-4s to guard against the MiGs. A similar force escorted a like number of F-105s from the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat Air Base as they penetrated North Vietnam from the Gulf of Tonkin. Although the two wings dropped forty-eight 2000-pound and 3000-pound bombs, only one hit the bridge, and three days later trains were using it. An escort F-105 from Korat was lost to a SAM and the pilot, Capt. Robert M. Elliot, was never seen by Americans again.[32]

In yet another attempt to make use of clear weather on Valentine's Day, a flight of four F-4s from Ubon dropped Walleye television-guided bombs on the thermal power plant associated with the Thai Nguyen ironworks, some thirty

miles north of Hanoi. At least one of the Walleyes made a direct hit. Two were obscured by dust and smoke, which may also have interfered with their guidance systems. Although the Walleye could be very accurate, its relatively small warhead sometimes failed to do enough damage even when right on target. At any rate, the power plant was soon operating and remained on the target list.[33]

During the weeks of bad weather which followed, there was little more that Seventh Air Force or the Seventh Fleet could do in the Hanoi-Haiphong region. Far to the south, Thailand for the first time permitted fighter aircraft based there to be used in South Vietnam. For nearly a year B-52s based in Thailand had been used in South Vietnam. The absurdity of this distinction was finally recognized, and thus the principal response of the Thai-based fighters to the Tet offensive came in the hills around Khe Sanh, where they joined the B-52s and other fighters in delivering an unprecedented tonnage of bombs on so small an area--a hundred thousand tons in a few weeks, about as much as the Hanoi-Haiphong region had suffered in three years.[34]

Since B-52s were not used near Hanoi and Haiphong, most major targets in North Vietnam were adequately protected from American air power by the northeast monsoon. The solo missions of Navy and Marine A-6s and the less accurate flights of four F-4s could do no more than harass the enemy. Some of the Red River port facilities on the south side of Hanoi were attacked for the first time without much damage. Unfortunately the most prominent

target given the bad weather attackers was one demanding greater accuracy than they could muster. They were supposed to turn off the voice of Hanoi Hannah by bombing Radio Hanoi. Not surprisingly they failed, while the White House paid close attention. After an A-6 attempt, Walt Rostow was informed that Radio Hanoi had kept to its usual schedule "which would indicate that our plane missed."[35]

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Since the beginning of Rolling Thunder in 1965, the Johnson administration had linked American bombing in North Vietnam to American ground forces in South Vietnam. Marines had been sent ostensibly to protect Danang Air Base, where some raids against North Vietnam were launched (while others launched from Thailand had to pretend that they came from Danang). When Marine and Army ground forces began to take the offensive, the administration's rationale turned around so that the bombing of North Vietnam was then justified as a way of reducing American casualties in South Vietnam.

Even critics of President Johnson's handling of the war often reinforced the linkage between bombs and troops. As early as April 1965, CIA Director McCone had warned that sending American ground forces to South Vietnam would never win the war unless North Vietnam was subjected to much harsher bombing. Although the CIA stopped calling for more bombing after McCone's replacement by Helms, CIA analysts continued to report that the gradual

escalation of American bombing was having little effect. Nor were they sanguine about the value of sending more troops to South Vietnam.[36]

Parallel increases in troop deployments and bombing came to an end in the summer of 1967, when the administration said no to Westmoreland's request for 200,000 more troops and promised him only 42,000. Despite Secretary of Defense McNamara's proposal to end bombing of the Red River delta, President Johnson went along with some of the demands of the Senate Armed Services Committee for more targets there. But through diplomatic channels and in his speech at San Antonio, Johnson offered to quit bombing North Vietnam if only the North Vietnamese would agree to negotiate seriously while not increasing their rate of infiltrating troops and supplies into South Vietnam.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, looked with greater equanimity on the possibility of a bombing halt than did his colleagues in the Air Force and Navy. After the San Antonio speech he formed a study group in the Joint Staff to examine the question of a bombing halt with particular attention to the question of what North Vietnamese actions should trigger a resumption of bombing. The group was composed of seven Army officers, two Marines, one Navy, and one Air Force officer. They predicted that North Vietnamese infiltration would increase during a bombing halt, but that the increase would be hard to measure and therefore possibly inadequate to justify resumption.[37]

While these were predictions with which most military men could agree, many in the Air Force and Navy were alarmed that the Chairman and his study group were even considering the possibility of a bombing halt. General Ginsburgh, the Air Force officer who served as Wheeler's liaison on the National Security Council staff, told the Chairman that the study group's report should stress the need to mine the ports and bomb the flood control dikes. The Joint Chiefs finally joined in a memorandum which called for resumption of bombing after thirty days if the North Vietnamese had not by then consented to withdraw all their forces from South Vietnam.[38]

The Tet Offensive revealed the flimsiness of support within the White House, the Congress, and even the Joint Chiefs for mining Haiphong or for using B-52s against the Red River delta--the only two dramatic air actions that could have been taken in the cloudy weather of February and March 1968. A major troop increase was another matter, however. General Wheeler thought that the Tet crisis might produce the same willingness to expand the military that the Chinese offensive had generated during the Korean War.

The President's initial response to Tet encouraged Wheeler, and on February 3rd the Chairman cabled Westmoreland that the President had asked whether his field commander needed reinforcement. At this point Wheeler's principal obstacle seemed to be Westmoreland, who was slow to take the hint. Westmoreland thought that his men were giving the communists a

drubbing, and while additional forces were always nice to have, he felt no particular need for them at the moment.[39]

Meanwhile the President was eager to send reinforcements immediately, but still reluctant to call up reserves. Only a few days earlier he had called up 10,000 air and naval reservists in response to the Pueblo crisis. Already complaints were coming from relatives and employers that these men were not doing useful work. Over the objections of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Johnson insisted on sending to Westmoreland an Army airborne brigade and a Marine regimental landing team totalling 11,000 men--without calling up reserves. In Wheeler's view the Army was already drawn much too thin, with only one deployable division, the 82d Airborne at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The President's new deployment took a third of that division.[40]

In late February, Wheeler traveled to Saigon, where he and Westmoreland discussed a troop request that President Johnson could not meet without a major reserve call-up. Wheeler wanted to use the Tet crisis to rebuild the American military, but he was also much more nervous about the situation in Vietnam than was Westmoreland. Tired and gloomy at the outset of his visit, Wheeler became more uneasy when an enemy rocket exploded near his quarters and he asked to move into the Combat Operations Center with Westmoreland. In any case Westmoreland was happy to comply with Wheeler's desire for a big troop request. Having been turned down when he requested such an increase in 1967, Westmoreland had then begun to think in terms of

gradually turning the war over to the South Vietnamese. But the enormous communist losses of the last month together with the prospect of a major infusion of American troops now had him once again thinking of winning the war.[41]

Echoing his 1967 request, Westmoreland joined Wheeler in asking for about 200,000 men--this time precisely 206,000. Half these were to go to Vietnam in the next few months. The rest might go by the end of the year if necessary, but Westmoreland did not think they would be necessary and thus could be kept in the United States. Even if all 206,000 were deployed (including fifteen fighter squadrons) raising the number of American servicemen in Vietnam above 700,000, stateside forces would have to grow to provide the necessary logistical tail. In fact satisfying the 206,000 request would have expanded the armed forces by about 500,000 (or nearly fifteen percent), partly by lengthening terms of service, partly by increasing draft calls, and partly by calling up more than 250,000 reservists.[42]

When Wheeler's proposal reached Washington on February 27, the President was at his ranch in Texas. He was due back the following day for the first of Secretary of Defense McNamara's two retirement ceremonies. In Johnson's absence McNamara and his replacement Clark Clifford met to discuss the troop request with a small group of the President's closest advisers, including Secretary of State Rusk. Wheeler's report dramatized the Tet offensive as "a very near thing," a declaration which preyed upon their fears

that the communists might soon launch an even more powerful offensive.[43] After all, most of the North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam had been withheld so far--not to mention all the enemy's forces in Laos and North Vietnam itself.

As McNamara saw it, the President had to make a choice between a big reserve call-up and higher taxes on the one hand and an end to Westmoreland's search and destroy strategy on the other. Westmoreland could be told to withdraw his forces from the hills and use them only to defend the heavily populated coastal areas. In that case a big reserve call-up would not be necessary. If they went with the reserve call-up, they might combine it with a new peace offensive. Rusk suggested that they might offer to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam or end it altogether in exchange for a North Vietnamese withdrawal from Quang Tri Province, the northernmost in South Vietnam. Clifford said that they should consider sending Westmoreland much more than 206,000 men, perhaps as many as a million, though he also said that he was not pushing the idea; given the widespread impression that the United States was losing the war, how could they avoid creating the impression that they were "pounding troops down a rathole?"[44] Clifford thought that they needed to evaluate their entire posture in South Vietnam before making a decision.

Walt Rostow conveyed these sentiments to Johnson and suggested he give Clifford the job of chairing a task force to evaluate the situation and

recommend a course of action. Johnson had long placed great stock in Clifford's advice and was enormously pleased to have him take over from McNamara. Although Clifford had joined George Ball in the summer of 1965 to oppose a major troop commitment in South Vietnam, he had subsequently supported the Johnson war policy. Clifford's counsels of caution were usually as welcome as his his encouragements to stay the course. As recently as December he had joined McNamara and Rusk in arguing against a Joint Chiefs' proposal to send B-52s against targets in Cambodia; rather than underline Rusk's fears of a Chinese reaction (always persuasive with Johnson), Clifford had simply questioned the utility of B-52 bombing in the jungle.[45]

Johnson had known Clifford since the 1940s, when Clifford had risen from being President Truman's assistant naval aide to being one of Truman's most influential civilian advisers. Like Clifford's closest friend, Stuart Symington, Clifford was part of Truman's Missouri political family. Like Senator Symington, Clifford would soon come to believe that the United States was on the wrong course in Southeast Asia.

After a very difficult month, the President gladly put the Wheeler proposal in Clifford's hands and left town again, this time for a weekend at Ramey Air Force Base, Puerto Rico. Johnson took along a son-in-law, Patrick J. Nugent, an Air National Guard enlisted man whose unit had been called up as part of Johnson's response to the Pueblo crisis. In the family pattern set by Johnson's other son-in-law, Marine Captain Charles S. Robb, Nugent expected

to go to Vietnam in the next few weeks. Johnson was proud of the fact that his family was contributing in this personal way to the war effort, while most sons of the country's government and business leadership had managed to avoid military service.

The other major participant in the President's weekend trip was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General McConnell. They went through the motions of inspecting Ramey, but their days were filled with golf. While they played for money according to the President's rules (as McConnell would remember with amusement), much of the Washington bureaucracy was hard at work preparing a position paper for the President.[46]

Since Clifford was in charge of this "A to Z reassessment," others in the bureaucracy (JCS, CIA, State, Treasury) sent their inputs to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where a team of action officers under the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, Paul Warnke, drafted a paper for the President. Some members of this team, including its leader, Leslie Gelb, were already engaged in a project launched by McNamara to compile a classified documentary history of America's involvement in Vietnam--a history which one of the authors (Daniel Ellsberg) would three years later leak to the *New York Times* for publication as *The Pentagon Papers*. Long before the Tet offensive, Warnke, Gelb, and many other civilians working for the Secretary of Defense had turned against the war. McNamara had given them a sympathetic hearing and tried to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam. They

were uneasy about his replacement by Clifford, long a defender of the President's Vietnam policies. The "A to Z reassessment" seemed an opportunity to change Clifford's thinking and perhaps even the President's.[47]

"A to Z" meant that once again the bombing of North Vietnam was considered in conjunction with the troop question. The bombing, however, was not uppermost in the minds of the drafters. They contented themselves with merely objecting to any increase, especially mining Haiphong harbor or reducing the restricted and prohibited zones around Haiphong and Hanoi. General Wheeler managed to get the discussion of bombing moved to an appendix, where the Joint Chiefs' diametrically opposed view was also included.[48]

With General McConnell out of town, Gen. Bruce K. Holloway, the Vice Chief, was left to direct the Air Staff's response to Clifford's request for alternative strategies. The Air Staff's preferred alternative was a much harsher bombing campaign, and they even went so far as to suggest using B-52s over the Red River delta, as well as targeting the flood control dikes and mining Haiphong harbor. Secretary of the Air Force Brown opposed such measures. He wanted to reduce bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong region (already very slight owing to the weather, but due to grow in the spring) and increase bombing in the North Vietnamese panhandle (which throughout Rolling Thunder had suffered the bulk of the bombing anyway).[49]

The Under Secretary of the Air Force, Townsend Hoopes, insisted that the Air Staff also study the possibility of substituting tactical air power for Westmoreland's search and destroy operations in South Vietnam. Until October 1967, Hoopes had worked for Warnke in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and was thoroughly in tune with McNamara's desire to cut back the ground war in the south and the air war in the north. Hoopes had already written Clifford a personal letter advocating an end to the bombing of North Vietnam. The Air Force under secretary advised Clifford to heed a study of the bombing completed in 1967 for the JASON division of the Institute of Defense Analyses by a group of university scientists--for the most part the same group of "Jasons" who had in the summer of 1966 developed the rationale for McNamara's proposal to build an electronically monitored barrier against infiltration into South Vietnam (and thereby render the bombing of North Vietnam unnecessary). Once again the Jasons stated in the strongest possible terms that the bombing was a complete failure because the rate of infiltration had increased.[50]

While Clifford may have been interested to learn that the Air Force civilian and military leadership was divided on bombing policy, his immediate concern was Wheeler's troop request. The drafting team reflected that concern. The primary purpose of the Gelb draft was to implement McNamara's suggestion that Westmoreland's search and destroy strategy should be discarded in favor of protecting the heavily populated coastal areas of the

country. Wheeler fought this change by warning that it would ensure continued fighting in the populated regions. He got the words about a change in ground strategy stricken from the draft. Though he could not get Clifford to endorse a major troop increase for Westmoreland, the new Secretary of Defense did agree that 262,000 reserves should be called up to rebuild the military in readiness for deployment whenever and wherever necessary.[51]

When President Johnson returned to Washington, he called his principal advisers to the White House for Clifford's report. Clifford explained that his group had not yet been able to agree on bombing policy or otherwise complete a thorough reassessment of the administration's Vietnam posture, but that such a reassessment should be done before sending Westmoreland major reinforcements. In the meantime Clifford recommended sending only 22,000, while calling up 262,000 reserves to rebuild the active military. Johnson made no immediate decision other than to approve the continuation of Clifford's reassessment. At this point Rusk raised again the possibility of a partial bombing halt during the ongoing northeast monsoon, and the President latched onto Rusk's suggestion as the bright spot in the meeting: "Really get your horses on that."[52]

It took a month for the partial bombing halt to become a reality. That month of March proved even more difficult for President Johnson than February had been, despite the fact that on the ground in South Vietnam the outlook for government and American forces continued to improve. Hue was

recaptured at the beginning of March. Although North Vietnamese troops still surrounded the Marines at Khe Sanh, the Marines were adequately resupplied by air while their besiegers suffered the heaviest conventional bombardment of all time. In another month Westmoreland would send a relief column which would arrive after enemy survivors had once again slipped away into the jungle. But meanwhile March brought a series of new blows to Johnson's presidency, all of them aftershocks of the Tet offensive.

On March 10, the *New York Times* published a front page story on Westmoreland's request for 206,000 men and on the ensuing debate in Washington. This story seemed to confirm all the speculation since Tet that American forces in South Vietnam were in deep trouble. President Johnson was furious, but he was unable to discover the source of the leak, though he suspected that the it came from a Pentagon civilian. Only years afterward did a reporter reveal that the original tip came from Townsend Hoopes, the Under Secretary of the Air Force.[53]

On March 12, Democratic voters in the New Hampshire primary failed to give President Johnson the overwhelming support expected. Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, who was running against the war in Vietnam and Johnson's handling of it, got almost as many votes as the President. True, McCarthy's name was on the ballot and Johnson's was not, but a landslide of write-in ballots for the President was expected. At the time, McCarthy's votes in New Hampshire were thought to indicate support for withdrawing from

Vietnam. Later analysis indicated, however, that most of McCarthy's supporters in New Hampshire were disgusted with Johnson for not prosecuting the war more vigorously.[54]

On March 16, Senator Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy for the presidency. As recently as January 28, Kennedy had said that he did not intend to run. But shortly after McCarthy's strong showing in New Hampshire, Kennedy presented an ultimatum to Clifford--either Johnson appoint a commission of prominent Americans, including Kennedy, to reassess the administration's Vietnam policy, or Kennedy would enter the race. The President refused.[55]

"Lady Bird" Johnson had noticed in early March a serenity emerge in her troubled husband. This new equilibrium was upset by the political tremors of that month. On the morning of Kennedy's announcement, the President told a meeting of the National Alliance of Businessmen that the United States was going to win in Vietnam: "To meet the needs of these fighting men, we shall do whatever is required."[56] Two days later he asked the National Farmers Union to join "a total national effort to win the war."[57] He warned them that this would require a more austere economy, which should mean at least enactment of the ten percent income tax surcharge he had proposed a year ago.

The President's sudden bellicosity passed quickly away. Political realities in Washington no longer permitted a truly national war effort. Secretary of Defense Clifford's discussions with Senators Russell, Stennis, and

Symington (among others) indicated that the administration would have a hard time selling a reserve call-up of even 100,000, let alone the 262,000 Clifford had originally contemplated. By the end of March the President decided to call up only 62,000 reservists and send to Vietnam nothing beyond those forces already scheduled for deployment; the troop ceiling in Vietnam would not go above 549,000. Johnson also announced that he would bring Westmoreland home that summer to be Chief of Staff of the Army. Westmoreland's replacement in Saigon would be his deputy commander, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., who had been giving much of his attention to building the South Vietnamese army.[58]

Ever since the Tet offensive, President Johnson had been thinking about making a televised speech on Vietnam. When he met with his advisers on March 19 to plan the speech, he showed less interest in a new peace initiative than he had earlier in the month. Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, a close friend of Johnson's, attended the meeting and encouraged his inclination not to confuse matters by mixing a peace initiative into a speech on troops and war. Within three days, however, Johnson again changed his mind. He told his advisers on March 22 that he wanted to take advantage of the few remaining weeks of bad weather over North Vietnam by giving a speech that featured a bombing cutback--perhaps only a renewed prohibition of bombing near Hanoi and Haiphong.[59]

For a month Secretary of State Rusk had argued in favor of a bombing cutback to the panhandle of North Vietnam, leaving not only Hanoi and Haiphong but most of the country free from bombing. When he had first raised this proposal in late February, he had talked about trading a bombing cutback for a North Vietnamese withdrawal from South Vietnam's northern province of Quang Tri. But he soon abandoned the idea of a trade and insisted like McNamara a year earlier that since the North Vietnamese had always called for an unconditional halt to the bombing, the administration would be wise to cut back while not expressing conditions and see what the North Vietnamese would do. Whenever Rusk would make this argument, however, Secretary of Defense Clifford would object to cutting back the bombing without a promise of anything in return. Clifford suggested trading a cutback for an end to North Vietnamese artillery shelling from the Demilitarized Zone and over it.[60]

Meanwhile some of Clifford's civilian subordinates got the impression that their new boss was waging a one-man battle to persuade the President and all his other top advisers to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam. During Clifford's confirmation hearings in January, his testimony on a possible bombing halt had first given Pentagon doves hope that he was not an irredeemable hawk. Clifford had been asked about President Johnson's San Antonio speech, which had expressed a willingness to stop bombing North Vietnam when a halt would lead promptly to productive discussions and if the North Vietnamese would not "take advantage" of the halt. Clifford explained

that by not taking advantage the President meant that the North Vietnamese could continue their normal rate of infiltration of men and materials into South Vietnam but not exceed it. The doves believed that making this interpretation explicit would inhibit Johnson from taking a harder line.[61]

The surprising sympathy with which Clifford heard the views of Pentagon doves, together with their longstanding suspicion of Secretary of State Rusk, led them to make some unwarranted assumptions about the discussions Clifford was having with Johnson and his principal advisers. Soon after the end of the administration, Townsend Hoopes would publish a memoir, *The Limits of Intervention*, propounding the view that Clifford had turned the President around. Clifford's own account in *Foreign Affairs* would fail to mention either his objections to Rusk's bombing cutback proposal or even the fact that Rusk had made the proposal which was adopted by Johnson.[62]

Both the President and his new Secretary of Defense were adjusting their thinking during that difficult month of March 1968, but they were headed in different directions. Clifford was becoming convinced that it was time to begin extricating the United States from Vietnam. Johnson on the other hand was looking for a way to salvage the war effort amid a more difficult political environment. He needed to avoid the additional controversy sure to be caused by a big reserve call-up and thus encouraged Clifford to propose a smaller one. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Rusk moved to provide a new peace initiative

that might relieve some of the political pressure already weighing on the President.

In the legend about Clifford's conversion of the President, an important turning point was a March 26 meeting between Johnson and several former government officials. From the early days of his administration Johnson had sought the advice or at least the support of men who had spent their careers rotating between important posts in the government and lucrative posts in the private sector, especially in prestigious law firms and financial institutions. He was not very comfortable with this "Eastern Establishment," but he tried to draw from it as much political support as he could. To begin with, his principal connection with such men was his first national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, who would invite the "Wise Men" (as Bundy dubbed them) to meet Johnson usually one at a time. After Bundy's departure from the administration, Johnson relied upon Clifford (the Wise Man with whom Johnson was most comfortable) to tell him which of the others could still be trusted.[63]

Prior to the March 26 meeting, Johnson had last met with the Wise Men as a group on November 2. In preparation for that earlier meeting Clifford had indicated that former Secretary of State Dean Acheson seemed hostile toward Johnson and in any case could not be trusted to keep secrets. That got Acheson demoted temporarily to a list of alternates, but not everyone on the November invitation list accepted. As so often in the past, Robert A. Lovett

(Assistant Secretary of War for Air in World War II and Secretary of Defense during the Korean War) pleaded ill health. In other respects the President got exactly what he wanted at the November meeting. Acheson and nine of his colleagues supported the President's Vietnam policy; these supporters included two former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, Generals Omar Bradley and Maxwell Taylor. Only former Under Secretary of State George Ball dissented, as he had from the beginning of the war.[64]

Even at their November meeting, the Wise Men expressed some discontent with bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong region. The President himself indicated that he might begin to reduce bombing there, and his San Antonio speech had made clear his willingness to trade the bombing for productive talks. Dean Acheson suggested trading a bombing halt for an end to communist attacks across the Demilitarized Zone. General Taylor thought it would be much better to trade the bombing for a lower level of enemy activity throughout South Vietnam. McGeorge Bundy warned that weather made it difficult to relate bombing pauses to "specific military actions" by the enemy.[65]

McGeorge Bundy sought a more routine bombardment that would avoid cities and civilian casualties. In a memo to Johnson after the meeting, Bundy recalled the advice of Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War during World War II, who had said that airmen would never pay as much attention to the question of civilian casualties as they should; he had pointed particularly at Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Commander of the Army Air Forces in World War II.

"I first learned this lesson from Colonel Stimson," Bundy wrote Johnson, "when he was telling me how he was hornswoggled by Hap Arnold on just this point."[66]

Before the Wise Men met in March, the kernel of discontent about the bombing of North Vietnam had grown into agreement with George Ball that the United States should begin disengaging from South Vietnam. Only General Bradley, General Taylor, and former Ambassador Robert Murphy strongly disagreed. Clifford knew that most of the Wise Men had changed their minds, and he suggested that Johnson hold the March meeting. The President was also in a position to know that the Wise Men would express themselves much differently than they had in November. Not only was he familiar with the change in Clifford's thinking, but Johnson had been talking to McGeorge Bundy and Dean Acheson.[67]

Although Johnson may not have been surprised by the general tenor of the advice he received on March 26, he was irritated about briefings that the Wise Men received on the preceding evening from Philip C. Habib of the State Department, Maj. Gen. William E. DePuy (Army) of the Joint Staff, and George Carver of the Central Intelligence Agency. Johnson thought that those briefings had drawn too bleak a picture of communist gains in the South Vietnamese countryside after government forces had been withdrawn to fight in the cities. As a counterweight, Johnson began his meeting with the Wise Men by introducing General Wheeler and General Abrams (who was paying his

first visit to the President after selection as Westmoreland's replacement). Both Wheeler and Abrams had just come from a meeting with Westmoreland at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. Wheeler insisted that everything had turned around for the better since his February visit. Abrams stressed that South Vietnamese government forces had performed very well and that in time they would be able to assume a larger proportion of the fighting.[68]

While the President had a more positive view of developments in Vietnam than did most of the Wise Men, he was as depressed as they were about political developments in the United States. He had already expressed interest in a partial bombing halt as a way to mollify his critics, and he insured that the question of a bombing halt would receive plenty of attention by inviting Arthur Goldberg, Ambassador to the United Nations, to meet with the Wise Men. Goldberg had been urging a total bombing halt over all of North Vietnam. George Ball of course agreed with him, as did a second new addition to the roster of Wise Men, Cyrus Vance, former Deputy Secretary of Defense. Ball, however, thought that the President should not raise the matter of a bombing halt publicly until it had been suggested by the Pope or the Secretary General of the United Nations. General Bradley agreed that a bombing halt was a good idea if the Pope would suggest it. The rest of the group was more wary of stopping the bombing when Westmoreland's forces near the Demilitarized Zone were threatened by communist forces on both sides of the border.[69]

A partial bombing halt would permit Johnson to bomb communist forces and supply routes north of the border--and still avoid the outcry which accompanied bombing near Hanoi and Haiphong. During the three days immediately preceding his meeting with the Wise Men, Johnson had been talking to speech writer Harry C. McPherson, Jr., and Secretary of State Rusk about stopping the bombing north of the twentieth parallel (which would free all of North Vietnam except the panhandle from American attack). The meeting of the Wise Men at least did not divert Johnson from this important ingredient of his televised speech on March 31. Johnson told House and Senate leaders afterward that his meeting with the Wise Men led directly to the speech. In his memoirs, however, he would be at pains to show that the major points of his speech had taken shape before his meeting with the Wise Men (and that therefore Secretary Clifford's role in the speech was less than advertised). Johnson's memoirs seem nearer the truth than his effort at the time to associate the Wise Men with his decision. He frequently called upon influential "advisers" to share the responsibility for a decision he had in fact already made.[70]

The President's announcement of a bombing cutback gained enormously in its impact (at least on the American public) from his coupling it in his March 31 speech with an announcement that he would not run for reelection. Although he had raised this possibility with his principal advisers as early as October 1967, he caught even them by surprise. In less than three days the

surprising speech of March 31, 1968, was followed by North Vietnam's surprising agreement to meet with representatives of the U. S. government. During the summer of 1967, Johnson had offered them a complete bombing halt over North Vietnam for formal peace negotiations. Now they accepted a partial halt for informal talks. Only two months after the Tet offensive had seemed to shut the door on peace initiatives, the North Vietnamese were at last ready to talk to American government officials.[71]

The first strong evidence that the North Vietnamese might be changing their position had come in late February through the Indian ambassador in Washington. The Central Intelligence Agency also reported on March 1 that the North Vietnamese were ready to talk while fighting--in the belief that a bombing halt would not only help them rebuild their economy and their forces in South Vietnam, but also help to discourage and thus destabilize the South Vietnamese government.[72]

Hopes for peace talks had often been dashed before. Had Johnson been rebuffed again, the bombing probably would have been resumed when the good weather arrived in May--and it was at least conceivable that political opposition to Johnson's policies might then have swollen so dramatically as to force a rapid withdrawal from Vietnam. But the North Vietnamese chose a talk and fight strategy which would permit Johnson's successor a disengagement so gradual that it could still seem possible for South Vietnam to survive free from communist control.

* * *

Had the North Vietnamese failed to respond to Johnson's bombing cutback, his opponents on Capitol Hill were ready to lay the blame at the President's door. During the brief interval between the March 31 speech and North Vietnam's positive answer, Senator Fulbright castigated Johnson for misleading the country by promising to stop the bombing of North Vietnam "except in the area north of the Demilitarized Zone." How could the President's promise be reconciled with the next day's naval air attack on a truck park near Thanh Hoa, more than two hundred miles north of the Demilitarized Zone and less than one hundred miles south of Hanoi?[73]

Senators Mansfield, Russell, and Stennis rose to the President's defense on this point. They had been consulted by Johnson about his speech before he made it, and he had told them that there would be no bombing north of the twentieth parallel. Thanh Hoa lay just south of the twentieth parallel. Senator Mansfield, the Majority Leader, pointed out that the President was correct in his statement that ninety percent of the North Vietnamese people lived in the region no longer being bombed. While Thanh Hoa was more than two hundred miles from South Vietnam, the intervening panhandle was so narrow that it constituted less than a third of North Vietnam.[74]

Senator Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, made it very clear that he did not approve of the cutback and that he had advised the President against it "unless there was some indication of

reciprocity on the part of the North Vietnamese." But the President "as has often been the case in the past" did not take the advice of his old friend Senator Russell, who had been opposed to getting into the war and opposed to the way it had been fought. For two years he had urged a naval blockade of the coast of North Vietnam. "We have been about two years behind what we should have been doing in fighting the war ever since it started." Russell had "no solution of my own to bring the war to a successful conclusion without considerable escalation."[75] He predicted that the President's speech would not lead to a "fruitful conference" with the North Vietnamese--a prediction Senator Thurmond modified by warning that another kind of peace talks might well be in the offing. During the Korean War negotiations, Thurmond recalled, the United States lost almost as many men in combat as had been lost before negotiations began.[76]

The character of President Johnson's support in the Senate did not embolden him to stand his ground at the twentieth parallel. He may have regretted taking Under Secretary of State Katzenbach's advice to delete any mention of the twentieth parallel in the March 31 speech, but once challenged by Fulbright, the President immediately retreated to the nineteenth parallel. Thanh Hoa and the top third of the panhandle joined the sanctuary which then protected all North Vietnam except a narrow strip less than fifty miles wide stretching from Vinh south a hundred fifty miles to the Demilitarized Zone.

A virtue of retreating to the nineteenth parallel was that it eliminated a possible source of friction between the Air Force and the Navy over bombing responsibilities. The eighteenth parallel not only evenly divided the new target area but was also the approximate boundary between long established route packages: the Air Force's Route Package One between the Demilitarized Zone (at the seventeenth parallel) and the eighteenth parallel; north of the eighteenth the Navy's Route Packages Two and part of Three until it was cut short by the nineteenth parallel just above Vinh.

Into this relatively small area, the Air Force and Navy poured all the firepower they had formerly spread throughout North Vietnam. Proponents of the bombing cutback liked to present this compression as a very dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of interdiction. Secretary of Defense Clifford had become a firm supporter of the cutback, especially once the North Vietnamese had agreed to talk. His subordinates in the military were presented with a familiar dilemma: having argued against the cutback, should they now go along with their boss in looking for its bright side. As usual much of the military leadership decided that the new bombing policy had a lot of merit, especially in comparison with no bombing at all.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, told President Johnson on April 9 that the United States had lost nothing by ceasing to bomb in the Hanoi-Haiphong region, but that there was a need to bomb Thanh Hoa--that is, return to the twentieth parallel. Given the cloudy weather which

had not yet broken over the Red River delta, relatively little bombing could be done there for a few weeks, though conditions over Thanh Hoa were not much better. It was certainly true that Thanh Hoa was increasing daily in importance as a supply storage and transportation center. After all, it was the southernmost city in North Vietnam no longer subject to bombing, and the North Vietnamese were quick to take advantage of that fact. Wheeler may well have guessed (probably correctly) that the President would be more likely to return to the twentieth parallel than to bomb the Red River delta. In the old game of gradualism, the objective was always the next little bit.[77]

Secretary of Defense Clifford attempted to stave off efforts to return to the twentieth at first by downplaying the fact that enemy truck traffic through the North Vietnamese and Laotian panhandles was increasing. When the *New York Times* quoted him as saying that he was "not aware of any increase in infiltration," Clifford felt obliged to draft a letter explaining to the President that this "reprehensible" reporting was a willful misunderstanding of the way the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State had decided to handle this question. Clifford and Rusk were merely saying that there had been an increase starting before Johnson's March 31 speech and that the increased flow had continued. "We are not taking the position that there has been any specific increase since March 31st because that increases the burden on the President for restricting the bombing as of that date."[78]

Wheeler's argument in favor of bombing Thanh Hoa was strengthened in May when the communists launched a second offensive in South Vietnam. Although this offensive was much smaller than the Tet offensive and focused mostly on Saigon, the Johnson administration worried that something bigger was coming from the North Vietnamese forces in and near the I Corps region of northern South Vietnam. At the outset of the second offensive on May 4, Secretary of State Rusk said that he was willing to bomb Thanh Hoa. Clifford argued that they should save Thanh Hoa for a major offensive which might come much later in the negotiating process. The President was not ready to return to the twentieth parallel, but Clifford's influence with him was crumbling. When Clifford asserted that the May offensive was merely a reaction to the administration victory in getting the North Vietnamese to accept Paris as the negotiating site rather than Warsaw, the President curtly remarked that the North Vietnamese really preferred Paris.[79]

Attacks on Saigon prompted Ambassador Bunker to recommend that one of the conditions for a bombing halt over North Vietnam should be an end to communist assaults on South Vietnamese cities. In Bunker's view such restraint fell within the meaning of President Johnson's San Antonio formula--that the communists not "take advantage" of a bombing halt. When passing along Bunker's views to Johnson, Rusk suggested that the time had come to move beyond the narrow Clifford interpretation of the San Antonio formula, which permitted the North Vietnamese to do anything but increase

their rate of infiltration (a rate that had tripled since the President's San Antonio speech in September).[80]

Toward the end of May the President seemed ready to bomb north of the nineteenth parallel. He was much affected by Wheeler's argument that the MiG base at Bai Thuong (about twenty miles west of Thanh Hoa) posed a danger not only to Navy pilots operating near Vinh, but also to American forces in South Vietnam. The Chairman stressed that the North Vietnamese were using their sanctuary, that MiGs and Il-28s were busy training--possibly for an attack on the American air base at Danang, South Vietnam. Wheeler's proposal to bomb Thanh Hoa and Bai Thuong gained in attractiveness when contrasted with his other proposal of late May to send B-52s against communist forces and supplies in Cambodia. Upon hearing Wheeler's Cambodian initiative, the President declared that he was ready to send the fighter bombers back to the twentieth parallel and instructed Rusk and Clifford to figure out how to do it quietly. This quiet bombing escalation apparently eluded the Secretaries of State and Defense, if indeed they bothered to look for it. Never again would President Johnson order fighter bombers north of the nineteenth parallel.[81]

* * *

Left with a smaller field of action, Seventh Air Force tried to make the best of it. Chasing trucks in Route Package One was at least less dangerous than bombing targets in the Red River delta, and the North Vietnamese did

less than expected to change that situation in the summer of 1968. They did nearly double their antiaircraft guns in the panhandle to perhaps 2600, but most of their surface-to-air missile batteries remained near Hanoi and Haiphong--with only four or five active sites near the nineteenth parallel. There was no effort in 1968 (as there had been in 1967) to install missiles near the Demilitarized Zone. Hence the Navy bore the brunt of the remaining SAM threat as well as the MiG threat.[82]

The Air Force had only to worry about anti-aircraft artillery, which was less deadly when divorced from SAMs and MiGs. Nevertheless, Route Package One boasted more guns than Route Packages Two and Three, and the Air Force lost fifty-two aircraft there in the remaining six months of Rolling Thunder; fifty-six of those pilots and backseaters were not rescued, of which only eleven came home at the end of the war. These losses were slightly more severe than Navy losses in Route Packages Two and Three, but much less severe than the two services had experienced in Route Package Six (the Hanoi-Haiphong region). In some months Route Package Six losses had exceeded twenty per thousand sorties, while the rate stayed below two per thousand in Route Package One.[83]

The North Vietnamese panhandle was nevertheless everywhere a much more deadly place for pilots than the Laotian panhandle. In Laos the Air Force was beginning to have some success finding and strafing trucks with guns mounted on a relatively slow, propeller-driven transport aircraft (a Lockheed

C-130 Hercules), but such a fixed-wing gunship could not survive in the North Vietnamese panhandle. Nor could forward air controllers (FACs) use their customary light propeller-driven aircraft to look for targets and call in fighter bombers. Instead the FACs flew in two-seat F-100F jets. They were fortunate indeed to see a truck in daylight from 4500 feet at 400 knots, and most North Vietnamese trucks did not take to the road until after dark.[84]

A FAC could see better from the back seat of an F-100F than he could from the back seat of an F-4, and the F-100F could loiter over the panhandle longer. But the old F-100Fs were in short supply as they neared retirement. In the summer of 1968, the Air Force began to supplement the F-100Fs with Danang F-4s for FACs working in Route Package One. The Danang F-4s did well enough that subsequently Thailand F-4s would join them in taking the jet FAC concept to Laos, where communist air defenses were improving.

Meanwhile many F-4 crews were introduced to night interdiction. Before the bombing cutback, only the F-4s of the 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Ubon Air Base, Thailand, had specialized in night work over the North Vietnamese panhandle. In the sprin[redacted]f 1968, the Night Owls began to teach night flying to the other squadrons [redacted] the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing. Truck traffic on the roads in Route Pack[redacted]e One was plentiful enough so that aircrews claimed to see about three [redacted]ousand trucks a month in May, June, and July; of those sighted they clai[redacted]l to have destroyed or damaged about twenty percent. Of course the same [redacted]cks were no doubt sighted repeatedly.

No one knew how many were using the roads, let alone how many had actually been destroyed.[85]

Many of the trucks moving south through Route Package One in the summer of 1968 were carrying ammunition and supplies for North Vietnamese units located in and just north of the Demilitarized Zone dividing North from South Vietnam. About five miles wide, the zone followed the irregular course of the Ben Hai River as it flowed east into the South China Sea from the mountains separating Vietnam and Laos. The North Vietnamese had never had much problem infiltrating forces through the Demilitarized Zone, and perhaps thirty thousand of their soldiers operated in the I Corps region of South Vietnam. Supplying these forces through the zone was much more difficult than infiltrating them. Most trucks with supplies for communist forces in South Vietnam went around the Demilitarized Zone by driving west through the mountain passes into Laos.

Because the arrival of heavy rain in May made truck travel on dirt and gravel roads in Laos difficult, the North Vietnamese emphasized resupply of units in South Vietnam during the dry northeast monsoon of November through April. The southwest monsoon brought rain to the North Vietnamese panhandle as well, but the amount was somewhat less on the lee side of the mountains and the roads were somewhat better. From the North Vietnamese point of view, the major problem with the seasonal character of their resupply system was that the seasons favored American air attack in Laos. When the

roads were dry in Laos, there were relatively few clouds overhead to protect the trucks from the planes. The fighter bombers, however, rarely got such good weather in North Vietnam, because the relatively dry northeast monsoon nonetheless produced heavy cloud cover along the coast and over the Red River delta. The best opportunities to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong had occurred during the breaks between the heavy rains of the southwest monsoon when the skies did clear. Hence the American bombing had focused on the Laotian panhandle during the northeast monsoon, but during previous southwest monsoons the American effort had necessarily been divided between North Vietnam's panhandle and the Red River delta.

Even in the summer of 1967 at the height of bombing in the Red River delta, more than half of the Air Force's fighter bombers attacking North Vietnam had bombed the North Vietnamese panhandle. Whenever clouds over the delta did not permit attack, Air Force fighter bombers had been diverted to Route Package One. Seventh Air Force had frequently argued that this practice produced in Route Package One an overabundance of air power which might better have been used in the Navy route packages farther north. After the bombing cutback in 1968, Seventh Air Force had the resources to double the number of strike sorties sent into Route Package One to more than six thousand a month. While absorbing Air Force sorties that had formerly struck the northern route packages, Route Package One could be bombed without using a high percentage of attacking aircraft for suppression of enemy

defenses. Occasionally Seventh Air Force would send a big formation of strike aircraft with escorts into Route Package One, but only to practice the technique in case the President once again permitted them to bomb targets near Hanoi.[86]

Although Seventh Air Force thought of Route Package One primarily in terms of interdiction, the Marines holding outposts just south of the Demilitarized Zone wanted close air support as well. North Vietnamese artillery in and just north of the zone exchanged heavy fire with Marine and South Vietnamese artillery units on hills south of the zone. As in many similar situations over the years, the Air Force thought it could best limit North Vietnamese firepower by interdicting the enemy's supply of ammunition rather than by attacking the guns themselves, which were well protected in their earthworks. A steady pounding from B-52s had not silenced the North Vietnamese guns, and the Air Force would have moved the target areas for the big bombers farther north had not the Johnson administration feared to threaten the Paris talks with any change that might be perceived as escalation of the war. Certainly Seventh Air Force did not want to expend much of its fighter-bomber force on the border guns.[87]

Throughout northern I Corps there was a tug of war in progress between the Air Force and the Marines over control of air power. Seventh Air Force had long controlled aircraft from the Marine air wing in I Corps when they struck targets in Route Package One. Early in 1968 during the massive

use of air power to break the siege at Khe Sanh (twenty-five miles south of the zone), the Seventh Air Force commander, General Momyer, had gained some control over Marine aircraft even when they were operating within I Corps. For the most part, Air Force and Marine officers managed to cooperate reasonably well within complex control structures and under the pressures of interservice rivalry. Seventh Air Force tried to coordinate air operations in I Corps while interfering as little as possible in the smooth close air support relationships which years of practice had developed between Marine air and ground forces.[88]

As to Route Package One, the Marine air wing contributed about a fifth of the interdiction sorties, and Seventh Air Force joined a major effort to destroy North Vietnamese artillery in and near the Demilitarized Zone. During the first week in July 1968, Seventh Air Force dedicated nearly half its effort in Route Package One to bombing an area along the eastern end of the zone. The Marines and the Navy carriers each matched Seventh Air Force's tactical air effort, and Strategic Air Command's B-52s dropped a greater tonnage than the tactical aircraft of all three services combined. To eight thousand tons of bombs, Marine artillery and Navy ship guns added more than forty thousand rounds (about two thousand tons). This was smaller than a similar operation lasting six weeks in the fall of 1967, but much more intense.[89]

The bombardment went on around the clock all week at the rate of a ton of explosive a minute. So long as this operation lasted, Marine forward air controllers were even able to fly their light planes into the sector (without

much concern for enemy fire, but with great concern for friendly fire). Despite Marine enthusiasm for the operation, however, reconnaissance photography provided evidence of only two enemy guns destroyed out of the more than four hundred thought to be in the sector; based on aircrew reports, Seventh Air Force estimated that perhaps sixty-three had been destroyed. The best that could be said with any certainty was that for a few weeks after the operation, North Vietnamese artillery fire from that sector was less intense.[90]

Although B-52s continued to bomb enemy positions in and near the Demilitarized Zone, Air Force fighter bombers returned their focus to interdicting truck traffic. The new Army commander in Vietnam, General Abrams, favored interdiction because he feared that the communists were preparing a third offensive which would be bigger than their May offensive and perhaps surpass their Tet offensive. Since their earlier two offensives had depleted their supplies in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese would have to depart from their normal seasonal supply cycle if they were going to launch a third offensive within South Vietnam in 1968.[91]

As usual during the southwest monsoon, the North Vietnamese had concentrated on sending supplies to units stationed just north of the Demilitarized Zone. But even if they chose to invade across the Demilitarized Zone and abandon their pretense that there were no North Vietnamese soldiers in South Vietnam, the communists would still need to prepare their forces within South Vietnam for the struggle. That meant sending more trucks

through Laos in the rainy season, and by early July traffic was growing on roads leading to the Mu Gia and Ban Karai mountain passes along the Laotian border.[92]

Seventh Air Force attempted to block use of mountain passes by closing the roads leading to them. The passes themselves as well as the roads in Laos had been heavily bombed by fighter bombers and B-52s without closing them for more than a few hours. Early in the war, bombing sometimes blocked a road with a rock slide, but repeated bombing of the same points had turned the rock to gravel, which North Vietnamese road repair crews used to their advantage. Despite this experience in Laos, Seventh Air Force thought that there were places on the North Vietnamese side of the passes where bombing might close roads at least for a few weeks.[93]

The most ardent supporters of road closing (as opposed to truck destruction) were air intelligence officers. Their capability of analyzing aerial photography had not been very helpful in the truck destruction campaign, since trucks moved faster than photography could be processed. Photo interpreters did sometimes turn up evidence that a particular area in the jungle was being used as a truck park, but only when bomb detonations were accompanied by secondary explosions were pilots reassured that they were really bombing a target of value to the enemy. In the case of an interdiction choke point, the target at least stayed put and (once chosen by intelligence analysts) was fairly

easy for pilots to find--especially after they had returned to it daily with more and more bombs.[94]

As trucks moved south from Vinh, they could take either Route 1 through the coastal lowlands or Route 15 into the mountains toward the Mu Gia Pass and Laos, a journey of about seventy-five miles. Trucks bound for the Ban Karai Pass left Route 15 twenty miles north of the Mu Gia Pass and followed Route 101 forty miles south to Route 137, which crossed the mountains into Laos forty miles from the Demilitarized Zone. Under the direction of Brig. Gen. George J. Keegan, Jr., Seventh Air Force's Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, analysts chose one choke point on each of the three North Vietnamese roads connecting Vinh with the mountain passes.[95]

Just north of its intersection with Route 101, Route 15 was a single lane road winding sharply through steep cliffs. From the middle of July this Xom Ve choke point was bombed repeatedly as was a less promising point on Route 101. Neither of these efforts was very successful, though the Xom Ve choke point was thought to be closed almost a third of the time. More satisfactory was a choke point on Route 137 recommended by Col. Frederick I. Brown, Jr., Chief of Intelligence for the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at Udorn Air Base, Thailand. Route 137 bent around a cliff where a river passed underneath the road and into a limestone cave. Brown had visions of damming the river and flooding the road permanently. That did not happen, but whenever it rained the road was covered with a pool dubbed "Brown's Lake" by aircrews.

There was enough rain in late July to keep Route 137 closed two-thirds of the time.[96]

In August, Seventh Air Force added three more choke points to the target list. The six targets were bombed so frequently that they soon looked like former choke points in Laos that had been worn out by bombing. But interdiction bombing in Laos was performed during the dry northeast monsoon. The rainy southwest monsoon proved more conducive to the choke point method, since rain turned worn out choke points into mud. Tropical Storm Rose of mid August was followed by Tropical Storm Bess and Typhoon Wendy in early September. General Keegan was delighted with what he took to be the result: "A 90 percent reduction of the enemy's net logistic tonnage through-put into Laos was accomplished."[97]

General Keegan's confidence that he could measure the amount of truck traffic on roads in the North Vietnamese and Laotian panhandles had been increased by the introduction of electronic sensors to detect movement and sound. The sensors were a legacy from former Secretary of Defense McNamara's project to build a barrier against infiltration into South Vietnam. Although "McNamara's Wall" had not been built, parts of the project continued to grow. South of the Demilitarized Zone, Marines strengthened their major positions except for Khe Sanh, from which they had withdrawn after breaking the communist siege. As they had for the first time at Khe Sanh, Marines in northern I Corps used electronic sensors to warn of enemy movement. Neither

the Marines nor the Army, however, came anywhere near fulfilling McNamara's prescription that they should construct an impenetrable line of fortified positions from the coast to the mountains.[98]

The western, mountainous portion of McNamara's Wall had never been intended to be more than strings of sensors monitored by the Air Force, which would send aircraft to attack when enemy trucks and soldiers were detected. In South Vietnam and Laos sensors could be planted by ground teams or dropped from the air. By the summer of 1968, Seventh Air Force was also dropping sensors into Route Package One. EC-121 radar surveillance aircraft from Korat Air Base, Thailand, picked up sensor signals and transmitted them to a control center at Nakhon Phanom Air Base on the eastern boundary of Thailand, just across the Mekong River from Laos.[99]

Electronic sensors confirmed aircrew observation that there was much less traffic on the mountain roads between North Vietnam and Laos. This result led General Keegan to write that Seventh Air Force's effort against those roads during the southwest monsoon of 1968 was "one of the most successful interdiction campaigns in modern history."[100] Not everyone agreed. Those who favored truck destruction were embarrassed to find that the Navy claimed to have destroyed or damaged nearly 4000 trucks from July through October 1968, while the Air Force could claim fewer than 1200. This result, however, did not flow simply from Seventh Air Force's dedication of a fifth of

its sorties to bombing choke points. Fewer trucks were seen on the roads even in the Navy route packages, and still fewer reached Route Package One.[101]

General Abrams seemed less impressed with either closing mountain roads or truck destruction than with the sharp decline in truck traffic throughout the panhandle. But he may have given airmen more credit for that change than they deserved. As early as August 23, Abrams informed Walt Rostow that air interdiction had been "the primary agent" in reducing trucks detected in the North Vietnamese panhandle from more than 1000 a day to between 150 and 200 a day.[102] This was misleading. In mid July truck detections had briefly surged to an unprecedented level, but the daily average for the heavy traffic months of May, June, and July was only about 200 a day. Thereafter detections fell below 150 a day for most of the next three months, a somewhat steeper decline than had been experienced during typhoon season a year earlier.[103]

President Johnson was glad to get evidence of an eighty percent decline in the number of trucks detected in North Vietnam (the misleadingly large drop from 1000 to 200). He released General Abrams' data to newsmen and also used it in a letter to McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow's predecessor as national security adviser and subsequently the youngest Wise Man. Bundy, like so many others, was now calling for an unconditional bombing halt (that is, stopping without getting anything in return from the North Vietnamese). Johnson faced a party platform fight on this very issue at the Democratic

National Convention, which got underway in Chicago the following Monday, August 26. Although student protesters fought police outside the hall, a badly divided convention did manage to select Vice President Humphrey as their nominee for President, with a platform supporting administration policies.[104]

In August the administration's reluctance to halt the bombing was based at least in part on an expectation that the communists would launch a third offensive. Meanwhile a lull in the fighting throughout South Vietnam had spurred the New York Times among others to ask why the President did not reciprocate by halting the bombing. On August 19 the new Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., warned Washington that while the North Vietnamese were ready to launch a third offensive, they might hold back in hope of encouraging Americans who were advocating a bombing halt. As the level of violence increased for a couple weeks in late August, including renewed rocket attacks on Saigon, the administration was uncertain whether the third offensive had at last arrived. If it had, it did not amount to much.[105]

* * *

Rolling Thunder was a one-term bombing campaign. It had not begun until after President Johnson's reelection in 1964. A few days before the 1968 election, Rolling Thunder came to an end, and its timely demise was almost enough to return the Democrats to the White House.* But prospects for peace

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* The election was complicated by the strong third-party candidacy of Governor George Wallace of Alabama and his running mate, General Curtis LeMay (USAF Retired). They pulled nearly ten million votes (out of about

and for Hubert Humphrey dimmed considerably on the very first day of the bombing halt, November 1, when President Thieu of South Vietnam told his National Assembly that he was not yet ready to participate in the Paris talks.

Thieu had gained the impression that the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, was less likely than Humphrey to let South Vietnam come under communist control. During the campaign Humphrey had put enough distance between himself and Johnson to declare that a Humphrey administration would end the bombing of North Vietnam. Nixon's position was more difficult to decipher. He had permitted his party to insert a peace plank in their platform, and he claimed to have a secret plan to end the war. But the President of South Vietnam did not have to rely solely on vague public statements when assessing Nixon's plans.[106]

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seventy million) from the major party candidates in a close election. Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President 1968* (New York, 1969) argued that Wallace would have done better had he not chosen LeMay as a running mate, because Wallace supporters tended to be former enlisted men who disliked generals like LeMay. To bolster this argument, White recalled meeting LeMay in China during World War II: "Meeting Curtis LeMay, as I had in Asia, one could not but instantly respect him then, and later, in restrospect, recognize how great a debt the Republic-in-arms owed to him. But one could not love him; and the men of his command loathed the harsh, unsparing, iron discipline by which he made the United States Air Force the supreme instrument of annihilation it became in the skies over Japan." There were of course many enlisted men who recalled their service under LeMay with pride, and there were many voters who liked LeMay's gruff talk about the need at least to threaten harsher bombing of North Vietnam. LeMay's friends thought it was a mistake for a man of his stature to run with a politician know for exploiting racial bigotry. LeMay's thinking about the election weemed uncharacteristically muddled. He distrusted Richard Nixon but preferred him to Hubert Humphrey. See Thomas M. Coffey, *Iron Eagle* (New York, 1986), p 445.

For months President Thieu had been hearing about Nixon's views from the chairwoman of Republican Women for Nixon, Anna Chennault, China-born widow of Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault. Her husband had served in China during World War II as commander first of the American Volunteer Group (the "Flying Tigers") and subsequently of the Fourteenth Air Force. The Chennaults had moved to Taiwan with the government of Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, when China fell under communist control. After General Chennault's death in 1958, Anna Chennault continued to build her connections with anti-communist political leaders not only in Taipei and Washington, but also in Saigon.[107]

Whatever Anna Chennault told Thieu or his ambassador in Washington, Bui Diem, Nixon soon disappointed them all. Less than a week after his election, Nixon's messengers, including Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen, started to call upon Bui Diem with the message that Nixon wanted the Thieu government to participate in the Paris peace talks. Anna Chennault refused to carry that message. Thieu held out until the end of November before giving into the pressure he was getting from both American political parties. Years of talking in Paris then followed the years of bombing in North Vietnam, while fighting continued in South Vietnam with fewer and fewer American soldiers.[108]

President Johnson and his closest advisers may not have admitted even to themselves that the Paris talks might be permitted to drag on for months, let alone years, without a resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam. They

thought that their negotiating posture was based on the President's speech in San Antonio a year earlier, when he had offered a bombing halt in exchange for productive talks. Somehow they accepted in the end merely North Vietnam's concession that the South Vietnamese government would be permitted to participate in the talks--no matter how unproductive they might be.

When word of North Vietnam's concession reached Washington in mid October, Johnson and his advisers were surprised, delighted, and suspicious. They knew that Hanoi was trying to encourage Humphrey's election, and they doubted that the talks would be productive. Secretary of State Rusk suggested that they stop bombing and go along with enlarged, formal talks in Paris until December 1, 1968. If a suitable peace agreement had not begun to emerge by then, they should resume bombing. But Johnson did not commit himself to any time limit. After all, the weather was already turning sour over North Vietnam and would not improve for six months.[109]

The President tried to use both the promise of resuming the bombing and the onset of the northeast monsoon to persuade his military leaders to support a bombing halt. He invited the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff (not just the Chairman as usual) to come to the White House on the afternoon of October 14. When he asked for their views about a bombing halt, the Air Force Chief of Staff, General McConnell, immediately raised the question of a possible resumption of the bombing. Johnson assured him that if more bombing proved

necessary they would not merely resume--they would move on to unlimited bombing.[110]

The President and Walt Rostow explained to the Joint Chiefs that unproductive talks were not the only possible reason for resuming the bombing of North Vietnam. The Paris negotiating team of Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance had told the North Vietnamese repeatedly that any bombing halt rested on two "facts of life": (1) no attacks or infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone; (2) no attacks on South Vietnamese cities. The Joint Chiefs expressed considerable skepticism that the administration would resume bombing under any circumstances, particularly if the North Vietnamese merely stalled in Paris. This sentiment was echoed by Senator Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who participated in Johnson's October 14 meeting with the Joint Chiefs. Nevertheless, Russell said that a majority of his committee would probably go along with a bombing halt.[111]

Before announcing his bombing halt decision, President Johnson consulted two other generals. General Abrams was summoned all the way from Saigon to tell Johnson that a bombing halt was the right thing to do. Since General Momyer had left Seventh Air Force that summer to take charge of the Tactical Air Command (with headquarters at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia), he did not have to travel so far to see the President. Like McConnell, Momyer wanted to make certain that reconnaissance aircraft would keep flying over North Vietnam. Johnson promised to continue reconnaissance flights and

said that the North Vietnamese understood this would be the case. His instructions to Harriman and Vance were to commit the United States to cease only "acts of force" against North Vietnam rather than "acts of war." In the State Department's view, reconnaissance was an act of war, but not an act of force.[112]

The President kept his word to Momyer about reconnaissance, but Johnson also confirmed the foresight of those who doubted that he would resume the bombing of North Vietnam. Even after the South Vietnamese government agreed in late November to join the talks, nearly two months were spent arguing about the shape of the negotiating table. The communists wanted a four-sided table to proclaim that North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam were separate negotiating parties. The South Vietnamese government preferred a two-sided table, with the communists together on one side. Four days before the inauguration of Richard Nixon, the negotiators agreed on a round table. Whether to resume the bombing of North Vietnam was a question that then passed quietly to the man who said he had a secret plan for peace in Vietnam.

Notes

Chapter 5

Rolling Thunder Subsides

1. On intelligence reporting before the Tet Offensive, see James J. Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Ithaca, NY, 1991) and John Prados, "The Warning that Left Something to Chance: Intelligence at Tet," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Summer 1993, pp 161-84. For a description of the offensive, see Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Garden City, New York, 1971).

2. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp 407-39.

3. Peter Braestrup, B*ig Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, 2 vols (Boulder, Colorado, 1977).

4. Ibid., I, 253-60.

5. Ibid., I, 653-54.

6. Gallup poll, March 31, 1968, based on interviews 15-20 Mar 68.

7. On the May 1967 debate, see above Chapter 3.

8. On the Stennis Hearings, see above Chapter 3.

9. *Congressional Record*, Jan 30, 1968, p 1398.

10. *New York Times*, Feb 4, 1968, IV, 12.

11. Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services, Senate, *Authorization for Military Procurement, Research and Development, Fiscal Year 1969, and Reserve Strength*, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (Washington, 1968), p. 3.

12. Ibid., pp 12, 26.

13. Ibid., p 754.

14. Ibid., pp 758-62.

15. Ibid., p 765.

16. Ibid., p 770.

17. James Reston, "The Big Peace Battle," *New York Times*, Mar 12, 1968, p 17.

18. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Senate, *Foreign Relations Assistance Act of 1968, Part 1 - Vietnam*, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (Washington, 1968), p 101.

19. Ibid., p 184.

20. See above Chapter 3.

21. Memo, W. Rostow to President, May 14, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 67, #42.

22. Memo, R. Ginsburgh to W. Rostow, Feb 28, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, National Security Council Hist, Mar 31 Speech, Vol 3, #37.

23. Memo, W. Rostow to President, Feb 3, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 59, #75; Feb 10, 1968, vol 61, #98; Feb 19, 1968, with att memo from McNamara, vol 63, #35 and 35a. See also msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 020208Z Feb 67, Westmoreland's Back Channel Msg File, US Army Center of Military Hist; press conf, Feb 16, 1968, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1968-69, I, 234; Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, 1977), pp 89-90.

24. Hist, JCS, Vietnam, 1960-68, part III, ch 44, p 16.

25. On the development of the bombing zones, see especially Chapter XIV; Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 234-36.

26. Notes of President's Tuesday lunch meeting, Feb 6, 1968, LBJ Library, President's Appointment File, box 89.

27. Notes of National Security Council meeting, Feb 7, 1968, LBJ Lib, Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings and NSF, NSC Meetings File. David C. Humphrey ("Searching for LBJ at the Johnson Library," *Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter*, Jun 1989, pp 3-4) has pointed out discrepancies in the two sets of notes. For one thing, Tom Johnson (and no doubt others at the meeting) did not know enough about aircraft to distinguish between an IL-28 and a MiG-21; in his notes, the IL-28s are called "MiGs."

28. Hist, 8th TFW, Jan-Mar 68, pp 27-28; HQ PACAF, *Summary of Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, Feb 1968, sec 1, p 8 and sec 5, p A-4.

29. Hist, 555 TFS, Jan-Mar 1968.

30. HQ PACAF. *Summary of Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, Feb 1968, sec 1, p 8 and sec 5, p D-1

31. USAF Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, *Project Red Baron II* vol IV, part 3, pp 159-79; *Aces and Aerial Victories*, pp 78-79. Lt Col Wesley D. Kimball and 1st Lt John Daday of the 555 TFS probably shot down a MiG-21 on March 29, 1968,

32. CIA/DIA, *Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam*, Jan-Mar 1968, pp 3-4; hist, 388 TFW, Jan-Mar 1968; hist, 355 TFW, Jan-Mar 1968.

33. HQ PACAF, *Summary of Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, Feb 1968, ch 1, p 8.

34. See Bernard C. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington, 1973).

35. Memo, Art McCafferty (NSC staff) to W. Rostow, Feb 21, 1968, 3:25 pm, LBJ Library, National Security File Country File - Vietnam, Box 84, 3I, #21.

36. Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *US Intelligence in Vietnam*, a special issue of the CIA's *Studies in Intelligence*, vol 28, no 5, 1984; memo, John A. McCone, Apr 2, 1965, quoted in Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, III, 352-53.

37. Joint Staff, SEA CABIN Study Group, "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiations," Nov 22, 1967, LBJ Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 95, 6G(1)b, #26e.

38. Memo, Ginsburgh to Wheeler, Nov 29, 1967, LBJ Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 95, 6G(1)b, #26b; hist., JCS, Vietnam, 1960-68, part III, ch 47, p 10.

39. Schandler, pp 92-120; Westmoreland, pp 460-77.

40. Hist, JCS, Vietnam, 1960-68, part III, ch 49, pp 1-8.

41. Westmoreland, pp 465-69.

42. Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 575; hist, JCS, Vietnam, 1960-68, part III, ch 49, pp 10-11.

43. Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 547.

44. McPherson's notes of meeting, Feb 27, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, #47.

45. Meeting, Dec 5, 1967, 6 pm, in LBJ Lib, Tom Johnson's Notes, box 1, #146a. On Clifford's opposition to 1965 troop deployment, see Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York, 1991) and George W. Ball, *The Past has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York, 1982).

46. Intrvw, Dorothy Pierce McSweeny, LBJ Lib, with Gen McConnell, Pentagon, Aug 28, 1969; McConnell draft msg to Gen Nazzaro, CINCSAC, Mar 4, 1968, AFHRC 1028520; ltr, McConnell to LBJ, Mar 27, 1968, AFHRC 1028520.

47. A condensed version of The *Pentagon Papers* was published by the *New York Times* in its newspaper and in one volume (New York, 1971). Senator Mike Gravel (Democrat, Alaska) entered more of this classified history into the *Congressional Record* and subsequently sponsored publication in five volumes by Beacon Press (Boston, 1971). For an account of the "A to Z" reassessment, see the Gravel edition, IV, 238-59, 549-84. See also Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam* (Washington, 1979) and Schandler, *Unmaking*. Schandler wrote the portion of the *Pentagon Papers* relating to the Tet offensive.

48. Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 252.

49. Memo with attachments, Secretary of the Air Force Brown to Deputy Secretary of Defense Warnke, subj: SEA Alternative Strategies, Mar 4, 1968, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, box 1, Memos to Read (2), #1a; intvw, Tom Belden, Jacob Van Staaveren, and Hugh Ahmann, USAF historians, with Harold Brown, Pasadena, Alug 29, 1972, AFHRC K239.0512-619.

50. Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York, 1969), pp 176-77; Hoopes to Clifford, Feb 13, 1968, LBJ Lib, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 83, 3G, #5b. On the second JASON report, see also Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 222-25. On McNamara's Wall see ch XIV above.

51. Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 252.

52. Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p 399. See also memo, W. Rostow to Pres, Mar 4, 1968, 1:45 pm, LBJ Library, National Security File, NSC Hist, Mar 31 Speech, vol 7, #3.

53. Schandler, *Unmaking*, p 203; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, pp 402-03.

54. Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerod G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review*, Dec 1969, pp 1083-1105.

55. Intvw, LBJ Library with Clark Clifford, Jul 14, 1969.

56. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1968-69, I, p 404. For Mrs. Johnson's view, see (Claudia T.) Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York, 1970), esp pp 633-47.

57. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1968-69, I, p 410.

58. Clifford's handwritten memos of conversations with President and senators, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Notes Taken at Meetings, 2, esp #11, #21, #30, #33; Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 589-93; Schandler, *Unmaking*, pp 210-12.

59. Meeting notes, Mar 19 and 22, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, #53 and #54.

60. Ibid. See also memo, Clifford to Wheeler, Mar 5, 1968, attaching Rusk bombing cutback proposal, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 2, Memos on Vietnam Feb-Mar 1968, #7a, #7b, #7c; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, pp 397-400.

61. Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 233-34.

62. Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York, 1969); Clark M. Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal: The Personal History of One Man's View and How It Evolved," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1969, pp 601-22. Clifford's role in President Johnson's March 1968 decisions has been scaled down in succeeding accounts, beginning with Johnson's memoirs, *The Vantage Point* (1971). Herbert Y. Schandler, whose account of Tet in the *Pentagon Papers* portrayed Clifford as crucial, retreated considerably from that view in *The Unmaking of a President* (1977). Warren I. Cohen followed this line still further in *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, New Jersey, 1980).

63. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York, 1986), esp pp 642-741.

64. Memos, W. Rostow to President, Oct 19, 1967 (National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 46, #30a), Oct 25, 1967 with attachment (vol 48, #80 and 80a), and Nov 3, 1967 (vol 47, #46). The following Wise Men attended the Nov 1967 meeting: Dean Acheson, Clark Clifford, McGeorge Bundy, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, Robert Murphy, Henry Cabot Lodge, Arthur Dean, Douglas Dillon, George Ball, Gen Maxwell Taylor, and Gen Omar Bradley. Two members of the administration with close ties to this group also participated in the meeting: Averell Harriman and William Bundy (brother of McGeorge Bundy and son-in-law of Dean Acheson).

65. Memo, McGeorge Bundy to President, Nov 10, 1967, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 50, #36b.

66. Ibid. M. Bundy helped Stimson write his memoirs, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York, 1947).

67. Intvw, LBJ Library with Clark Clifford, Jul 14, 1969.

68. Johnson, *Vantage Point*, pp 415-17. Attendance at the Mar 1968 meeting of the Wise Men was the same as the Nov 1967 meeting (see note 62 above) with the following additions: Arthur Goldberg, Cyrus Vance, and Gen Matthew Ridgway.

69. Meeting notes, Mar 26, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, #1 and #2.

70. Notes of meeting of President with House and Senate leaders, Apr 3, 1968, LBJ Library, Tom Johnson's Notes of meetings, Box 2, April 1968, #2d; Lyndon Johnson, *Vantage Point*, esp pp 415-19.

71. "President's Address to the Nation," Mar 31, 1968, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1968-69, I, pp 469-76; "Statement by the President Following Hanoi's Declaration of Readiness to Begin Discussions," same source, p 492. President Johnson raised the possibility he would not run again on Oct 3, 1967 in a meeting with Rusk, McNamara, Rostow and Helms; see notes of the meeting in LBJ Lib, Tom Johnson's Notes, #105a.

72. Memo, W. Rostow to President, Feb 29, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, NSC Hist, Mar 31 Speech, vol 3, #54; memo, CIA, subj: Question Concerning the Situation in Vietnam, Mar 1, 1968, LBJ Library, NSC Hist, Mar 31 Speech, vol 4, #2.

73. *Congressional Record*, Apr 2, 1968, p 8569.

74. Ibid., pp 8569-77.

75. Ibid., pp 8572-73.

76. Ibid., p 8574.

77. Meeting notes, Apr 9, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, #61.

78. Draft ltr, Clifford to President, May 4, 1968, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 3, Southeast Asia Bombing Pause, Apr 1968, #2.

79. Meeting note, May 4, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, #3.

80. Memo, Rusk to President, May 18, 1968, with attached Bunker msg, 171048 May 68, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 77, #7a and #7b.

81. Meeting note, May 25, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 3, #13.

82. CIA/DIA, *Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam,* Jul-Oct 1968.

83. HQ PACAF, *Summary of Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, Apr-Oct 1968.

84. Lt Col John Schlight, "Jet Forward Air Controllers in SE Asia," CHECO Report, Oct 15, 1969; Jack S. Ballard, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships 1962-1972* (Washington, 1982).

85. Hist, 8th TFW, Apr-Jun 1968; HQ PACAF DCS Intel, *The Effects of United States Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, 2 vols, Oct 1969,esp vol II, ch 7, p 12; memo, George A. Carver, Jr., CIA, to W. Rostow, May 31, 1968, with attached report, "North Vietnamese Truck Losses since 31 Mar 1968," LBJ Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 83, 3F, #17 and #17a.

86. C. William Thorndale, "Interdiction in Route Package One, 1968," CHECO report, Jun 30, 1969.

87. Melvin F. Porter and Maj A. W. Thompson, "Operation Thor," CHECO report, Jan 24, 1969.

88. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp 68-81.

89. See note 83; Col Royal W. Connell, "Operation Thor," Corona Harvest special report, Feb 1970; William Thorndale, "Air War in the DMZ, September 1967 - June, 1968," CHECO report, Aug 1, 1969; Lt Col Valentino Castellina, "Operation Neutralize: The Pattern is Set," Corona Harvest special report, Jun 1969.

90. See note above.

91. Msg, Abrams to W. Rostow, 231304Z Aug 68. LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 5, Abroms (1), #1.

92. C. William Thorndale, "Interdiction in Route Package One, 1968," CHECO report, Jun 30, 1969; HQ PACAF DCS Intel, *The Effects of United States Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, 1969, vol I, esp ch 1, pp 9-12, and ch 7, pp 1-13; HQ USAF Operations Analysis and RAND, "Measures of the 1968 Out-Country Bombing Campaign in Southeast Asia," Dec 1968; HQ PACAF Corona Harvest activity report, "Out-Country Strike Operations Apr 68 - Dec 69," Dec 1, 1970, subtask Ie, North Vietnam, Apr-Nov 68.

93. See note above.

94. See note above

95. Brig Gen George J. Keegan, Jr., "7AF Summer Interdiction Program," appended to C. William Thorndale, "Interdiction in Route Package One, 1968," CHECO report, pp 61-701

96. Thorndale, "Interdiction," p 28.

97. Keegan, p 63.

98. On McNamara's Wall, see Chapter XIV above.

99. Throndale, "Interdiction," pp 40-42.

100. Keegan, pp 69-70.

101. PACAF, *Summary of Air Operations in Southeast Asia*, Oct 1968.

102. Msg, Abrams to W. Rostow, 231204Z Aug 68, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 5, Abrams (1), #1.

103. Thorndale, "Interdiction," pp 44-52.

104. White House press release, "Summary of General Abrams' View," Aug 23, 1968, LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 5, Abrams (1), #3; ltr, M. Bundy to President, Aug 15, 1968, with attached memo, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, Vol 91, #2c and #2d; ltr, President to M. Bundy, Aug 25, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 91, #2a.

105. *New York Times* editorial, Jul 29, 1968; msg, W. Rostow to President, 191510Z Aug 68, transmitting Adm McCain's msg, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 91, #35; memo, W. Rostow to President with Brig Gen Ginsburgh's memo attached, Aug 22, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 92, #115 and #115a; notes of meeting of President with his advisers, Sep 4, 1968, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 3, #38.

106. Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, *The Palace File* (New York, 1986), pp 21-41.

107. Anna Chennault, *The Education of Anna* (New York, 1980), esp pp 163-214. Clark Clifford's *Counsel to the President* (p 583 in the 1992 edition) confirms that the Johnson administration learned from the FBI, CIA, and NSA about Chennault's efforts to influence the Thieu government and through it the U.S. election. Thieu, of course, probably would have taken the same stand without any promptimg from Chennault or Nixon. This story was made public by Thomas Powers in *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York, 1979), pp 197-200. See also the entries for Jan 9-12, 1973, in *The Haldeman Diaries: The Complete Multimedia Edition* (Santa Monica, Calif, 1994).

108. Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston, 1987), pp 235-46.

109. Notes, meeting of Oct 14, 1968, 9:40 am, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 3, #68a.

110. Notes, meeting of Oct 14, 1968, 1:50 pm, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 3, #57. These notes were taken by Bromley Smith. See also Tom Johnson's notes of the same meeting in LBJ Lib, Tom Johnson's Notes, #25a.

111. See not above. Despite North Vietnamese eagerness to avoid any public linkage of the "facts of life" with the bombing halt, President Johnson did point to them in his televised address (Oct 31, 1968) announcing the halt: "We cannot have productive talks in an atmosphere where the cities are being shelled and where the demilitarized zone is being abused." See *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1968-69, II, p 1101.

112. Memo of Gen Momyer's conversation with the President, Oct 23, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, vol 101, #66a. See also notes of meeting, Oct 14, 1968, 9:40 am, LBJ Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 3, #68a.

CHAPTER 6

PROTECTIVE REACTION

The American bombing halt in North Vietnam encouraged people in both countries to believe that the long war was nearly over. Only gradually did they realize that the war had merely entered a new phase. Having suffered heavy losses in the Tet offensive of 1968, communist forces in South Vietnam were much less aggressive for the next three years. They could bide their time and rebuild their strength while the United States slowly withdrew its forces. In exchange for disengaging, the United States asked nothing at the negotiating table in Paris and received nothing.

Meanwhile the United States tried to build a South Vietnamese army which with the assistance of American air power would be capable of stopping a communist offensive. Although South Vietnam's air force was increasingly able to provide close air support for its army, a resumption of full-scale bombing in North Vietnam could be undertaken only by the United States. Whether bombs would again fall on North Vietnam was a question to be pondered not only in Washington, but also of course in Hanoi.

When the bombing ceased north of the nineteenth parallel in April 1968, the North Vietnamese quickly began to restore their battered transportation system. In three months the Paul Doumer Bridge over the Red River at Hanoi was carrying rail traffic once again. Hundreds of smaller bridges were rebuilt, and locomotives pulled trains in daylight as far south as Thanh Hoa. After bombing ended throughout North Vietnam in November, the railroad was reopened between Thanh Hoa and Vinh. Thousands of boats operated free of harrassment along the coast and on the rivers. Thousands of trucks moved rapidly on sunlit roads free of bomb craters. The road network grew especially in the southern panhandle, so that trucks could delay crossing into Laos (where bombs continued to fall) until they were just north of the Demilitarized Zone. An oil pipeline, which had begun to appear in July 1968 while the bombs were still falling, extended steadily southwest from Vinh through the Mu Gia Pass into Laos. A second pipeline was then built from Quang Khe (a port about ninety miles south of Vinh) passing into Laos just north of the Demilitarized Zone. If bombing resumed, these oil pipelines would be even harder to hit in daylight than trucks had been at night, and trucks would be free to carry other supplies.[1]

The rapidity with which the transportation system was rejuvenated contrasted with the leisurely pace of reconstruction elsewhere. Neither the North Vietnamese nor their allies were eager to provide new targets for American bombers. In the case of the Chinese, this reluctance was reinforced

by a new coolness in their relations with North Vietnam. China had opposed the Paris negotiations, and the Central Intelligence Agency received reports that a Chinese offer of combat troops had been spurned by North Vietnam. Indeed many of the perhaps fifty thousand Chinese already in North Vietnam were going home. In the absence of American bombing, they were no longer needed to work on North Vietnam's railroads or man its antiaircraft artillery. The Chinese also left behind the ruins of their major industrial project in North Vietnam, the ironworks at Thai Nguyen. North Vietnam postponed plans to open a steel mill there indefinitely and did not even attempt to resume production of pig iron.[2]

That the failure to rebuild Thai Nguyen was not merely the result of worsening relations with China could be seen by looking at other industrial projects sponsored by the Soviet Union and its East European allies. Before Rolling Thunder, Hanoi and Haiphong had been served by several coal-burning electric power plants tied together in a grid. American bombs destroyed the grid's control switch and left the plants operating at less than a third of their former capacity. The North Vietnamese had turned to hundreds of small diesel generators imported during the bombing, and (even in the absence of bombing) the bigger plants only slowly and partially recovered. The North Vietnamese tried to hide restoration of productive capacity by replacing bombed smoke stacks with underground flue systems. Meanwhile the control switch at Dong Anh was not repaired. Nor was there rapid progress in constructing the Soviet

hydroelectric project on the Red River at Lang Chi, sixty-five miles northwest of Hanoi. Completing this project would provide more electricity than all the old coal power plants combined. American intelligence estimated that the Soviets and North Vietnamese could rush Lang Chi into production within nine months, but they took three years.[3]

The citizens of North Vietnam were considerably less cautious than their leaders. The government's preference for dispersed population and industry could not long keep former residents of Hanoi away from their homes when bombs no longer fell on the Red River delta. In any case, throughout the war very few bombs had fallen on Hanoi itself, one of the safest places in Vietnam. Although more than half a million people had left the city during the bombing, within three years Hanoi exceeded its prewar population of about a million. So quickly did they return, that their number often outran the government's ability to feed them and a black market grew to fill the need. In Hanoi as elsewhere, the passage of time dissipated euphoric expectations that the bombing halt would soon be followed by the end of the war.[4]

Hanoi's problems were exacerbated in August and September of 1968 by typhoons that drowned the new rice crop and severely damaged the city itself. Unlike American bombers, the typhoons made no effort to avoid Hanoi. On September 9th, falling trees brought down power lines and cut off electricity for several days. The city authorities responded to this emergency with remarkable sluggishness. Many cranes, tractors, and trucks sat idle

while too few rescue workers made slow progress. One British observer noticed a victim pinned under a tree for six hours and wondered how well the city would have handled an air raid.[5]

In Washington, the Johnson administration was pleased to end its management of the war by having nature do work that the political climate no longer permitted bombers to do. Although not focused on particular targets, typhoon damage was widespread in North Vietnam. With his usual enthusiasm, Walt Rostow informed the President that the recent typhoons had probably done more damage than six months of bombing.[6]

* * *

For a year and a half after the bombing halt of November 1968, the United States limited its air attacks on North Vietnam to retaliation against air defense sites which fired upon American aircraft. At the peak of Rolling Thunder in 1967, the United States had sent more than a hundred thousand attack sorties to strike North Vietnam (not counting nearly as many escort, reconnaissance and refueling sorties). In 1969, there were about five thousand reconnaissance sorties flown over North Vietnam, and these were supported by more than fifteen thousand fighter sorties. While contributing about sixty percent of the reconnaissance sorties, the Air Force provided fewer fighter escorts than did the Navy.[7]

The first reconnaissance planes to venture over North Vietnam after the bombing halt flew without escorts. Fourteen sorties in four days penetrated

the panhandle before the North Vietnamese reacted. On the night of November 7, 1968, a Navy RA3B was fired upon in Route Package Three. Although President Johnson thereafter permitted fighter escorts, the North Vietnamese continued to shoot. On the afternoon of November 23, an Air Force RF-4C was hit by gunfire at about three thousand feet while attempting to photograph a surface-to-air missile site northwest of Dong Hoi. The crew of the escort fighter could not see parachutes, but Capt. Mark J. Ruhling, the navigator of the downed plane, soon contacted them on his radio and told them that he was surrounded by enemy forces. Ruhling spent the rest of the war as a prisoner, and his pilot, Capt. Bradley G. Cuthbert, was presumed dead.[8]

Only two days later, another pair of Air Force planes ran into antiaircraft fire near Dong Hoi while photographing a road from a thousand feet. This time the escort fighter went down. Once again radio contact was made with the crew, Maj. Joseph C. Morrison and First Lt. San D. Francisco, but neither would come home at the end of the war. Although Navy reconnaissance aircraft were each escorted by two fighters (rather than the single escort at first used by the Air Force), the Navy lost an RF-4C near Vinh also on November 25th. That added up to three losses in only two days. In retaliation, American fighter planes bombed the responsible antiaircraft sites. When Secretary of Defense Clifford reported these developments at a National Security Council meeting, he complained that it would be tragic if the reconnaissance problem was allowed to derail negotiations with the North

Vietnamese in Paris. But the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, urged that reconnaissance of North Vietnam was essential to the security of American forces just south of the Demilitarized Zone in South Vietnam.[9]

President Johnson kept the reconnaissance program he had established. American planes could retaliate when fired upon, but he did not choose to make North Vietnamese attacks on American reconnaissance a reason for resuming the bombing of North Vietnam. His emissaries did complain to the Soviet ambassador in Washington and to the North Vietnamese in Paris. Although the United States lost another plane in December (an Air Force RF-4 whose crew was rescued), that would be the last loss for more than a year. The North Vietnamese apparently decided not to press their luck, and thenceforth their gunners rarely fired at American reconnaissance planes or their escorts.[10]

* * *

Contributing to Hanoi's caution may have been concern about the new Republican administration which took charge in Washington at the end of January 1969. President Richard Nixon was reputed to be one of America's most ardent foes of communism. He had first achieved national prominence in 1948 when as a young congressman from California he played a leading role in the investigation of Alger Hiss, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former State Department official. Nixon's persistent effort to prove that Hiss was a communist was the beginning of an enduring

estrangement from liberals, including many reporters. Their hatred of Nixon grew during his harsh, successful run for the Senate against Helen Gahagan Douglas.[11]

Despite his anticommunist rhetoric, Nixon had avoided being too closely identified with the right wing of the Republican party. In the presidential race of 1952, when the party had to choose between Senator Robert A. Taft (the very conservative son of former President William Howard Taft) and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Nixon cast his lot with the more moderate and more popular Eisenhower. It was a shrewd decision which made the young senator the general's running mate as a gesture toward the alienated Taft wing of the party. Nixon had just turned forty when he became Vice President.

During his eight years under Eisenhower, Nixon traveled the world. Once again his anticommunist speeches were better publicized than his increasingly sophisticated view of the world's complexities. In the fall of 1953 he spent two months touring an Asia where the United States and communist China had only recently agreed to a cease-fire in Korea and were shifting their attention to Indochina. When Nixon's plane touched down at Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh's communist forces controlled the hills around the Red River delta. After spending the night with the French Commissioner General, Nixon flew on a French transport to a village on the edge of the delta. There he watched an artillery barrage and dined on *boeuf bourguignon* served with wine. He was offended by the haughty attitude of the French toward their Vietnamese

soldiers, and he insisted on visiting the Vietnamese mess and giving them the same pep talk he had given the French.[12]

A few months later when the French were losing the decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu, Nixon told the American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting in Washington that he would favor sending American troops to Indochina if that was the only way to save it from a communist takeover.[13] His failure to succeed Eisenhower in 1961, however, left it to Democrats to send American divisions to Vietnam. When Nixon became President in 1969, the country clearly expected him to bring the troops home.

Yet Nixon had managed to avoid saying how he would end the war. His secret plan echoed Eisenhower's equally vague promise of 1952 to end the Korean War. In recent years Eisenhower had made no secret of the fact that he had threatened China with nuclear destruction. He told the press in early 1968 that nuclear weapons should not be ruled out in Vietnam, and he urged President Johnson to prosecute the conventional air war against North Vietnam more vigorously. When Nixon took office in January 1969, Eisenhower was in failing health and died two months later--before he could witness the unfolding of Nixon's stratagems for ending the war in Vietnam.[14]

Far from threatening China with nuclear weapons, Nixon envisioned a normalization of relations with that country. In a 1967 article in *Foreign Affairs* he had proposed that in the long run the United States should try to pull China "back into the world community."[15] He warned that it would be a

mistake to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union against China, for that would divide the world by race. During the first year of his presidency, he had a chance to take his own advice when the Soviet Union secretly proposed that Soviet and American nuclear forces join in attacking Chinese nuclear plants. Instead of taking sides, Nixon began to play one side against the other and managed to improve American relations with both. Ultimately this change in the international climate would enable the United States to bomb North Vietnam without any risk of a reaction from China or the Soviet Union.[16]

Meanwhile Nixon wanted to find some way to threaten North Vietnam and not at the same time stir up discontent in the United States. After his election even university students were relatively quiet about the war while they waited to see what Nixon would do. Liberal journalists were reassured by Nixon's selection of Henry Kissinger to be his national security adviser. David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory of the *Los Angeles Times* had recently published *The Secret Search for Peace* in Vietnam, which included a description of the Harvard professor's role in negotiating with North Vietnam through French intermediaries during the summer of 1967.[17]

Nixon met Kissinger in December 1967 at Claire Boothe Luce's Christmas party. Although Kissinger was then serving as foreign policy adviser for New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal rival for the Republican nomination, Nixon made a point of recalling that he had sent a letter praising Kissinger's first book ten years earlier. Indeed this book,

Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, had apparently persuaded Nixon that he and Kissinger thought alike. It had also turned an obscure young instructor (denied tenure by the government department at Harvard) into a celebrated strategist whose wisdom was prized in Washington as well as Cambridge.[18]

The book responded to worries about the strategy of massive retaliation, which relied upon a hope that any attempt to expand communism would be deterred by threats of an all-out nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Kissinger agreed with those who claimed that such threats were not credible, but he offered an alternative to the great expense of matching Soviet strength in conventional forces. Kissinger advocated reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, which he thought would deter or if necessary win wars without escalation to strategic nuclear weapons. In Kissinger's view, a limited war might also be a war fought with tactical nuclear weapons.[19]

Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy won Kissinger more friends among politicians and civilian defense thinkers than among military officers. They mistrusted the work of civilian strategists in general, and Kissinger tied his strategic thinking to a proposal for reorganizing the Department of Defense. He wanted to replace the services with a strategic force (commanded by an air officer) and a tactical force (commanded by by a ground officer). "It may well be," Kissinger wrote,"that the separation of the Army and the Air Force in 1948 [*sic*] occurred two decades too late and at the precise moment when the distinction between ground and air strategy was becoming obsolescent."[20] It

would have been better, he thought, to "mix the two organizations more thoroughly."[21]

A Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, Kissinger knew a lot about European politics and history. He knew much less about Asia. But in 1965 he was invited to vist South Vietnam by the American ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge. During this and subsequent visits, Kissinger grew skeptical about prospects for an American military triumph. On the other hand, he believed that the United States had committed too much of its resources and prestige to abandon South Vietnam. He hoped that a way out might be found through negotiations.[22]

Kissinger's role in secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese during the summer of 1967 strengthened his connections with the Johnson administration. When open negotiations began in Paris the next year, Kissinger maintained his contacts there and at the State Department. The Johnson administration's negotiating team would have been disturbed to learn that Kissinger was passing information acquired in this way to the Republican presidential candidate, Richard Nixon. While not giving Nixon details of the negotiations, Kissinger did warn him during the campaign that a bombing halt might be near.[23]

Shortly after President Johnson stopped the bombing of North Vietnam, Kissinger submitted an article entitled "The Viet Nam Negotiations" to *Foreign Affairs*, which published it in the wake of Nixon's announcement that

Kissinger would be his national security adviser. It was consequently an article thoroughly and widely scrutinized for clues to the new administration's policy. There was to begin with no criticism of President Johnson for halting the bombing. But Kissinger also stated that Hanoi should have "little doubt that the bombing halt would not survive if it disregarded the points publically [*sic*] stated by Secretary Rusk and President Johnson"--that is, if North Vietnam violated the Demilitarized Zone or attacked South Vietnamese cities.[24]

Kissinger did criticize the Johnson administration for insisting on Saigon's participation in the Paris talks. While he thought that the shape of South Vietnam's government should ultimately be a matter for the Vietnamese to work out on their own, the "mutual withdrawal" of American and North Vietnamese forces could best be discussed by those two countries independently. The growing hostility in relations between the Soviet Union and China should somehow impel North Vietnam to seek a settlement with the United States. But what if the North Vietnamese refused to withdraw? Then "we should seek to achieve as many of our objectives as possible unilaterally" by avoiding American casualties, strengthening the South Vietnamese army, and withdrawing at least part of our forces.[25] This would prove to be the fatal weakness of the Nixon administration's policy: the North Vietnamese had no incentive to withdraw so long as they thought that the Americans were going to withdraw unilaterally.

While scattering reassuring words in several directions, the Kissinger article fell far short of delivering a plan for peace in Vietnam, and Nixon's "secret plan" remained secret. Indeed a major attribute of administration plans and decisions on Vietnam would be extreme secrecy that would permit participation to spread as little beyond Nixon and Kissinger as possible. Nixon distrusted the bureaucracy's ability to keep secrets and its loyalty to him. Even the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of Central Intelligence would often be left in the dark. Director Helms was a holdover from the Johnson administration retained largely at Kissinger's insistence. William P. Rogers, the new Secretary of State, had been Attorney General in the Eisenhower administration and knew little about foreign affairs. His appointment proclaimed Nixon's intention to be his own Secretary of State. For Secretary of Defense, Nixon had wanted Senator Henry M. Jackson (Democrat, Washington), who could be counted on to help win votes in a Democratic Congress. When Jackson turned the President down, Nixon turned to Congressman Melvin R. Laird (Republican, Wisconsin), longtime member of the House Appropriations Committee.[26]

Laird proved to be the most formidable member of the new cabinet. Nixon and Kissinger could not entirely exclude Laird from their deliberations, because he had many allies in the Congress and in the Republican Party at large. He was a very forceful Secretary of Defense, but better liked by the service chiefs of staff than his immediate predecessors because he paid more

heed to military advice. The principal purveyor of that advice to Nixon as well as to Laird might have been the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, had it not been for his declining health and Laird's determination that the Secretary of Defense should be the conduit of such advice to the President. Among the service chiefs an increasingly influential role was assumed by Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations, who was expected to replace Wheeler as chairman and did so in 1970.[27]

When General McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, retired in the summer of 1969, he was replaced by his Vice Chief, General Ryan, who had come to Washington from Pacific Air Forces the previous summer. Although McConnell had groomed Ryan to take the top job, the two men were very different. While subordinates often encountered a crusty McConnell, he had enjoyed warm relations with many Washington politicians, including President Johnson. Neither Nixon nor Ryan were suited to such cordiality, and Ryan's aloofness may well have lost his service some support on Capitol Hill. But the new Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans, Jr. (an aeronautical engineer from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) definitely liked the change. After a few months of dealing with a "salty" and inflexible McConnell, Seamans found Ryan to be a refreshing change of pace: "I guess I've never worked with anybody that I respected so much, who was so direct and so open and so pragmatic." [28]

Seamans also liked the man who was already expected to succeed Ryan, Gen. George S. Brown. Formerly General Wheeler's assistant, Brown had moved to Saigon as commander of Seventh Air Force in the summer of 1968. Even before taking over as Chief of Staff, Ryan told Brown that he was next in line.[29] They were both West Point graduates whose careers had got an early boost from World War II. Brown had led a bomber group on the famous raid against the oil refineries at Ploesti, Rumania, in August 1943, and after a little more than a year he became a full colonel when he was only twenty-six. He was still a colonel thirteen years later when he became executive officer for the Chief of Staff, Gen. Thomas H. White. Brown's calm, good-humored diplomacy kept him in the Pentagon as military assistant for two Secretaries of Defense, first Thomas S. Gates and then McNamara. That Brown was able to remain on good terms with both McNamara and White's successor as Chief of Staff, General LeMay, seemed miraculous and eventually led to Brown's selection as Wheeler's assistant.

The transition from General Momyer to General Brown as commander of Seventh Air Force was an even more dramatic change than the Air Staff experienced in going from McConnell to Ryan. Momyer was an authority on tactical air warfare and he continually involved himself in the details of operations. His intelligence chief, Maj. Gen. George Keegan, would later recall that "Momyer ran every aspect of that war and hardly used his staff."[30] Brown, on the other hand, delegated authority. He had been too tall to become

a fighter pilot, and he claimed no special expertise in fighter operations. Handsome and athletic, Brown took time for a daily game of tennis. He told subordinates not to bother him with their problems unless they wanted him to make a decision they could not make. A wing commander who called Brown in the middle of the night to report an enemy rocket attack was quietly told to call back if there was something that Brown could do about the situation.[31]

When Momyer was in Saigon he had found himself in repeated disagreement with the commander of Pacific Air Forces, General Ryan. Brown was more fortunate in this regard, not so much because his diplomatic skills were exceptional or because Ryan had been replaced by Gen. Joseph J. Nazzaro, but mostly because Rolling Thunder came to an end. Without Rolling Thunder, the Commander in Chief Pacific and his immediate subordinates in Hawaii (the Commander in Chief Pacific Air Forces and the Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet) lost much of their influence on the prosecution of the war. During Rolling Thunder the Pacific commander, Admiral Sharp, had reluctantly given General Westmoreland control of air operations in Route Package One of North Vietnam as well as in Laos--to the extent that the American ambassador in Laos permitted military control there. From Brown's point of view, Sharp had thus written his successor (Adm. John S. McCain, Jr.) out of the war. Since the manned tactical reconnaisance mission in North Vietnam continued to be conducted along the old service lines (Air Force in Route Package One and Navy in Route Packages Two and Three), only in the

Navy route packages did McCain have much of a role. Unlike Momyer, Brown had to worry about only one military boss, Westmoreland's successor in Saigon, General Abrams.[32]

Brown thought his principal achievement as Seventh Air Force commander was persuading Abrams that at least half the air effort should be expended in Laos. When Brown arrived in the summer of 1968, about sixty percent of the Air Force's attack sorties were going to South Vietnam. Brown thought that many of these could be better used in North Vietnam or Laos. After bombing stopped in North Vietnam, Brown made certain that Laos picked up the extra sorties and not South Vietnam. As Abrams reduced the exposure of American ground forces to combat, he was willing to divert more and more sorties to the interdiction campaign in Laos.[33]

Laos became the sole preoccupation of Air Force crews in Thailand. Their lives became much safer. Aircraft losses dropped from nearly two hundred a year to less than fifty (out of about six hundred U.S. Air Force planes based in Thailand). Thailand crews still ran greater risks, however, than their counterparts in South Vietnam, and there was considerable resentment among the former when it appeared that the Internal Revenue Service might deprive them of their income tax exemption for combat service. In South Vietnam the income of all American enlisted personnel was exempt from taxation as was the first $5000 of every officer's pay. In Thailand only aircrews flying over North Vietnam were eligible for this benefit. Since the

United States continued to pretend that it had no forces fighting in Laos, the end of bombing in North Vietnam threatened the tax exemption for aircrews in Thailand.[34]

General Brown raised the tax exemption question when he visited President Nixon at the White House in early February 1969. Nixon was concerned that aircrew morale might have been hurt by the bombing halt. Brown assured him that while there was a morale problem, it could be remedied by maintaining the tax exemption. Nixon replied that depriving the Thailand aircrews of their tax break was "ridiculous" and told Kissinger to fix it.[35]

Brown came away from his conversation with Nixon impressed that unlike every other civilian Brown talked to in Washington, the new President said nothing about withdrawing forces from Southeast Asia. In fact it was Brown who counseled restraint and Nixon who seemed ready to do more. Since the weather would have permitted little bombing of North Vietnam during the past three months even without a bombing halt, Brown was able to say truthfully that the halt had not yet really hurt the American war effort. When the President wondered whether more could be done in South Vietnam, Brown cautioned him against the political repercussions of permitting American casualty rates to rise. Nixon seemed especially eager to curb enemy use of his sanctuary in Cambodia and even told Brown that if Abrams employed "dirty tricks" in Cambodia, the President would stand behind him.[36]

Nixon was perhaps surprised by Brown's caution, since the new President had already heard the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs voice his support for bombing North Vietnam. In his first meeting with the new President on January 30, Wheeler had argued for bombing and Secretary Laird had argued against. The rest of the Joint Chiefs soon made plain their agreement with Wheeler that resuming the bombing of North Vietnam and mining Haiphong harbor could bring the war to a favorable conclusion. But their opinion reached the President together with the dissenting views of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency--both of which thought that North Vietnam would not be intimidated and would be able to import whatever it needed across the Chinese border under any bombing campaign. The replay of this old argument together with many others was staged by Henry Kissinger, who persuaded Nixon to send the bureaucracy a long list of questions about the war. Many of these questions were prepared by Daniel Ellsberg of the RAND Corporation, who had been working on a history of the war for the Office of the Secretary of Defense.[37]

The list of twenty-eight major and fifty subsidiary questions was ready when Nixon was inaugurated, and on his first full day in office he sent them out over his signature as National Security Study Memorandum 1. Kissinger in this way made clear at the outset that his potential rivals throughout the government not only still disagreed about the war but disagreed according to a pattern established during the Johnson administration. The most positive

view of the ability of American military force to gain a favorable outcome in the war came from the military and Ambassador Bunker. By contrast the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the State Department took a much more skeptical stance.[38]

The familiarity of the bureaucracy's responses could be partly attributed to the fact that the new administration had yet to fill many appointed positions with its own people. But those responses did indicate a continuity in thinking about the war within segments of the two administrations. This continuity was most striking in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff found the new secretary to be a more congenial boss than McNamara or Clifford, Laird was determined to get American forces out of Vietnam. He hoped to do this by turning the fighting over to South Vietnamese forces.[39]

Before Laird could convince President Nixon to begin a unilateral withdrawal, the communists launched a light offensive in South Vietnam. On February 23, 1969, just as Nixon was beginning a tour of the Europe, they began to fire rockets into Saigon and other cities. But those cities were spared ground attacks, while communist ground forces assaulted targets only in remote areas. Although sporadic rocket attacks continued through March, this offensive was barely worthy of the name. It did demonstrate, however, that President Nixon was not going to enforce the understandings upon which President Johnson's bombing halt was supposed to have depended.

President Johnson had publicly implied that the United States would resume bombing North Vietnam if communist forces violated the Demilitarized Zone or attacked South Vietnam's cities. The Johnson and Nixon administrations had chosen not to react in that way against North Vietnam's continued infiltration of troops and supplies through the Demilitarized Zone. Rocket attacks on Saigon could not be ignored, however, since they were given ample coverage in the press. When Nixon was asked by a reporter on March 4 whether the communists in Vietnam were testing the new administration, Nixon admitted that the rocket attacks might be "technically" a violation of the October 1968 understandings. But he was still considering whether the violation was "so significant" that it would require a response.[40]

At the same press conference another reporter then asked if a resumption of bombing might be an appropriate response? Nixon replied that there were "several contingency plans" but that he would not threaten North Vietnam with mere words. He preferred to let his deeds speak for themselves: "I will only indicate that we will not tolerate a continuation of this kind of attack without some response that will be appropriate."[41]

The President's only public response was sending Secretary of Defense Laird and General Wheeler to visit South Vietnam. Although General Abrams urged a return to bombing up to the nineteenth parallel, Secretary Laird found that the communist rocket attacks were not sufficiently significant to warrant bombing North Vietnam. General Wheeler agreed the enemy's offensive was

weak but thought an American failure to respond would confirm North Vietnam's claim that the bombing halt had been unconditional. The chairman's position on this issue had little or no chance of overcoming administration reluctance to endure the political uproar sure to follow renewed bombing.[42]

The Seventh Air Force commander offered a related reason not to bomb. In General Brown's view the North Vietnamese might be trying to spur the United States to bomb and thereby revive the antiwar movement. Brown sent General Abrams a memorandum suggesting alternative courses of action said to be less politically incendiary: "neutralize" enemy base areas near the South Vietnamese border in Cambodia and Laos; mine Haiphong harbor; blockade the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville. Brown's options seemed likely to produce much more domestic furor than he indicated, but (as Brown knew) Abrams and President Nixon were already strongly interested in eliminating the border sanctuaries.[43]

Shortly after Brown had met with Nixon in early February, Abrams had asked permission to send B-52s against the Cambodian sanctuaries. Of all the ideas which came to the new President about Vietnam during the early weeks of his administration, Nixon liked this one the best. Since the beginning of the year he had been talking with Kissinger about the enemy buildup in Cambodia. The B-52 proposal offered a way to retaliate against North Vietnam without arousing the war's critics in the United States--if the B-52

strikes could be kept secret from them. Secrecy seemed possible, because North Vietnam denied that it had forces in Cambodia and thus could not complain about their being bombed. With Nixon's approval the Strategic Air Command's big B-52 bombers commenced a year of covert bombing just over the Cambodian border.[44]

So began a cancer which would destroy the Nixon presidency and eat away at the integrity of the Air Force. The Cambodian bombing was so secret that the military's normal classified reports were not trusted to protect it. Instead those reports were filled with false information indicating that the B-52s were dropping their bombs in South Vietnam. Air Force officers began to lie for the President, and the lies did not stop when a few weeks into the bombing the *New York Times* exposed it.[45] Indeed that very exposure caused Nixon and Kissinger to authorize wiretaps on their subordinates in hope of identifying those who were leaking to the press.[46]

Although the Secretary of Defense had favored bombing in Cambodia, he was distrusted in the White House--as was his military assistant, Air Force Colonel Robert E. Pursley, who had served in the same capacity under Secretaries McNamara and Clifford. Consequently the Federal Bureau of Investigation tapped Pursley's telephones. But the wiretaps turned up nothing damaging to Pursley or to his boss, who continued to provide Nixon and Kissinger with sometimes unwelcome advice for the next three years.[47]

Nixon's suspicion of Laird did not inhibit the President from embracing the Secretary's efforts to put a better face on the administration's actions. Some of Laird's descriptive phrases were adopted by the administration and the press. Nixon saw merit in using Laird's "Vietnamization" in preference to "De-Americanization" as way of describing and rationalizing withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. Another of Laird's useful phrases, "protective reaction," was coined during his first visit to Vietnam. The *New York Times* reported that a hundred U.S. marines had occupied a few hills in Laos for a week. When asked whether this was an escalation of the American war effort, Laird refused to confirm the story but said that American commanders had long had authority to take actions necessary to protect their troops. In the months and years to come his phrase "protective reaction" would provide an all-purpose label for a wide range of military activities, including American air strikes retaliating against air defense sites in North Vietnam.[48]

* * *

Except for the secret bombing of Cambodia, President Nixon had trouble finding a way to intimidate North Vietnam without arousing American critics of the war. During his first year in office, his threats remained empty, and most of his actions revealed the weakness of his position.

After Nixon's initial decision not to resume the bombing of North Vietnam, his next opportunity to display greater toughness came in April 1969 when a Navy EC-121 radio intercept plane was shot down off the coast of

North Korea and all thirty-one crew members were lost. Arguing that this incident would be seen as a test of the administration's resolve not merely in Pyongyang, but also in Moscow, Beijing, and Hanoi, Kissinger supported a retaliatory strike against a North Korean airfield. Secretary of Defense Laird urged restraint and on his own canceled all American reconnaissance flights not only near North Korea, but also near China, the Soviet Union, the Mediterranean, and Cuba. Although Nixon was furious with Laird, the President decided not to risk a war with North Korea. Nixon would later say that he told Kissinger: "They got away with it this time, but they'll never get away with it again."[49]

Knowing that withdrawal of American forces would undercut any influence he might yet have on North Vietnam, Nixon did not announce removal of the first 25,000 troops until June 1969. The long-awaited beginning of Vietnamization helped to quiet protests in the United States against American search and destroy tactics, which had led in May to the bloody battle of Hamburger Hill. At Ap Bia near the Laotian border, the North Vietnamese had not melted away into the jungle as usual but had chosen to stand and fight. In repeated assaults on the hill, more than fifty Americans were killed. After taking the hill, American troops then abandoned it, for their objective there and elsewhere had not been gaining positions but killing the enemy. Although enemy losses were thought to be much greater than American and

South Vietnamese losses, American public opinion had turned against expending American lives in this way.[50]

Less than a month before his first troop cutback announcement, Nixon had gone on television to propose a ceasefire followed by withdrawal of most American and North Vietnamese troops. Since the United States was beginning to withdraw unilaterally, there was little incentive for North Vietnam to make such an agreement and withdraw its forces. To give Hanoi the necessary incentive, Nixon decided in early July that he would secretly send an ultimatum.

President Nixon's first messenger was Jean Sainteny, a Paris businessman who had served as France's Delegate-General in Hanoi. Nixon's letter to Ho Chi Minh urged peace, but Nixon instructed Sainteny to tell the North Vietnamese that unless there was a negotiating breakthrough by November 1 (the first anniversary of the bombing halt) Nixon would resort to "measures of great consequence and force."[51] Nixon's ultimatum may not actually have accompanied his letter to Ho. North Vietnam denied Sainteny a visa, and he had to give Nixon's letter to Mai Van Bo in Paris. Kissinger, who served as translator for Nixon's conversation with Sainteny, would claim in his memoirs to have known nothing about Nixon's ultimatum for another two weeks. With or without the ultimatum, a few days later the North Vietnamese proposed a secret meeting in Paris between Kissinger and Xuan Thuy, their senior representative at the peace negotiations.[52]

Kissinger began his covert negotiations in Paris under the guise of reporting to the French government on Nixon's late July tour of Asia. Kissinger traveled with Nixon and stopped in Paris on the way home. The image of weakness conveyed by Nixon's tour may well have carried more weight in Hanoi than his secret ultimatum whenever it arrived. But the President intended his journey to advertise American strength. On July 23 he flew to the carrier *Hornet* in the South Pacific, where he greeted astronauts returning from the first visit to the moon. In an ebullient mood Nixon told them that "this is the greatest week in the history of the world since the Creation," a remark he later had to explain to the evangelist Billy Graham.[53]

From Hanoi's point of view, Nixon's confession of weakness came during his press conference on Guam. The President proclaimed his determination to avoid being "dragged" into other conflicts like Vietnam. In future, allies were going to have to fight their own battles short of nuclear war--perhaps with American arms, but not with American soldiers.[54] This "Nixon Doctrine" was warmly received in the United States, but neither that reception nor the doctrine itself could have done anything other than undercut Nixon's threat of harsh action against North Vietnam.

During his visits in Asian capitals, Nixon told his hosts about his determination to take action if negotiations with North Vietnam did not begin to make progress by November 1. Kissinger then presented Nixon's ultimatum directly to the North Vietnamese in Paris during the first week in August.[55]

At the end of the month a letter arrived from Ho Chi Minh rejecting Nixon's proposals and ignoring his ultimatum.[56]

Three days later Ho died at the age of 79. Since his heart had been troubling him for several years, he had already delegated much of his authority to associates who had worked together for decades. Nevertheless, in Washington and Saigon some thought that a struggle might develop among Ho's possible successors. Few were as optimistic as President Thieu, who told the press that if party secretary Le Duan emerged on top, his moderate, pro-Russian views might permit a quick negotiated end of the war.[57] This was a rather curious assessment, since Le Duan had led communist forces in the south against the French and was usually said to be a leading proponent of total victory there. Although Le Duan did appear gradually to gain the most influential position in the government, there was no obvious squabbling in Hanoi, nor any change in policy.

President Nixon wanted to find a way to make the North Vietnamese believe in his ultimatum and respond to it. Kissinger's National Security Council staff and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been quietly exploring ways to implement the ultimatum, including mining North Vietnam's harbors and invasion as well as a resumption of bombing.[58] Some attention may also have been given to the possibility of using nuclear weapons for contaminating tranportation routes with radiation.[59] Unlike President Eisenhower's handling of the Korean War, however, Nixon did not try to end the Vietnam War by

explicitly threatening to use nuclear weapons. He did decide to let North Vietnam know that he was considering invasion and mining Haiphong. Nixon leaked these options to the press by briefing several senators.[60]

Nixon also tried to pressure the Soviet Union into using its leverage with North Vietnam to end the war. When Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin asked to see Kissinger in late September, the President and his national security adviser staged a little performance. As they had planned, a call from Nixon interrupted the meeting, and after putting down the telephone Kissinger somberly told Dobrynin that in the President's words the "train had left the station and was heading down the track."[61] Dobrynin replied that he hoped it was a plane rather than a train, because a plane could still change course.[62]

In October, Nixon attempted to underline the seriousness of his ultimatum to Moscow and Hanoi without contributing to the revival of antiwar protest in the United States. On October 10 the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, ordered the Strategic Air Command and the unified commands to begin on October 13 a readiness test which would generate actions "discernible to the Soviets, but not threatening in themselves."[63] General Bruce K. Holloway, the SAC commander, nearly doubled the number of B-52s on ground alert to 144. Almost two-thirds of the rest of his bombers were loaded with nuclear weapons on October 25, and two days later B-52s carried nuclear weapons on airborne alert for the first time since January 1968

(when a B-52 crashed near Thule, Greenland). But on October 28, the administration ended the readiness test.[64]

Nixon's campaign to convince Moscow and Hanoi that he was serious about his ultimatum had opened persuasively on October 13, the first day of the readiness test, when his press secretary announced that the President would make a televised address to the nation on November 3. The timing of the speech was meant to suggest the possibility that Nixon might use the occasion to announce the dire measures he had been threatening.[65] But the communists called his bluff, and the first week in November passed without escalation of the war.

Nixon blamed the failure of his ultimatum on the antiwar movement, which rose to new heights after a year's quiescence. Since the bombing halt, student unrest had mostly involved racial problems. After black students at Cornell University got their way in the spring of 1969 by carrying rifles, Nixon was not alone in fearing what a revival of the antiwar movement might bring. But the threat of violence at Cornell following the skirmishing between police and demonstrators at the Democratic convention in Chicago the preceding August caused the development of new tactics within the antiwar movement. During the summer of 1969 organizers planned a nationwide "moratorium" for October 15th, when people were asked to take time out from their normal routine to protest the war. The idea was to involve as much of the American middle class as possible--to shed the disreputable "hippie" image of earlier

demonstrations in favor of cleancut respectability. Those in sympathy with the moratorium were asked to wear black armbands. In addition to marches, there would be a range of other activities, including lectures and candlelight vigils.

Growing support for the moratorium on the east and west coasts seemed to indicate that many Americans wanted out of the war immediately without regard to the consequences for South Vietnam. A Gallup poll found that more than half the Americans surveyed favored withdrawing completely by the end of 1970.[66] President Nixon tried to derail the antiwar movement by announcing a second installment of 35,000 troops to be withdrawn from South Vietnam. He also removed Lt. Gen. Lewis B. Hershey (U.S. Army) as Director of the Selective Service System. Ever since the United States had begun to draft young men into the military during World War II, Hershey had managed the proceedings, and during the Vietnam War he had become a favorite target of the antiwar movement. Within a year, continuing withdrawals from Vietnam combined with a new draft lottery (which quickly exempted most young men from the draft) would deprive the antiwar movement of much of its impetus, but Nixon's gestures in the fall of 1969 did less to curb it than to rob his ultimatum of any weight in Hanoi.

North Vietnam's leaders took undisguised pleasure in the American antiwar movement's activities. The day before the moratorium, North Vietnam's delegation in Paris gave the press an open letter from Premier Pham Van Dong to "American friends" wishing them a "great success" in their

"autumn struggle."[67] President Nixon would later recall that when he heard about Pham Van Dong's letter, "I knew for sure that my ultimatum had failed."[68]

Not only was the moratorium of October 15 the first time the antiwar movement had succeeded in coordinating major events in several cities simultaneously, but the same groups were already organizing much larger gatherings for Washington and San Francisco in mid November. Only two days after the moratorium, Kissinger advised the President that perhaps it might be best to postpone plans to act more forcefully against North Vietnam.[69] On the same day Nixon got similar advice from a British authority on counterinsurgency, Sir Robert Thompson, who suggested that the United States needed to convince Hanoi and Saigon of its ability to stay, not escalate.[70]

The Soviet Union hammered home the final nail in the coffin of Nixon's ultimatum. On October 20, Ambassador Dobrynin presented Nixon with his government's agreement to enter into strategic arms limitation talks. At the same time, Dobrynin voiced Soviet unhappiness with Nixon's overtures to the Chinese. Left unspoken was the bad time Nixon was bound to have with the American press if he risked a Soviet arms agreement to escalate the Vietnam War. Nixon took the opportunity to lecture Dobrynin at length on the Soviet Union's failure to help end the war. "If the Soviet Union will not help us get peace," Nixon threatened once again, "then we will have to pursue our own

methods for bringing the war to an end."[71] He added that the Soviets should not expect much progress on other matters until the war was over.[72]

Having decided not to announce any dramatic new actions in the war, President Nixon was left with the problem of what to say to the American people on November 3. Fortunately for him they did not know about his ultimatum, and he made use of the occasion to shore up his dwindling support on the war. He reminded his television audience that when the communists took Hue during the Tet offensive of 1968, they had executed about three thousand civilians.[73] He repeated his offer to withdraw American forces from South Vietnam if the North Vietnamese would do the same, and he read Ho Chi Minh's letter rejecting that proposal. But Nixon said that his plan for ending America's role in the war did not depend on negotiations with Hanoi. Through Vietnamization, he would gradually replace American forces with South Vietnamese forces. If North Vietnam ever tried to take advantage of this situation by introducing greater force against the remaining American troops, Nixon promised that he would "not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation."[74]

While Hanoi now had plenty of reason to doubt Nixon's willingness to make good on his threats, he appeared forceful and reasonable to much of his audience that evening. He reached to them past the demonstrators who were beginning to harry him as they had harried President Johnson. Nixon acknowledged that Vietnamization would take more time than protestors

marching in the streets seemed inclined to give him, and he called upon "the great silent majority" of Americans to support him.[75]

A Gallup telephone poll taken after Nixon's speech found that more than three fourths of those who heard the President did support him.[76] For the first time more than two thirds of the American people seemed to approve of Nixon's performance in the White House.[77] His leading critic in the Congress, Senator Fulbright, decided to postpone new public hearings on the war. Representative James Wright (Democrat, Texas) and about three hundred other House members signed his resolution supporting the President's "efforts to negotiate a just peace in Vietnam."[78] Nixon thanked his congressional supporters on November 13 by making speeches to the House and the Senate, his first there as President.

As Nixon spoke on Capitol Hill, protestors were gathering in Washington for the biggest demonstration ever held there, surpassing even the great civil rights March on Washington of 1963. At least a quarter of a million people participated in 1969 and perhaps two or three times that many. Meanwhile more than a hundred thousand demonstrated in San Francisco and there were dozens of smaller demonstrations in the United States and Europe. In Washington the three-day event began with a "March Against Death" from Arlington Cemetery to Capitol Hill, where 46,000 marchers each deposited a placard bearing the name of an American killed or a Vietnamese village destroyed into one of forty black coffins. The bulk of the youthful crowd

maintained the discipline sought by organizers, but a rough fringe element broke windows, damaged police cars, and flew a Vietcong flag over the Justice Department before being scattered by tear gas.[79]

Although President Nixon had proved the existence of a relatively silent majority, a large and influential minority was obviously becoming increasingly vocal. The North Vietnamese government could take comfort in this as well as in Nixon's failure to enforce his ultimatum. In any case, Nixon seemed committed to withdrawal--only the pace of withdrawal remained in question. A few days before the big demonstration in Washington, there was a "solidarity rally" in Hanoi addressed by visiting American antiwar activists Richard J. Barnet (co-director of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington) and William Meyers (director of the Lawyers Committee on American Policy Toward Vietnam in New York). Urging immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces, Barnet said that he and the North Vietnamese were fighting the same aggressors.[80]

* * *

November 1969 would have been a poor time to start an air campaign against North Vietnam unless the big B-52 bombers were used against area targets. As occured every November, the northeast monsoon began to cover the Red River delta with clouds and drizzle. Meanwhile the sky cleared over the Laotian panhandle and as the roads dried there, North Vietnamese trucks were detected in increasing numbers headed south. By the end of the year

more than 600 B-52 sorties a month (forty percent of those available for all of Southeast Asia) were dropping more than 10,000 tons of bombs on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.[81]

Apart from political repercussions, another argument against using B-52s over the Red River delta was their vulnerability to surface-to-air missiles. Earlier in the war North Vietnamese SAMs had not bothered B-52s over Laos, but on December 19, 1969, a site on the North Vietnamese side of the Ban Karai Pass launched two missiles against a cell of three B-52s in Laos. One of the missiles narrowly missed the third B-52. The Seventh Air Force commander, General Brown, requested permission to bomb the offending SAM site and any other SAM sites in North Vietnam threatening his forces in Laos. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, decided not to present this request to Secretary Laird. But Wheeler did pass along another Brown request to permit F-105G Wild Weasel aircraft to operate in North Vietnam.[82]

Since the bombing halt over North Vietnam, the two-seat Wild Weasels had been limited to flying along the Laotian side of the North Vietnamese border, a restriction which inhibited maximum use against a missile site in North Vietnam of radar detection equipment, radar-seeking air-to-ground missiles, unguided bombs, and guns. President Nixon did not approve use of Wild Weasels in North Vietnam until late January 1970. On January 28, a pair of F-105G Wild Weasels escorted an RF-4C reconnaissance aircraft into North Vietnam. After evading two SAMs launched from a site near the Mu

Gia Pass, the Wild Weasels dropped a dozen 500-pound bombs on the site. One of the Wild Weasels then strafed a second site a few miles north of the first and was hit by ground fire while pulling off the target. The pilot, Capt. Richard J. Mallon, and the electronic warfare officer, Capt. Robert J. Panek, both ejected.[83]

An unsuccessful rescue effort came to a sad end less than three hours later when a rescue helicopter orbiting nearby in Laos was shot down by a MiG-21's heat-seeking missile. The helicopter exploded in the air and all six crew members were presumed to have died instantly: Maj. Holly G. Bell, Capt. Leonard C. Leeser, SMSgt. William D. Pruett, MSgt. William C. Sutton, SSgt. William C. Shinn, and Sgt. Gregory L. Anderson. Nor would Captains Mallon and Panek come home at the end of the war.[84]

Dismayed by these losses and disappointed that he had not been granted permission to mount a campaign against missile sites near the Laotian border in North Vietnam, General Brown resolved to make maximum use of the authority he did have. Since the summer of 1969, he had sometimes authorized a flight of four fighters to orbit in readiness to join a reconnaissance mission when attacked, so that Seventh Air Force could react with more force than afforded by the pair of escorts which then normally accompanied a reconnaissance aircraft. In this case Brown took the advice of his second in command, Maj. Gen. Robert J. Dixon, to expand the reaction force to at least a dozen aircraft. An aide would recall that this was one of the few times he

saw Brown display much emotion: Brown banged the table and declared he wanted "every damned plane we can get airborne."[85]

On February 2, 1970, Seventh Air Force had two RF-4C reconnaissance aircraft (each with two F-4 escorts) fly over North Vietnamese SAM sites near the Laotian border. Orbiting in Laos were fifteen other F-4s. Although one of the reconnaissance flights was fired upon by antiaircraft artillery near the Mu Gia pass, neither encountered a SAM. After the escorts alone bombed the offending artillery, Seventh Air Force sent the orbiting force against another artillery site near the Ban Karai Pass (midway between the Mu Gia Pass and the Demilitarized Zone). That artillery site had fired on American aircraft in Laos the day before, and the rules of engagement permitted reaction within twenty-four hours. General Brown hoped that a SAM site north of Ban Karai would respond to so large a force and it did. After launching a SAM, the site was bombed by eight F-4s led by Col. Donald N. Stanfield, commander of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing (Ubon, Thailand). This was an unusually effective strike. At least two missiles were thought to be destroyed on the ground, while launch facilities and associated artillery sites were heavily damaged.[86]

Just a week after the Ban Karai strike, President Nixon not only extended the time for reaction against fire in North Vietnam to three days, but permitted preemptive strikes on SAM and anti-aircraft artillery sites near the Laotian border. When bad weather prohibited any attacks on those sites during the first week after his authorization, Nixon expressed his impatience--

only to withdraw the authorization a day later. Early in March he reinstated the three-day period for permissable reaction, but he did not again give a blanket authorization for pre-emptive strikes. Instead he began to consider authorizing an air campaign much broader in scope.[87]

The occasion for Nixon's renewed interest in bombing North Vietnam was the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk's government in Cambodia by Gen. Lon Nol, who wanted American forces to drive North Vietnamese forces out of his country. Having tossed aside Sihanouk's delicate compromise between American and North Vietnamese interests, Lon Nol was immediately at war with the large North Vietnamese forces on the Cambodian side of the South Vietnamese border. For a year B-52s had been secretly bombing those forces, and General Abrams had long wanted to send his soldiers against this enemy sanctuary with its Cambodian port at Sihanoukville. Lon Nol renamed the port Kompong Som and closed it to communist supplies. If Abrams could destroy supplies stored along the border before Vietnamization stripped him of most of his own forces, South Vietnam's chances for survival would improve--as would those of Lon Nol and American forces remaining in South Vietnam.[88]

When President Nixon decided to attack North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, he knew that he would face an uproar on Capitol Hill, in the press, and on college campuses. He suggested to Kissinger that they might as well go the whole way and resume the bombing of North Vietnam to include mining the ports. Kissinger did not believe the President was serious, and brushed

aside the suggestion by commenting that they had a full plate already. But after the war, Kissinger would doubt that he had given good advice on this occasion: "The bane of our military actions in Vietnam was their hesitancy; we were always trying to calculate with fine precision the absolute minimum of force or of time, leaving no margin for error or confusion, encouraging our adversary to hold on until our doubts overrode our efforts."[89]

Although Nixon did not resume a full-scale bombing campaign against North Vietnam, he did decide to bomb North Vietnamese supply dumps just north of the Demilitarized Zone and near the mountain passes on the Laotian border. During the first four days in May, when American troops joined South Vietnamese troops fighting in Cambodia, Air Force and Navy fighter planes flew more than 700 sorties against North Vietnam. Nothing like this had occurred since the bombing halt of November 1968. The size of the operation overwhelmed North Vietnam's defenses, and the Air Force and the Navy each lost only one aircraft. Fortunately both crew members of the downed Air Force F-4D were rescued.[90]

Pacific Command intelligence officers believed that the May strikes had been very damaging, but the evidence did not permit their estimates of destroyed supplies to be more precise than somewhere between 10,000 and 50,000 tons.[91] At any rate, as President Nixon had guessed, the public relations cost of the raids seem considerably lessened by their occurring in the midst of the clamor over Cambodia. When National Guard troops killed four

students on the campus of Kent State University in Ohio, students at hundreds of universities went on strike and about 100,000 came to Washington for the last major demonstration of the war.

In this context, the air raids on North Vietnam received relatively little attention. When the press was informed about the just concluded raids on May 4, 1970, the Defense Department briefer did not know that the Navy had struck the Mu Gia Pass area and therefore denied that this attack had occurred--an error that was rectified the next day. But the press was given far more information about the raids than military officers in Hawaii put in their own classified reports. In the insidious fashion they had learned from Strategic Air Command's falsified reporting about B-52 raids on Cambodia, Pacific Command and Pacific Air Forces deleted the raids from their Top Secret reports. Pacific Air Forces' long, detailed monthly summary of operations in Southeast Asia, for example, stated that there had been only three strike sorties sent against North Vietnam during the entire month of May.[92]

Although the Nixon administration was more honest than that with the press, there was plenty of deception for reporters as well. The administration latched onto Secretary of Defense Laird's "protective reaction" phrase to defend the raids. There was a certain irony in this, since Laird was again out of favor in the White House, this time for opposing the invasion of Cambodia. Nevertheless he was defending the administration in public and insisting that if the North Vietnamese retaliated after the Cambodian operation by attacking

across the Demilitarized Zone, he would favor resuming the bombing of North Vietnam.[93]

Several months earlier Laird had himself applied the phrase "protective reaction" to retaliation against North Vietnamese air defenses.[94] By then his phrase (which he had originally applied to small Army operations from South Vietnam across the Laotian border) was already closely associated with the end of search and destroy missions by American troops in South Vietnam--where "protective reaction" implied that American troops would no longer go looking for trouble, but would merely react when attacked.

During the first year of the Nixon administration, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew had often served as the administration's lightning rod in its battles with the press. Once again he stepped forward to defend the President's actions on a television interview program. When asked about the raids on North Vietnam, he said that American attacks there had "traditionally been ones that we call protective reaction. As far as I know, these attacks that you are referring to fit into that category."[95] Secretary of State Rogers also emphasized that American air attacks were directed at North Vietnamese air defenses, and Defense Department spokesmen confirmed this view while indicating that the size of the raids was new by calling them "reinforced protective reaction strikes."[96] No one in the administration publicly admitted that although air defense targets were of course included, the principal targets of the raids were enemy supply dumps.

Despite the drubbing President Nixon took on campus and in the press during the Cambodian operation, he continued to hold the support of a majority of Americans. A Gallup poll found that more than eighty percent of adults over the age of twenty-one objected to students going on strike to protest "the way things are run in this country."[97] President Nixon had finally taken a dramatic public action which may well have surprised North Vietnam's leaders. On the other hand, the vigor of American dissent may also have reassured them that he would be unlikely to take such action again. If the North Vietnamese came to that conclusion, Nixon would prove them wrong.

Notes

Chapter 6

Protective Reaction

1. *Defense Intelligence Digest*, Sep 1968 (pp 17-18), Nov 1968 (pp 7-9), May 1969 (p1), Nov 1969 (pp 4-9), Sep 1970 (p 13), Oct 1970 (p 13).

2. CIA Intelligence Information Cable, DB-315/03896-68, Oct 25, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, W. Rostow, vol 101, #35a; CIA Special Report, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations Over the Last Two Years," SC00791/69A, Dec 19, 1969; *Defense Intelligence Digest*, Oct 1968 (pp 5-7), Apr 1969 (pp 9-11).

3. *Defense Intelligence Digest*, Aug 1968 (pp 15-17), Dec 1970 (pp 26-28).

4. Msg, Maclehose (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), Jun 27, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, W. Rostow, vol 86, #17a; CIA Intelligence Information Cable, DB-314/10635-68, Jul 2, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, box 84, 3H(3), #2; CIA/DIA, *Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam*, Jul-Oct 1968; William S. Turley, "Urbanization in War: Hanoi, 1946-1973," *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1975, pp 370-97; Nigel Thrift and Dean Forbes, *The Price of War: Urbanization in Vietnam, 1954-1985* (London, 1986).

5. Msg, Stewart (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), Sep 12, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 85, 3K(2), #5.

6. Msg, W. Rostow to President, CAP82407, 191912Z Sep 68, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, W. Rostow, vol 95, #83.

7. HQ PACAF, *Summary Air Operations Southeast Asia*, Dec 1969; OASD Comptroller, *Southeast Asia Statistical Summary*, Table 321, Oct 1973.

8. HQ PACAF, *Intelligence Index of USAF Personnel MIA/PW Southeast Asia*, 1974; AFMPC, "Summary of Casualties Due to Hostile Action in Southeast Asia," Nov 1968; HQ PACAF, *Summary Air Operations Southeast Asia*, Nov 1968; Hist, 432 TRW, Oct-Dec 1968; W. Rostow to President, Nov 15, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security Files, Country File, Vietnam, box 138, Bombing Halt Memos, vol 6, #8.

9. Ibid.; Summary notes, 594th NSC Meeting, Nov 25, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, NSC Meetings, vol 5, tab 76.

10. Memo, W. Rostow to President, Nov 14, 1968, LBJ Library, National Security File, Memos to Pres, W. Rostow, Vol 105, #4; HQ PACAF, *Summary Air Operations Southeast Asia*, Dec 1968.

11. Nixon's version of these events is in his *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978) and in his *Six Crises* (New York, 1962). Recent scholarship has tended to confirm Nixon's view that Hiss was a communist spy. See Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York, 1978) and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962* (New York, 1987).

12. Nixon, *RN*, Warner paperback edition, I, 150-53.

13. Ibid., p 187.

14. See above Chapter XVII. See also Nixon, *RN*, I, 357; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City, New York, 1963). Some scholars have been skeptical about the importance of Eisenhower's nuclear threat in ending the Korean War; see Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," and Rosemary J. Foot, "Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict," both in *International Security*, winter 1988/89.

15. Richard M. Nixon, article, *Foreign Affairs*, Oct 1967.

16. The Soviet proposal to engage in nuclear strikes against China was revealed to the public by H.R. Haldeman, *The Ends of Power* (New York, 1978), Dell paperback edition, p 129.

17. David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York, 1968), pp 221-24; see above, Chapter XIV.

18. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), pp 9-10;
Nixon, *RN*, I, pp 421-22.

19. Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1957).

20. Ibid., p 418.

21. Ibid.

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23. Nixon, *RN*, I, 399-401; Kissinger, *White House Years*, p 10.

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37. Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp 235-41; Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York, 1983), pp 48-50.

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73. "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Nov 3, 1969, *Public Papers of the the Presidents,* Nixon, 1969, p 902. Nixon also said that the communists had executed 50,000 when they took over North Vietnam in the 1950s. This is the figure given by Bernard Fall in *The Two Viet-Nams* (New York, 1963), p 156, but it has been questioned by Gareth Porter and Edwin E. Moise. In *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1983), p 222, Moise estimates 5000.

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75. "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Nov 3, 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Nixon, 1969, p 909.

76. Gallup poll released Nov 4, 1969.

77. Gallup poll, Nov 23, 1969, based on data gathered Nov 12-17, 1969.

78. Quoted by John D. Carroll, "Nixon Thanks Congressmen," *Baltimore Sun*, Nov 14, 1969, p 1.

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CHAPTER 7

PRISONERS AND OTHER SURVIVORS

On May 1, 1970, while American troops pushed into Cambodia and F-4s bombed the panhandle of North Vietnam, more than a thousand American military wives and parents gathered in Washington to deal with the war's special impact on their families. Although some of their husbands and sons had been imprisoned or missing in Southeast Asia since as long ago as 1964, no such meeting had occurred before. The Johnson administration had discouraged these families from organizing; they were told that quiet diplomacy was the best way to secure the safe return of their men, whose survival might be threatened by publicity. But the families grew suspicious of quiet diplomacy, especially after an avalanche of publicity about the USS *Pueblo* (the Navy intelligence ship whose crew was captured by North Korea in January 1968 and released at the end of that year).[1]

The Nixon administration decided to join in publicly condemning North Vietnam's cruelty toward its American prisoners and failure even to reveal which men it had captured. Secretary of Defense Laird unveiled the

administration's decision to publicize the plight of captured Americans in May 1969. Three prisoners subsequently released by North Vietnam in August 1969 were encouraged to tell the press about the grim realities of imprisonment in North Vietnam--a subject which had been discussed only in classified debriefings by six prisoners released in 1968. The American member of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights complained about conditions in North Vietnam's prisons to a committee of the General Assembly in November 1969. Meanwhile wives of Americans missing in Southeast Asia visited the North Vietnamese delegation at the peace talks in Paris to inquire whether they were wives of prisoners or widows. They got no answer, and when Philip Habib replaced Henry Cabot Lodge as America's chief negotiator at the talks in December, he devoted his entire opening statement to the prisoner of war issue.[2]

In March 1970, Senator Robert Dole (Republican, Kansas) proposed that the new National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia come together for a meeting at Constitution Hall in Washington on International Law Day, May 1. Many family members were flown to Washington by the Air National Guard. Although Secretary Laird and Vice President Agnew spoke to the group, much of the expected publicity was submerged in the controversy over Cambodia. But this was to be the first of many national gatherings, and the League established an office in Washington to promote its interests.[3]

Senator Dole's concern reflected Kansas's military ties in addition to his own experience as a severely wounded veteran of World War II. Fort Riley had sent its First Infantry Division to Vietnam, and many of the Army's field grade officers had attended Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. But it was McConnell Air Force Base near Wichita that had trained F-105 pilots who attacked targets in North Vietnam.[4]

While few Americans missing in South Vietnam or Laos were thought to be still alive, chances for survival seemed much better for the aircrews of more than nine hundred aircraft shot down over North Vietnam. Although fewer than a hundred of those men had been rescued, evidence of captivity had emerged for about four hundred, and there was hope that some of the other missing flyers were also in captivity. As the replacement training center for F-105 pilots, McConnell had not only contributed many of the prisoners and missing, but its staff included officers who had fought in the skies over North Vietnam.[5]

A year after President Johnson's March 1968 bombing halt in the Hanoi-Haiphong region, veterans of Rolling Thunder had flown to McConnell for their first stateside "practice reunion." They called it a "practice reunion" because they declared that a "real reunion" could not occur until their friends imprisoned in North Vietnam could join them. About a hundred pilots parked their military aircraft on the ramp, while several hundred others came to Wichita by commercial air or automobile. They partied for three days, adopted

a charter, and elected another Johnson, Col. Howard C. "Scrappy" Johnson, as their president.[6]

Colonel Johnson had launched the first practice reunion in Thailand. When he became the operations officer at Korat Air Base in 1966, his chief claim to fame was that he had set an altitude record in the F-104. But he had also flown P-51 missions during the Korean War, and he thought that men fought better in the air if they knew each other on the ground. With the force attacking North Vietnam scattered among several bases and aircraft carriers, coordination of the air war was often too impersonal to permit a full sharing of ideas and experience. So Johnson persuaded his wing commander, Brig. Gen. William S. Chairsell, to invite the other wings to a tactics conference at Korat.[7]

The Korat conference on May 22, 1967, was the occasion for an exuberant release from the tensions of war. Visiting dignitaries were hoisted atop elephants and paraded through the base to the music of a marching band. Similar gatherings were held at Ubon, Takhli, and Udorn before the bombing halt. Thus was born the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association. They called themselves the River Rats, and they took as members all who had flown into Route Package Six, plus all who were imprisoned in North Vietnam. Air Force, Navy and Marine fighter pilots flew to the gatherings, and other participants in the air war also came--helicopter rescue crews were especially welcome.

To differentiate the many squadrons represented, River Rats took to wearing "party suits", flight suits in the squadron's color with the most imaginative insignia the wearer could create. The tailoring of these flight suits became a major enterprise outside the gates of the Thailand bases. At Udorn, Maharajah Clothiers grew into an establishment employing more than eighty seamstresses who made party suits for officers from throughout Seventh Air Force. The "Maharajah", Amarjit Singh Vasir, formerly a civil servant in India, frequently attended squadron parties wearing the appropriate party suit (bought by the squadron). His clients (which included several generals) made him an honorary six-star general, and the shoulders of his party suits bore the stars to prove it.[8]

Two favorite activities at River Rat parties were "dead bug" and "MiG sweep." At the command "dead bug", the last man to assume the proper position (on his back with legs and arms in the air) bought drinks for the rest. Those participating in a "MiG sweep" linked arms and attempted to knock down everyone else in the room. When Navy pilots were present, "carrier landings" were added--a wet table assuming the role of an aircraft carrier and a pilot assuming the role of an aircraft.

High jinks and party suits were much in evidence at Wichita in 1969 when Colonel Johnson became CINCRAT. But as before in Thailand, a more serious purpose underlay the festivities. After the bombing halt and their own return to the United States, the River Rats took as their new mission the

welfare of the families of friends killed, missing, or held prisoner in Southeast Asia. Members were enjoined to check on those families and make sure they were getting as much financial and moral support as possible. The River Rats raised money to provide scholarships for the children of their unfortunate comrades; it was a commitment the Rats would sustain for more than two decades until all those children were educated.

By the time the River Rats met for their second annual stateside practice reunion at San Antonio in May 1970, they had acquired in Thailand a "liberty bell" which would not be rung until the prisoners were released. Like many other Americans, River Rat families began to wear bracelets bearing the names of the prisoners and the missing--with promises to wear them until the prisoners came home.

In this way, the prisoners began to be seen as the most celebrated group of heroes in a war which some Americans thought lacking in heroism. During earlier wars fighter pilots had looked to aces as their principal celebrities, but in 1970 no pilot had yet shot down the requisite five aircraft. Although there had often been a stigma attached to being shot down by another fighter, most of the pilots lost in North Vietnam were shot down by ground fire. Those who took greater risks by diving lower to get better accuracy made themselves more vulnerable. For every prisoner whose lack of skill or experience may have contributed to his fate, there were others whose abilities were widely respected. In any case, the length and hardship of the prisoners' ordeal commanded the

sympathy and respect of fellow fighter pilots as well as of Americans generally.[9]

Demands for return of the prisoners reverberated through American society. In June 1970 an exhibit of their living conditions opened in the U.S. Capitol building. A life-size mockup of a North Vietnamese cell showed a prisoner whose only companions were a rat and some cockroaches. Nearby a mockup of a Viet Cong bamboo cage showed a prisoner whose feet were shackled. Although this exhibit made no attempt to portray torture, visitors were dismayed at the grimness of what they saw.[10]

The Capitol exhibit was provided by a young and wealthy Dallas businessman, H. Ross Perot, who after graduating from the Naval Academy in 1953 had made a quick fortune in the new computer industry. His interest in the prisoners and the missing had been engaged in 1969 when some of their wives asked him for funds to visit the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris. Not only did he provide those funds, but he immediately began to put hundreds of thousands of dollars into a campaign to advertise the plight of the prisoners. For Christmas 1969 he gathered tons of Christmas packages (with food, clothing, and medicine) for the prisoners, but the North Vietnamese authorities did not permit his cargo planes to land. The North Vietnamese also refused to meet with him when he flew to Laos or Paris, and they turned down his offer of $100,000,000 in exchange for the prisoners.[11]

One result of Perot's offer together with the publicity generated by him and others was that the North Vietnamese knew without question that their few hundred American prisoners were an asset whose value was increasing. By contrast the North Vietnamese showed nothing but disdain for the thirty-six thousand communist prisoners in South Vietnamese hands and indicated no interest in getting any of them back. North Vietnam would not even admit that about seven thousand of those prisoners were North Vietnamese, for North Vietnam continued to insist that there were no North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. If the Americans wanted the return of American prisoners, the Americans would have to trade something far more important than the communist prisoners in South Vietnam.[12]

When the Nixon administration offered to cut back B-52 bombing in South Vietnam in exchange for the prisoners, the North Vietnamese said they would take nothing less than the full evacuation of American forces from South Vietnam--and even that they knew they were apt to get anyway as the end result of Vietnamization.[13] After all, the Nixon administration was already cutting back B-52 sorties and withdrawing troops without any concession by the North Vietnamese. It was not difficult to discern that unless there was a sea change in American politics, the Nixon administration would want to have most of its forces out of South Vietnam by the next presidential election in 1972. But the North Vietnamese were willing to trade the prisoners to have their desires met sooner, for it was the essence of the Nixon administration's

policy to prolong Vietnamization as long as possible (up to the 1972 election) so that the South Vietnamese government would have some chance of standing on its own.

The Nixon administration could not use the prisoner issue either to maintain American support for the war or to improve the situation of the prisoners without increasing the negotiating value of the prisoners to the North Vietnamese. But the administration's negotiating position was already so weak, it hardly mattered. So long as Vietnamization promised that American forces would be withdrawn eventually in any case, the North Vietnamese had little incentive to agree to the withdrawal of their own forces from South Vietnam. And once American forces had all gone home, what was to stop the North Vietnamese from simply keeping their American prisoners indefinitely?

In August 1970 President Nixon sought to heighten awareness of North Vietnam's mistreatment of American prisoners by sending Col. Frank Borman, a former astronaut recently retired from the Air Force, as his special emissary to fourteen countries (including the Soviet Union). Borman had come to Nixon's attention on Christmas Eve 1968 when the astronaut read to the world from the Book of Genesis while orbiting the moon. Later he had made a good impression speaking to a joint session of Congress and visiting several foreign capitals. Now Nixon wanted him to perform in a similar way on behalf of the prisoners.[14]

The Borman tour came on the heels of revelations about harsh conditions in the South Vietnamese prison on Con Son Island, fifty miles off the coast. This facility had been built by the French (who called the island Poulo Condore) nearly forty years before to house the colonial government's most recalcitrant prisoners (including Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Tho). Don Luce of the World Council of Churches had persuaded two congressmen to tour the prison. Augustus F. Hawkins (Democrat, California) was an early opponent of the Vietnam War, which he condemned for soaking up funds needed by his black constituents in the riot-torn Watts area of Los Angeles. William R. Anderson (Democrat, Tennessee) was a retired Navy captain who had commanded the Navy's first nuclear-powered submarine, the *Nautilus*. They were both shocked by what they saw. In one building they looked down through floor bars into concrete cells they dubbed "tiger cages." Each cell held as many as five prisoners (men or women) confined to a space measuring about six feet by ten feet. One man claimed that his fingers had been cut off as punishment. Others complained about being shackled so long that they had been paralyzed.[15]

By the end of July 1970, photographs of the "tiger cages" on Con Son Island were featured in *Life*, and Gloria Emerson of the *New York Times* was doing her best to spread Don Luce's version of the story. Luce, who had gone to South Vietnam in the 1950s from Cornell University as an expert on sweet potatoes, now became a hero of the antiwar movement. He found an antidote

to the evil reputation the North Vietnamese were earning for their mistreatment of American prisoners of war.[16]

When Frank Borman reached Saigon at the end of August, he too asked to see the prison on Con Son Island. By then the "tiger cages" were no longer in use and some had been torn down. He came away convinced that the only prisoners of war still on Con Son Island were a few convicted of crimes in the ordinary prison camps like the one he visited at Phu Quoc--camps frequently inspected by the International Red Cross. In his speech to a joint session of Congress on September 22, 1970, Borman urged once again that "we continue to press for the use of the International Red Cross in inspection of the prison camps in North Vietnam."[17]

* * *

The International Committee of the Red Cross had sponsored a conference in 1949 at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, to draft new conventions for the protection of war victims. One of these conventions governed the treatment of prisoners of war. By 1958, the Geneva Conventions were accepted by both North and South Vietnam, as well as the United States. But North Vietnam followed the lead of the Soviet Union in agreeing to the convention on prisoners of war only with a most important reservation: North Vietnam did not accept article eighty-five, which stated that "prisoners of war prosecuted under the laws of the Detaining Power for acts commiteed prior to

capture shall retain, even if convicted, the benefits of the present Convention."[18]

Throughout its struggle with the United States, North Vietnam insisted that the American airmen who fell into its hands were criminals, not prisoners of war. Since the North Vietnamese called the bombing of their country a crime rather than an act of war, they refused to comply with the pertinent Geneva convention--inspectors from the International Committee of the Red Cross would not be welcome in North Vietnam. American complaints that the North Vietnamese were failing to live up to provisions of the convention on prisoners could be dismissed simply by noting that North Vietnam rejected the applicability of those provisions.

Even within the terms of its own reservation, North Vietnam's treatment of American prisoners was indefensible.[19] Although North Vietnam threatened them with prosecution, war crimes trials never took place in Hanoi. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell did sponsor mock war-crimes trials in Sweden and Denmark, but of course his purpose was to foment international opinion against the Johnson administration rather than to weigh the criminal liability of individual pilots.[20] The best justifications North Vietnam could produce for denying American rights under the prisoner of war convention were the confessions extorted by torturing prisoners in violation of that convention.

Without the protection afforded by the Geneva Conventions, Americans captured in North Vietnam had reason to doubt that they would survive captivity. Bernard Fall's widely read *Street Without Joy* described the deaths of hundreds of French prisoners in communist camps there during the early 1950s. But Fall's readers could take some comfort from the fact that once French soldiers had been put in a prison camp, few of them were killed--most of the dead were victims of infection, disease, and malnutrition. During their war against the French, the communist forces often operated as guerrillas, and guerrillas rarely took prisoners or treated well those taken. Before their war with the United States, the North Vietnamese had inherited the French prisons and could more easily provide humane treatment if they so desired.[21]

Instead the North Vietnamese not only ignored the Geneva Conventions but looked to Chinese and North Korean practices in the Korean War for a model of how to treat American prisoners. The American public had been dismayed in that war when American airmen in Chinese prison camps confessed to germ warfare. Although those germ warfare allegations had been discredited, the North Vietnamese were eager to get at least confessions of intentionally bombing hospitals, schools, homes, and other civilian targets. The North Vietnamese became adept at using torture to extort such "confessions"--for the most part without killing and often without permanently disfiguring their valuable American prisoners.[22]

North Vietnamese torturers commonly used ropes to pull a prisoner's arms behind him, squeezing his elbows together and increasing the pressure and the pain--sometimes until his shoulder joints dislocated. Prisoners were also forced to torture themselves: great pain could be inflicted simply by kneeling on a concrete floor for enough hours. Prisoners who were injured when they ejected from their aircraft were tortured and denied medical treatment until they "confessed." Yet the prisoners who survived knew of only twelve men who died in North Vietnam after capture. This at least was a welcome contrast to the Korean War, when more than a third of seven thousand Americans captured were known to have died--many because they did not receive adequate protection from sub-zero weather.[23]

A new prisoner might face the terrible initial weeks or months of his captivity shackled in isolation from other prisoners. When he yielded to torture, he did not know that most of his fellow prisoners had also relented but had learned to gather their strength to resist again. Sometimes even before his captors relieved his isolation by giving him a cellmate, veteran prisoners made contact with the new prisoner and taught him to communicate by tapping on walls or writing messages on toilet paper with ink made from cigarette ash. For a few prisoners who spent years in solitary confinement, secret communications were especially cherished.

The tap code was introduced to Hanoi's Hoa Lo Prison by Capt. Carlyle S. "Smitty" Harris whose F-105 was shot down in April 1965 while bombing

the Thanh Hoa Bridge. At this early stage the North Vietnamese had not yet begun to torture their American prisoners, whose rapid increase in number soon led to Harris being put into a cell with three other Americans. He taught them the tap code he had learned in survival school at Stead Air Force Base, Nevada.

The code had not been a formal part of Harris's training, but one sergeant teaching the course had told a story about prisoners communicating by tapping on a pipe. Thinking they had used Morse Code, Harris asked the sergeant how they had differentiated between dots and dashes. The sergeant explained that each tap indicated a letter's position in a square matrix of five rows and five columns. The letter "A" was signaled by one tap for the row and one tap for the column; the letter "Z" by five taps for the row and five taps for the column; the letter "K" was dropped from the matrix in favor of "C", leaving only the twenty-five letters necessary to fill the matrix.[24]

The increasing number of American prisoners soon led to the separation and relocation of Harris and his first three cell mates--spreading the tap code to others. Over time variations of this code would develop. If transmitting hand and receiving eye were close enough together, sign language could be used. Capt. Kyle "Red" Dag Berg, whose F-105 went down along with four others on July 27, 1965, had a deaf step sister and taught his cellmates how to sign.[25]

Until September 1965, almost all American prisoners in North Vietnam were kept in Hoa Lo Prison, which had been built by the French near the center of Hanoi some seventy years before. Although the "Hanoi Hilton" (as American prisoners called Hoa Lo) was big enough to hold at least four hundred prisoners, the North Vietnamese decided not to concentrate Americans there. Instead a large part of Hoa Lo continued to house Vietnamese criminals, while other facilities in and around Hanoi were converted to prisons for Americans.

The largest of the improvised prisons was a former film studio at Cu Loc on the southern edge of Hanoi; about two hundred prisoners could be kept there in what they called the "Zoo." A somewhat smaller prison was established in some sheds on the grounds of a mansion which had been the French mayor's home. Here at the "Plantation" (or "Country Club"), foreign journalists and American antiwar activists came to meet prisoners in the "Big House" (or "French House"). A few cells were fixed up to show visitors. Prisoners being considered for early release were sent to the "Plantation," while some of the least cooperative prisoners were sent to "Alcatraz," a small jail behind the Ministry of National Defense.[26]

Since it was possible that the United States might eventually bomb Hanoi, dispersion of the prisoners may have been intended to insure that some of them would survive. On the other hand, one group of prisoners was deliberately put in harm's way during the summer of 1967, when they were

moved onto the grounds of the Hanoi thermal power plant. The plant was one of the few targets ever bombed within the city. The North Vietnamese may have hoped that casualties among the prisoners might make the United States more reluctant to bomb Hanoi.[27]

In any case, scattering the prisoners inhibited their attempts to organize. Within each facility prisoners still sought to communicate and determine the identity of their senior ranking officer. This dangerous responsibility soon fell upon Lt. Col. Robinson Risner, a Korean War ace shot down in September 1965. After a couple weeks at the Hilton, he was among the first prisoners sent to the Zoo. Although he continued to be kept in solitary confinement, he had already learned the tap code and was even able to have whispered conversations with a prisoner in a neighboring cell. Risner's stay at the Zoo was a short one of only a few weeks. His efforts to organize the prisoners and present their demands for decent living conditions brought his early return to the Hilton, where he spent the next month in stocks and was one of the first prisoners to be tortured.[28]

The prison authorities were on the lookout for signs of leadership emerging among the prisoners and would torture and isolate anyone caught assuming a leadership role. Navy Commanders James B. Stockdale and Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr., frequently found themselves in risky leadership positions at the Hilton or the Zoo or Alcatraz, as did Majors Lawrence N. Guarino and James H. Kasler (a Korean War ace like Risner) at the Zoo. Such

men took turns leading and suffering the consequences. Their fragile communication networks were sometimes disrupted, but rarely did American prisoners lack American leadership for long. On the other hand, for more than two years the North Vietnamese were successful in completely isolating from other American prisoners within the Hilton four colonels captured in 1967 and 1968.[29]

The leaders among the prisoners were in their forties, while most of the men were captains about thirty years old. A few of the older men were veterans of World War II. Major Guarino had even strafed Japanese rolling stock on the railroads around Hanoi, and Capt. Richard P. "Pop" Keirn had been captured by the Germans; Keirn had been shot down on his first combat mission in Europe and on his third day in Southeast Asia--the grim joke was that in exchange for two days of combat he won nearly a decade in prison. Although the younger men had not joined a military service until after the Korean War, they too looked to America's recent wars for examples of how a prisoner of war should behave. But filtered through movies, novels, and training manuals, those examples contributed to confusion among the prisoners who needed them.

For several days after arriving at the Hilton, Colonel Risner thought that it was just a processing center and that he would soon be "moved to a compound to start the life of a regular prisoner of war."[30] The Zoo was hardly what he had in mind. Where were the open barracks in which prisoners

played cards and planned escapes? Clearly the relatively mild experience of American prisoners in Germany during World War II was not going to be relevant in Hanoi's prisons. Even the deadly brutality of Japanese prison camps lacked the ideological and propagandistic thrust of imprisonment in North Vietnam. The most appropriate reservoir of experience for American prisoners in Hanoi was the same one the prison authorities there were using--the Chinese and North Korean prison camps in the Korean War.[31]

Concern about the behavior of American prisoners in the Korean War led President Eisenhower in 1955 to approve a Code of Conduct for members of the armed forces.[32] From its birth the Code was a compromise among the services. They did not agree on its meaning in 1955, and they continued to teach their contradictory interpretations of the Code throughout the Vietnam War. Consequently, Americans shot down in North Vietnam carried these disagreements into prison.

Article V of the Code stated that a prisoner of war was "bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth"--that he would "evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability." Ever since the Hague Convention of 1899, international law had required that prisoners of war give their captors name and rank; in 1929 the first Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War included service number, and the Geneva Convention of 1949 added date of birth. These "big four" items of information enabled countries at war to notify each other of the identity of

those captured so that the family of each prisoner might learn that he was alive.

International law did not require, of course, that prisoners refuse to answer other questions. Every country interrogated its prisoners of war, and usually elicited useful intelligence. In the Air Force's view, Article Five of the Code of Conduct was merely a restatement of international law with an added injunction to "evade" giving information detrimental to the United States. While "evade" seemed to imply that a prisoner was free to do more than simply refuse to talk, Article Five's blanket reference to "further questions" might mean that the prisoner should confine his answers to the "big four" or that he should not give truthful answers to even the most trivial questions beyond the "big four."[33]

The Defense Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War, which had drafted the Code of Conduct, also drafted a training guide to go with it. In this document the other services permitted the Air Force to have its way. Recommended training included "the use of ruses and strategems to evade and avoid the disclosure of important information."[34] Individuals engaged in special operations were also to be taught "the use of cover stories."[35] But only the Air Force implemented these training recommendations. The other services maintained that most of their personnel needed the simplicity of "the big four and no more"--if they started talking they would not know where to stop.

While the other services were reacting to collaboration by young enlisted prisoners during the Korean War, the Air Force was trying to deal with germ warfare "confessions" by officers. During that war, the Strategic Air Command had given its aircrews training in answering the questions of enemy interrogators without divulging important information. None of the men who received this training and subsequently endured imprisonment were among those who confessed to germ warfare, but it was not clear how evasiveness had stopped the Chinese from extorting lies.[36]

Most American prisoners in the Korean War had received an assortment of conflicting guidance. At the beginning of the war the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized prisoners to divulge any information which the enemy already knew. Even when accurately communicated to those who might need it, this directive was hard to apply in practice and was soon replaced by an injunction to be vague when talking to an enemy interrogator. In the wake of the germ warfare "confessions," Far East Air Forces ordered its men not to give the enemy any information beyond name, rank, serial number and date of birth.[37]

After the Korean War, the Air Force discarded Far East Air Forces' "big four" reaction in favor of the Strategic Air Command's training program in ruses and stratagems. The Strategic Air Command's survival school at Stead Air Force Base, Nevada, was expanded into an Air Force survival school under Air Training Command. Navy officers who attended the school complained

about its departure from complete reliance on name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. The Air Force insisted that few men could hold that line against torture and continued to teach fallback techniques which involved talking without divulging important information.[38]

But the problem for prisoners in North Vietnam (and earlier in North Korea) was not so much safeguarding classified information as it was avoiding exploitation for enemy propaganda. The North Vietnamese had ample opportunity to observe American air tactics and they had acquired American hardware ranging from undetonated bombs to aircraft. The routine character of American air operations over North Vietnam meant that as the war went on there was less and less an American pilot could tell the North Vietnamese that they did not already know. North Vietnamese interrogators lost interest in gathering intelligence, but they were increasingly interested in getting confessions of war crimes.

However much or however little a prisoner talked, he might be required to write a "confession" or tape one or recite one to visiting journalists. Most prisoners could be tortured into confessing, but many learned to sabotage these confessions. While Navy officers may have been less prepared than Air Force graduates of Stead for failure to hold the line at name, rank, serial number and date of birth, some of the Navy prisoners proved especially successful in undermining North Vietnamese propaganda. When Commander Stockdale was selected for a filmed interview, he pounded his face black and blue with a

mahogany stool. When Commander Denton was giving a filmed interview, he blinked the word "torture" in Morse Code. When Commander Richard A. Stratton appeared before a group of visiting journalists, his face assumed a vacant expression and he complied with the North Vietnamese requirement that prisoners bow by bowing repeatedly and stiffly like an automaton; thanks to a *Life* magazine photographer, the North Vietnamese were soon getting complaints from around the world that they must be "brainwashing" their American prisoners. When Navy Lieutenants Charles N. Tanner and Ross R. Terry talked to a Japanese television interviewer, they told him that Lt. Cmdr. Ben Casey and Lt. Clark Kent had been court-martialed for refusing to fly missions. Upon learning that "Ben Casey" was the fictional surgeon on a popular American televison show and "Clark Kent" was better known as Superman, the North Vietnamese were considerably less amused than the American public.[39]

North Vietnam's effort to use its American prisoners for propaganda purposes often seemed to backfire. Sometimes this was because the real target of the propaganda was not in the United States or Europe but in North Vietnam itself. The prisoners were trophies whose display could arouse the martial ardor of the North Vietnamese people. When prisoners were first captured, they usually had to run the gauntlet in several villages whose inhabitants naturally enjoyed beating a man who had dropped bombs in their vicinity. After bombing began near Hanoi in the summer of 1966, fifty-two

American prisoners were paraded through a mob in downtown Hanoi and endured countless rocks, bottles, and fists. Film of this event spurred even the antiwar leaders in the Senate (including Fulbright, McGovern, McCarthy, Morse and the Kennedys) to warn Hanoi not to put its American prisoners on trial for war crimes.[40]

Thereafter the government of North Vietnam showed more restraint in displaying American prisoners. Often the government was content merely to put their uniforms in a museum. At the end of 1969, for example, Hanoi opened a large exhibit in honor of the air defense forces. Model aircraft on wires fought above a relief map of Hanoi, from which little missiles arose as tape-recorded antiaircraft fire boomed; a dozen aircraft models bearing American insignia fell while a narrator described the capture of American "air pirates." Col. Norman C. Gaddis's uniform was displayed together with the uniforms of North Vietnam's leading aces, Capt. Nguyen Van Coc (credited with shooting down nine American aircraft) and Capt. Nguyen Van Bai (seven and a half). Colonel Gaddis, the assistant deputy commander for operations of the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing at Cam Ranh Bay, was shot down near Hanoi in his F-4 by a MiG-17 on May 12, 1967; the 12th did not operate in Route Package Six, but Gaddis was visiting Danang and asked to go along.[41]

Although their propaganda about American prisoners could be clumsy, the North Vietnamese sometimes used the sophisticated services of Wilfred Burchett, an Australian communist writer who had disseminated China's germ

warfare propaganda during the Korean War. After that war, Burchett had come to live in Hanoi for a couple of years before taking up residence in Moscow. During the Vietnam War, he returned to live in Phnom Penh and write books and articles attacking the United States and glorifying North Vietnam. In March 1966 he conducted a filmed interview in Hanoi with Major Guarino, who stoutly defended American policy and conduct in Southeast Asia. When the interview was broadcast on American television, most viewers (including Guarino's own family) could not fully appreciate the great courage of the prisoner's performance. Rather they could only marvel that the North Vietnamese permitted such freedom of expression.[42]

By the spring of 1967 the North Vietnamese were preparing to take a bolder step to advertise their "lenient" treatment of American prisoners in a way that could persuade the American public and divide the prisoners. One day the usual dose of propaganda broadcast to the prisoners over loudspeakers included the announcement that repentant prisoners might be permitted to go home early--before the end of the war. Commander Stockdale dubbed this the "fink release program" and the senior officers opposed it with the policy that all would go home together.[43]

Lacking volunteers, the program's first candidates for early release may have been a dozen prisoners at the Zoo who were placed under a Cuban officer they called "Fidel." The Cuban's approach was to torture these men until they were so compliant that they would do anything--even express gratitude for an

early release and (most unlikely) not divulge their torture afterward. The North Vietnamese never agreed that this was the sort of prisoner they would be wise to send home anytime soon. Fidel's experiment finally ended when he encountered two especially resistant prisoners. Major Kasler (still suffering from infection in a severe leg wound received when he ejected from his aircraft two years before) and Capt. Earl G. Cobeil endured days of floggings. Cobeil went out of his mind, stopped eating, and died.[44]

While Hanoi's prison authorities sorted through their American prisoners for suitable candidates to release, the Viet Cong freed three American soldiers held in South Vietnam. They were sent to Phnom Penh, where they were turned over to an American anti-war activist, Thomas E. Hayden. A founder of the major left-wing student organization in the United States, the Students for a Democratic Society, Hayden had just paid his second visit to Hanoi. On his first visit in 1965 he had come as a junior partner of two historians, Herbert Aptheker (a communist) and Staughton Lynd (a Quaker professor at Yale). In the fall of 1967, Hayden led a group of young activists, including Rennard C. Davis (who would join Hayden the following year to organize demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago). Having hosted many such visitors, the North Vietnamese took Hayden's group to see the usual attractions--bomb damage, bombs which had not detonated, and American prisoners. The activists quarreled among themselves about whether to believe a prisoner who said not only that he was

treated well but that he opposed the war. They had been urging the communists to release some prisoners as a step toward negotiations, and Hayden agreed to escort from Phnom Penh to New York three American soldiers captured in South Vietnam.[45]

Three months later during the communist Tet 1968 offensive, Hanoi freed three American pilots shot down over North Vietnam. This time the American peace movement sent Father Daniel Berrigan and Professor Howard Zinn of Boston University to escort the three. Berrigan and his brother Philip had persuaded many young men to burn their draft cards; these two Jesuit priests would themselves go to prison for destroying government records kept by a draft board. At a press conference in Hanoi, Berrigan condemned American bombing of North Vietnamese women, children, schools, hospitals and churches. While all three pilots made obligatory statements thanking the North Vietnamese for humane treatment and release, the most junior (Ensign David P. Matheny) was alone designated by the North Vietnamese to talk to the press.[46]

The only way Americans could enter and depart Hanoi peacefully was by means of the weekly International Control Commission plane from Vientiane, Laos. Berrigan took his charges to Vientiane, where he planned to transfer them to a commercial flight. But Ambassador William H. Sullivan met the Commission plane when it landed and explained to Lt. Col. Norris M. Overly (the senior prisoner released) that the White House preferred they

return by military air, which they agreed to do despite heated objections from Berrigan and Zinn.

The willingness of Overly, Matheny, and Air Force Capt. Jon D. Black to accept early release disgusted fellow prisoners, but Washington was eager to get the intelligence they brought with them. Although the North Vietnamese had been careful to select pilots recently captured and held under relatively mild conditions at the Plantation, the three were able to convey useful information. Thanks to the excellence of prison communications, they could name many prisoners they had not met and recount examples of torture they had not experienced. Matheny had memorized more than seventy names and said that he himself had been subjected to the rope torture.

Overly spent most of his five months in prison caring for two badly injured cellmates, Lt. Commander John S. McCain II and Maj. George E. ("Bud") Day. McCain was the son of an admiral who would soon become Commander in Chief Pacific, and the North Vietnamese may have wanted Overly to convey the message that McCain (who had broken three limbs and a shoulder ejecting from his A-4) was receiving good medical care. Overly did report that McCain believed his surgeons were respected by other Vietnamese. On the other hand, McCain had been beaten and denied medical attention until he agreed to talk and his captors discovered the identity of his father.[47]

When McCain was put in Overly's cell, Overly was already attending to the needs of his other cellmate, Major Day, who despite a broken arm and

wrenched knee had managed to escape from his captors near the Demilitarized Zone. While he struggled through the jungle for two weeks, Day was wounded by an American bomb or rocket and by Viet Cong bullets. He made it to South Vietnam before being recaptured and severely tortured to the point of breaking his wrist. After the war and more than five years in prison, Day would come home to receive the Medal of Honor.[48]

For fear of retarding negotiations and in the hope that more prisoners might be released, the Johnson administration chose to keep quiet about mounting evidence of torture. That evidence was not limited to the testimony of released prisoners. Other intelligence illuminated the grim recesses of the prisoners' predicament. Instead of making public revelations, however, the Johnson administration sought to protect intelligence sources.[49]

It did turn out to be the case that Hanoi's periodic releases of American airmen stopped for three years after the Nixon administration permitted returning prisoners to talk publicly about torture. By then nine prisoners (three groups of three) had come home from Hanoi. The second and third groups took commercial flights from Laos to New York for fear of hurting chances for further releases by offending Hanoi and the antiwar activists. The second group included Maj. James F. Low, one of the three Korean War aces imprisoned in Hanoi. The other two aces, Colonel Risner and Major Kasler, led fellow prisoners in resisting their captors. Although Low was tortured at first, he was careful to refer to the experience as "punishment" and to hide the

fact that he was an ace. The North Vietnamese had read about Risner and Kasler in the American press, but they did not learn about Low's aerial victories until after he was released in August 1968.[50]

The third group of three prisoners was not released by Hanoi until August 1969. Since air operations (and therefore aircraft losses) over North Vietnam had been curtailed in 1968, this third group had been held in captivity much longer than its predecessors. They knew a lot about prison life in Hanoi, and one of them, Seaman Apprentice Douglas B. Hegdahl, came home with the approval of the prisoner leadership. Hegdahl was a special case in many respects. He was not aircrew--he had fallen off his ship in the spring of 1967. With this beginning, the North Vietnamese were inclined to view him as a stupid boy rather than a war criminal like the airmen. Hegdahl was bright enough to play the role of dunce to the hilt.[51]

Hegdahl and the two officers in the third group had memorized more than three hundred names of fellow prisoners. In addition to information of that kind, the three also brought a request for official guidance on the propriety of accepting early release. Through a prearranged overt signal, the U.S. government was to tell prisoners which of four policies they were to follow: no early release; or early release of sick and wounded only; or early release of sick, wounded and longtime prisoners only; or anyone is free to accept early release. The bureaucracy wrestled with this question for months. Although against trying to give the prisoners guidance, the Air Force agreed

with the Navy that the fourth alternative was preferable to the others. The Army's preference for the third alternative was largely overridden in the ultimate compromise: "The U.S. approves any honorable release and prefers sick and wounded and longtime prisoners first."[52]

When directed to introduce the new policy into training programs, Lt. Gen. Sam Maddux, Jr. (Air Training Command) objected that it ran counter to Article III of the Code of Conduct: "I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy."[53] This was precisely the view of the prisoner leadership in Hanoi. After the revelations of torture emerging from the 1969 release, Hanoi did not give its American prisoners a chance to act on the new U.S. policy until 1972. In any case, most of them continued to believe that early release was a violation of the Code of Conduct.

The prisoners' stance on early release might have inhibited a gradual exchange of prisoners had the North Vietnamese been so inclined. Following North Vietnam's first release in early 1968 of three American airmen, three captured North Vietnamese sailors had been returned to Hanoi on the International Control Commission plane. Accompanying them were two American editors, Harry S. Ashmore of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and William C. Baggs of the *Miami News*, who had been asked by the State Department to seek a broader prisoner exchange. The North Vietnamese seemed uninterested, and in any case this initiative was submerged in the

excitement over President Johnson's bombing cutback and announcement that he would not seek another term.[54]

American visitors to North Vietnam tended to have more sympathy for the North Vietnamese than for their American captives, especially because such visitors disapproved of the bombing campaign which the prisoners had waged. Prospective visitors likely to think otherwise were not given visas. During the Ashmore-Baggs visit, the most famous Americans staying at Hanoi's Thong Nhat (Reunification) Hotel were CBS television correspondent Charles Collingwood and novelist Mary McCarthy. In McCarthy's case, lack of sympathy for American prisoners hardened into disdain. After talking to Colonel Risner and another prisoner, she pronounced them "pathetic cases of mental malnutrition" who must make their charming captors wonder about the quality of an American college education--"naive, rote-thinking, childish."[55] She did guess that the prisoners did not entirely trust her, but the suspicion that they might have been tortured apparently never crossed her mind.[56]

Although Hanoi consistently rebuffed any proposal which would have involved the release of a large number of American prisoners before a cease-fire, the U.S. government continued to seek such an exchange especially after the Nixon admininstration took office. Secretary of Defense Laird was sensitive about having promised the prisoners' families that the prisoners would not be left stranded by Vietnamization. When American forces had left South Vietnam, how much leverage would the United States have to get a

prisoner exchange? Laird sought an exchange as soon as possible, but of course the North Vietnamese had little incentive to cooperate other than the return of their own men--an outcome which they seemed in no hurry to achieve.[57]

In early 1970 Laird enlisted the State Department in his campaign to persuade the South Vietnamese government to release as many as possible of its seven thousand North Vietnamese prisoners. President Thieu refused to release any able-bodied prisoners without assurance that the North Vietnamese would respond in a similar fashion, but he did send sixty-two disabled prisoners of war and twenty-four fishermen back to North Vietnam in July 1970.[58]

Although North Vietnam made no gesture in return, Thieu agreed in May 1971 to send more than five hundred sick and wounded prisoners. After the International Red Cross determined that only thirteen of these men wanted to return to North Vietnam, however, the North Vietnamese refused to accept any. It was an episode reminiscent of the Korean War, when the reluctance of Chinese prisoners to go home was for two years an impediment to a cease-fire. In both cases, the United States opposed forced repatriation and the communist governments sought to avoid the bad publicity surrounding the refusal of their men to return. There was also a superficial resemblance between the attitudes toward release of North Vietnamese and American

prisoners, but the Americans desperately wanted to go home--all together--and their countrymen were increasingly desperate to get them back.[59]

* * *

The same article of the Code of Conduct which enjoined American prisoners of war to refuse "parole," also urged them to "make every effort to escape and aid others to escape."[60] In contrast to the very strict interpretation most prisoners made of the "parole" clause (extending it to almost every kind of early release), they were inclined to water down the "escape" clause. Colonel Risner discouraged escape planning in 1966 by insisting that escape would not be feasible without outside help.[61] While Americans might be able to break out of jail, they could not blend into the local population.

The best opportunities for escape occurred soon after capture, especially near the Demilitarized Zone. In addition to Major Day's almost successful attempt, Captain Lance P. Sijan had evaded capture for six weeks and after capture managed to escape briefly. But starvation, injury, and torture took their toll, and Sijan did not survive to receive the Medal of Honor; he was the first Air Force Academy graduate to win that medal, and the Academy named a dormitory for him.[62]

Once a prisoner reached Hanoi, his chances for escape diminished. Only two escape attempts were mounted there during all the years of American captivity. The first and most promising grew out of the North Vietnamese decision to open a new prison in old buildings near the city's power

plant while it was under air attack in the summer of 1967. The prisoners called the main facility "Dirty Bird," because the power plant's coal dust covered everything. When Navy Lt.(j.g.) George T. Coker and Air Force Capt. George G. McNight were put into the nearby "Dirty Bird Annex," they saw opportunity in lax security procedures and proximity to the Red River. On the night of October 12, they removed the locks from their makeshift cell doors and stole away to the river. The current helped them swim perhaps fifteen miles before dawn forced them to seek cover on the bare, muddy bank. There they were discovered by peasants and recaptured.[63]

An encouraging aspect of the Coker-McKnight escape attempt was the lack of severe punishment afterward either for the recaptured men or their fellow prisoners. But the next attempt would lead to the worst weeks of torture experienced by prisoners at the large "Zoo" prison on the south side of Hanoi. There the abundance of airmen shot down in 1967 had led to the construction of an annex filled with more than seventy junior officers. Many of them and their fellow prisoners in the Zoo would suffer from the aborted escape of Air Force Captains John A. Dramesi and Edwin L. Atterberry.

Although Maj. Conrad W. Trautman, the senior officer in the annex, had grave doubts about an escape and refused to approve it, he could not bring himself to veto it. On a rainy Saturday night, May 10, 1969, Dramesi and Atterberry emerged from the roof of their cell, crossed the prison yard, and climbed the wall. Thanks to Atterberry's experience as a telephone lineman,

he knew how to short out the exposed electric wires running along the top of the wall. While the guards tried to get the lights back on by fiddling with the switch box, Dramesi and Atterberry slipped over the wall and used provisions laboriously gathered for months to disguise themselves as peasants carrying baskets on a shoulder pole. They passed through the streets undetected, but fearing daylight they hid in some bushes hours before dawn. There a few miles from the Zoo they were found by the soldiers sent to look for them.[64]

Atterberry died at the hands of North Vietnamese torturers. Dramesi again proved himself exceptionally tough. This was his second escape attempt--he had embarked on his first with a bullet wound in the right leg and a sprained left knee shortly after being shot down near Dong Hoi. Both times he survived his punishment ready to plan another escape. But Dramesi's intolerance of those less able to withstand torture and his persistent advocacy of escape had already made him unpopular. Many who endured torture on his account grew fervent in their opposition to escape attempts.[65]

The relationship between Dramesi's second escape attempt and torture was all the more memorable because this suffering was followed by a dramatic improvement in prison life. For most prisoners there was little or no torture after the death of Ho Chi Minh at age seventy-nine on September 3, 1969. Whether replacement of the prison system's commander and other positive changes flowed more from Ho's death or publicity about North Vietnamese

torture, few prisoners wanted to risk a return to torture for the sake of escape attempts with little prospect of success.

If outside help would be necessary for a successful escape, as Colonel Risner argued, then inmates of Hanoi's prisons could not have much hope of going home (on terms acceptable to most of them) before the end of the war. Short of invasion, American forces would have a hard time extracting prisoners from so well defended a city. Prospects for a rescue improved for prisoners held outside Hanoi. In the spring of 1970, Air Force intelligence analysts used photography to prove that American prisoners were being held in a compound about twenty-four miles west of Hanoi near the village of Son Tay. Construction to expand the facility had drawn attention, and the prisoners signalled their presence by arranging laundry and piles of dirt.[66]

This was not the first time that a prison camp had been established at Son Tay. During World War II the Japanese had imprisoned Vietnamese soldiers there, and at that time Nguyen Cao Ky (the future vice president of South Vietnam) was a boy in the village. Twenty-five years later in the summer of 1970, an American joint task group rehearsed a Son Tay rescue at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, where Air Force special operations training had been conducted throughout the Vietnam War.[67]

Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor commanded both the Air Force's Special Operations Force and the joint task group for the Son Tay raid. His combat experience dated back to World War II, when he had flown P-47s in Europe.

While commanding the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing at Phu Cat Air Base, South Vietnam, in 1968, Manor had flown missions into Route Package One. His second in command of the Son Tay task group was Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simons from the Army's Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Simons (a colorful veteran of World War II special operations in the Philippines) would lead the raiders to Son Tay, while Manor oversaw the operation from the communications center on Monkey Mountain, near Danang. Night after night the raiders practiced at Eglin with a Son Tay mock-up, which was dismantled during the day to prevent observation by a Soviet reconnaissance satellite.[68]

Manor's task group was ready in October, but President Nixon decided to postpone the operation until November--after the midterm election and after Nixon had been able to make an overture to China for better relations. A November date would also be further removed from Nixon's October 7th speech offering a cease-fire (with all forces left in place) and an exchange of all 30,000 communist prisoners in South Vietnamese prisons for the much smaller number of prisoners of war held by the communists. Since Manor wanted a quarter moon to provide enough but not too much light, the only suitable nights were November 21-25.[69]

Manor's task group arrived at Takhli Air Base, Thailand, on November 18, 1970. After five years of combat operations there, the F-105s of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing had just left Southeast Asia as part of Nixon's

drawdown. Unfortunately Takhli no longer had secure telecommunications with Seventh Air Force headquarters or the command center on Monkey Mountain. While a makeshift system was put in place, two T-39s shuttled weather reports from Saigon to Takhli, where Manor remained until a few hours before the raid. By the 20th of November, Manor was convinced that Typhoon Patsy would make the mission doubtful for any of the designated nights (November 21-25), and he decided to launch it one night early.[70]

Colonel Simons loaded the fifty-five soldiers in his raiding party aboard a transport plane, which took them to Udorn Air Base where they were transferred to three of the six Air Force helicopters headed for Son Tay. After aerial refueling over Laos, the six helicopters and five A-1 propeller-driven attack aircraft were led into North Vietnam by two C-130E four-engine transports equipped for special operations. When they reached the prison camp, the C-130s climbed to fifteen hundred feet and dropped flares over both the prison and a nearby army training center.[71]

Fire-fight simulators were also dropped near the training center to decoy enemy troops there. This measure proved unnecessary, because Simons' helicopter landed at the training center (possibly staffed by Chinese soldiers) instead of at the prison as planned--a fortunate error which killed and wounded scores of enemy soldiers without loss to Simons' force. The prison itself was less well defended, for the prisoners had been moved out three months earlier, even before Manor's task group had been formed. The raiders

penetrated almost to the heart of North Vietnam and came home with one slight bullet wound, a broken ankle, and no liberated prisoners.[72]

Henry Kissinger would blame raiding this empty prison on an "egregious failure of intelligence," but a few days before the raid the Defense Intelligence Agency had concluded that the prisoners had probably been moved.[73] Secretary of Defense Laird and Admiral Moorer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, went ahead with the raid anyway, probably after talking to Nixon (if not Kissinger) about the latest intelligence estimate.[74] When Laird testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he omitted any mention of that estimate and repeatedly declared that reconnaissance cameras could not see through roofs.[75]

Senator Fulbright and many of his colleagues on the committee were upset not only about the raid but also about air strikes which had been conducted the next day against the panhandle of North Vietnam. Indeed there was considerable confusion between these two operations. The administration initially announced only the strikes conducted in the panhandle on November 21. But Hanoi complained to the press about bombing near Hanoi and even claimed that American prisoners had been wounded when their prison was attacked. In the wake of these charges, Secretary Laird began to tell the nation about the Son Tay raid.[76]

Laird introduced Manor and Simons at a press conference and told how Navy airmen had drawn enemy attention away from the raiders by dropping

flares near Haiphong (they were not permitted to drop bombs). Unfortunately even then Laird held important parts of the story back. Gradually the press learned that both Navy and Air Force fighters had preoccupied enemy air defenses by firing Shrike missiles at enemy surface-to-air missile radars near Hanoi and Haiphong, that one of these fighters (an Air Force F-105 Wild Weasel) had been hit by a SAM and could only return as far as Laos before the crew had to eject (they were both rescued), that Air Force A-1s had strafed a bridge near the prison to cut off enemy troops, and that the Son Tay raiders had attacked another enemy installation near the prison. Poor handling of the Son Tay story left many Americans with the impression that their government had resumed bombing in the Red River Valley and then lied about it.[77]

The Nixon administration had displayed a certain wisdom in running two politically risky operations back to back. As with the Cambodian incursion and bombing of the North Vietnamese panhandle in the spring, the level of criticism spurred by two operations did not appear greater than would have accompanied only one. Indeed even in failure the Son Tay raid caught the imagination of many sufficiently to blunt barbs aimed at bombing in the panhandle.

On the other hand, it was difficult to prove that six hours of bombing in the panhandle had accomplished much. As with the bigger operation in the spring, the Nixon administration called the strikes of November 21 "protective reaction," but now anonymous Defense Department officials readily leaked the

fact that fighter bombers were attacking not only SAM and gun sites but also supplies stored in preparation for the dry season surge down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Soon the network of roads in Laos would dry sufficiently to support the heavier truck traffic necessary to carry those supplies to South Vietnam.[78]

As for SAMs and antiaircraft artillery in the North Vietnamese panhandle, they threatened not only reconnaissance planes in North Vietnam itself, but also B-52s and fighter-bombers attacking the transportation system in Laos. It was nonetheless true that the Nixon administration hoped to persuade the North Vietnamese to quit firing at their reconnaissance planes over North Vietnam. After the May 1970 strikes, reconnaissance planes had encountered little resistance until an Air Force RF-4C was shot down on Friday, November 13, with the loss of both crew members.[79]

The Freedom Bait protective reaction strikes of November 21 lasted only six hours because Typhoon Patsy was bearing down on the Vietnamese coast. Seventh Air Force and Seventh Fleet managed to send more than two hundred strike sorties (mostly Air Force F-4s and Navy A-7s) before weather closed the operation. Needless to say bomb damage assessment amounted to anybody's guess. The crews claimed to have hit perhaps ninety trucks and started fires at three fuel dumps, but were less certain about SAM sites. As the Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral McCain, informed Admiral Moorer, four SAM sites may have been hit, but "only two indications of possible SAM associated equipment were noted."[80]

Afterward the wings involved made known their unhappiness with the way Freedom Bait had been run. On the evening of November 20, Seventh Air Force had informed the wings at Udorn, Ubon, and Korat, Thailand, as well as Danang and Phu Cat, South Vietnam, that they would soon launch the sorties for which they had already been sent sealed target materials. Not until after midnight were they permitted to look at those materials and then only for targets assigned to the particular wing. That restriction was especially irritating to the 388th at Korat, which was expected to provide Wild Weasel support for the other wings.[81]

Scarcity of time to prepare for Freedom Bait was the result of the special demands for secrecy thought necessary if the Son Tay rescue mission was not to be endangered. Freedom Bait orders were sent in the most secure and slowest "back channel" messages. Seventh Air Force started sending the fragmentary order specifying the contributions of Udorn's 432d before 7 p.m. on November 20th, but the wing did not receive the order until after midnight.[82]

Meanwhile the wings were flying routine night missions as well as supporting the Son Tay rescue and preparing to fly the routine day missions which they had already been assigned. The latter were not cancelled until 7 a.m., little more than three hours before the wings launched their biggest operation in six months. As they scrambled to prepare for Freedom Bait, the wings had trouble believing that they would actually fly these missions in the

face of the oncoming typhoon. But at 4 a.m. on the 21st, as soon as the Son Tay raiders had returned, the wings were told to execute Freedom Bait.[83]

Per instruction the wings hit their Freedom Bait targets with waves of a dozen strike aircraft very much in the fashion of the old Rolling Thunder strikes in Route Package Six. The aircrews would have preferred breaking the waves down into flights of four or elements of two in the armed reconnaissance mode customarily used in Route Package One and on the Trail. Panhandle air defenses and targets did not appear to justify the more cumbersome formation, which permitted many trucks spotted by forward air controllers to escape unscathed.[84]

As so often in the air war over North Vietnam, Freedom Bait and the Son Tay raid had less to do with hurting the enemy than with signalling to him. This time the signal did some good, while costing no American lives and only one aircraft--the F-105 Wild Weasel lost defending the raiders. The principal beneficiaries of the raid were the American prisoners in North Vietnam. Fearing another rescue attempt, the North Vietnamese emptied the outlying prison camps and concentrated their American prisoners in downtown Hanoi at Hoa Lo, the "Hanoi Hilton." Even the "Zoo" on the edge of the city was vacated for a time. At the Hilton more than three hundred American prisoners had to be housed in open bay cells, with twenty to fifty men in a cell.[85]

The sudden privilege of associating openly with many of their fellow prisoners was a great morale boost, and the men dubbed their open bay cells "Camp Unity." The senior prisoner, Col. John P. Flynn, took command of the 4th Allied Prisoner of War Wing--so called because Americans were engaging in their fourth allied war effort of the twentieth century and a few of their South Vietnamese and Thai allies were imprisoned with them. The North Vietnamese were soon sending prisoners deemed troublemakers away from Camp Unity, some of them to camps outside Hanoi. But for most of North Vietnam's American prisoners, prison life had finally come to resemble the German prison camps in World War II.[86]

The Nixon administration portrayed the Son Tay raid as an attempt not only to shorten imprisonment but more than that to save American lives. The North Vietnamese had recently given Cora Weiss, an anti-war activist from New York City, the names of seventeen Americans who had died in North Vietnam--including eleven for whom the United States had evidence of capture. In the case of Air Force Capt. Wilmer N. Grubb, the North Vietnamese had released photographs of him in apparent good health after his capture in January 1966. In November 1970 they revealed not only that Grubb had died but also that his death had occurred only nine days after capture--before communist newspapers published his photograph.[87]

Although release of the dead men's names was a positive step in the somewhat more humane policy which North Vietnam had begun to implement

a year earlier, those names conveyed the impression of a situation more desperate than the prisoners' ameliorating plight had become. With regard to Son Tay, this impression was made all the more vivid by reasonable but unfounded speculation that the North Vietnamese might send away from Hanoi the prisoners in worst shape so that they would not be seen by visitors.

The sense of urgency stirred by the Weiss list helped to blunt qualms of the prisoners' families about the risks that the Son Tay raid necessarily took with the prisoners' lives. Although the raid's positive impact on the prisoners could not then be known by their wives and parents, the League of Families applauded the raid as proof that the Nixon administration really wanted to do something for the men who had been imprisoned for so long. A few of the families broke with their leadership, and one wife criticized the rescue attempt as a cynical ploy which "wiped the bombing raids right out of the headlines."[88] Most of the families who spoke to the press, however, were enthusiastic.

The wife of Air Force Capt. Howard J. Hill, for example, did not know that her husband was about to be moved to a better environment at the "Hilton" from a camp west of Hanoi. But she told the press that she was "screaming with sheer joy" and that the raid would not lead to worse conditions for her husband: "If anything, I think Hanoi will afford them better treatment. If the helicopters had brought out men in terrible condition, some maybe on the verge of death, how would that have looked for North Vietnam?"[89]

Notes

Chapter 7

Prisoners and Other Survivors

1. Marie Smith, "Support for the Captives' Families," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1970, p 4.

2. "Summary of Efforts to Date on Behalf of PW/MIA," 1972, AFHRC K143.430-13; "Operation Homecoming from Inception to Implementation, 1964-1973," AFHRC 1015703; staff summary sheet and attachments, Lt Col Kloberdanz, HQ USAF/XPPGS, subj: Correspondence to Mrs. Rita E. Hauser [UN], Mar 11, 1970, John D. Ryan papers, AFHRC 1024030.

3. Jim and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam Years* (New York, 1984), pp 372-76.

4. Robert and Elizabeth Dole with Richard Norton Smith, *Doles: Unlimited Partners* (New York, 1988); histories, 23 TFW, Jan 1966 - Dec 1970.

5. Minutes, Interagency Prisoner of War Intelligence Ad Hoc Committee, esp 1970 mtgs, AFHRC 1018954-14.

6. *MiG Sweep*, newsletter of the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association, Jul 1969.

7. Gardner Hatch and Patti Sheridan, eds, *Red River Valley Fighter Pilots* (Paducah, Kentucky, 1989), pp 27-28.

8. Ltr with numerous attachments, Amarjit Sing Vasir, Bangkok, to author, Dec 18, 1987; Intvw, author with Amarjit Singh Vasir, Pattaya, Thailand, Nov 7, 1987.

9. Some pilots did think that many prisoners were second-rate pilots. See Zalin Grant, *Over the Beach* (New York, 1986), p 288, who quotes a Navy pilot: "But a sizable portion of the POWs were fuckups. They got shot down either because of their fear or out of stupidity." There was a widespread conviction that increased pilot experience would increase effectiveness and reduce losses. However, the major study of this relationship during the Vietnam War looked only at air-to-air combat, where despite a relatively small number of engagements, a correlation was found. See USAF Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, Project Red Baron III, Vol III, Part 1, pp 127-53.

10. *New York Times*, Jun 5, 1970, p 8.

11. Ibid.; Arthur Scheer, "H. Ross Perot," in Eleanor W. Schoenebaum, ed., *Profiles of an Era: The Nixon / Ford Years* (New York, 1979), pp 493-94.

12. Allan E. Goodman, *The Lost Peace: America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Stanford, 1978), pp 78-122; Gareth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam, and the Paris Agreement* (Bloomington, Indian, 1975), pp 79-101.

13. John P. Wallach, "Bombing Cutback Offer Linked to POW Release," *Baltimore News American*, Oct 14, 1969, p 1.

14. Richard Nixon, "Statement on Appointing Frank Borman as Special Representative on Prisoners of War," *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1970 (Washington, 1971), pp 649-50; *RN*, pp 448 and 531. See also Henry Kissinger memo for Secretaries of State and Defense, Jan 22, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-6; minutes, DOD POW Policy Committee, Mar 9, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-6; minutes, Interagency POW Intelligence Ad Hoc Committee, Aug 7, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-14.

15. Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, pp 297-99.

16. Gloria Emerson, *Winners and Losers* (New York, 1976), pp 342-50; *Life*, Jul 17, 1970, pp 26-29.

17. The complete text of Borman's speech was given wide distribution by the State Department both in the *Department of State Bulletin*, Oct 12, 1970, and as a pamphlet entitled "U.S. Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia." See also State Department messages relating to Borman's trip in AFHRC 1018953-16.

18. Article 85, Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 1949.

19. North Vietnam's reservation to Article 85 is quoted in Richard A. Falk, ed., *The Vietnam War and International Law*, III (Princeton, 1972), 895.

20. *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal* (New York, 1968).

21. Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 4th ed (New York, 1967), pp 295-311.

22. Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny* (New York, 1963); William Lindsay White, *The Captives of Korea* (New York, 1957).

23. Ibid. See John G. Hubbell, *P.O.W.* (New York, 1976), for a survey of the American prison experience in North Vietnam. One prisoner, Lt. Cmdr. John M. McGrath, taught himself to draw; his drawings of various methods of torture can be seen in his *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi* (Annapolis, 1975). Many of the prisoners have published memoirs; these have been discussed by Craig Howes, *Voices of the Vietnam POWs* (New

York, 1993) and Elliott Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POWs* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1993).

24. Intvw, Capt Mark C. Cleary, AFHRC, with Col Carlyle S. Harris, Tupelo, Miss, Nov 16, 1982, AFHRC K239.0512-1359.

25. Everett Alvarez, Jr., and Anthony S. Pitch, *Chained Eagle* (New York, 1989), p 164. See also Henry James Bedinger, "Prisoner-of-War Organization in Hanoi," MA thesis, San Diego State University, 1976.

26. HQ USAF, SEA PW Analysis Program Report 800-2, "Places and Dates of Confinement of Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps Prisoners of War Held in North Vietnam, 1964-73," Jun 1975.

27. Capt. Gerald Coffee (USN, Ret), *Beyond Survival: Building on Hard Times--A POW's Inspiring Story* (New York, 1990), pp 195-22.

28. Intvw, Capt Mark C. Cleary, AFHRC, with Brig Gen Robinson Risner, Austin TX, Mar 1-2, 1983, AFHRC K239.0512-1370; Risner, *The Passing of the Night: My Seven Years as a Prisoner of the North Vietnamese* (New York, 1973); Gen T. R. Milton, "Robinson Risner: The Indispensable Ingredient," in John L. Frisbee, ed., *Makers of the United States Air Force* (Washington, 1987), pp 307-27; Col Jon B. Reynolds, "The Eagle in the Hilton," *Air Force Magazine*, Feb 1983, pp 82-85.

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30. Risner, *Passing of the Night*, p 31.

31. On German imprisonment of American airmen in World War II, see Arthur A. Durand, *Stalag Luft III* (Baton Rouge, 1988). On Japanese prison camps, see E. Bartlett Kerr, *Surrender and Survival: The Experience of American POWs in the Pacific, 1941-1945* (New York, 1985), and Stanley L. Falk, *Bataan: The March of Death* (New York, 1962). For a survey of the prisoner of war experience from the Hundred Years War to the Vietnam War, see Richard Garrett, *P.O.W.* (London, 1981).

32. Executive Order 10631, Aug 17, 1955.

33. *Report of the Air Force Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War*, Nov 1963.

34. Suggested Training and Education Guide for the Code of Conduct, Aug 1955, section 2d(3), in Ibid., p 53.

35. Ibid., section 3a, p 54.

36. *Report of the Air force Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War*, Nov 1963, p 94.

37. Ibid., pp 27-28.

38. Ibid., pp 92-93.

39. Stockdale, *In Love and War*, pp 332-36; Denton, *When Hell Was in Session*, pp 89-98; Scott Blakey, *Prisoner at War: The Survival of Commander Richard A. Stratton* (New York, 1978), pp 113-37; Hubbell, *P.O.W.*, pp 240-43, 265-69.

40. Hubbell, pp 183-99.

41. Daniel De Luce, "Hanoi Displays Defenses Against U.S. Air Radio [*sic*]," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Mar 2, 1970; Maj Gen Frederick C. Blesse, *Check Six: A Fighter Pilot Looks Back* (Mesa, Arizona, 1987), pp 128-130.

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43. Stockdale, pp 253-54.

44. HQ USAF, "The Special Exploitation Program for Selected United States Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1967-1968," Jun 1975, AFCHO K142.04-31; Guarino, pp 426-28; Alvarez, pp 186-87; Hubbell, pp 320-48, 429-49.

45. Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York, 1988), pp 175-241. See also Staughton Lynd and Thomas Hayden, *The Other Side* (New York, 1967) and Herbert Aptheker, *Mission to Hanoi* (New York, 1966).

46. Maj. James B. Overton, *Enemy Capture/Release of USAF Personnel in SEA* (Project CHECO, Hickam AFB, Hawaii, 1969); Daniel Berrigan, *Night Flight to Hanoi* (New York, 1968).

47. Ibid.

48. Col George E. Day, *Return with Honor* (Mesa, Ariz., 1989); Maj Donald K. Schneider, *Air Force Heroes in Vietnam* (Maxwell AFB, Alabama, 1979), pp 54-59.

49. Stockdale, *In Love and War*, especially pp 207-13 and 456.

50. Overton, pp 43-79. See also Corona Harvest intvws with Maj Joe V. Carpenter and Maj Fred N. Thompson, Jun 1970, AFHRC K239.0512-284 and 283; Thompson and Carpenter, *Facing Interrogation*, Corona Harvest Special Report #70-17 (Maxwell AFB, Alabama, 1970).

51. Hubbell, pp 252-87, 312-78, 506-08.

52. Memo for service secretaries from G. Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, subj: DOD Policy on Early Release of POWs by the Enemy, Jul 3, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-1. See also Nutter memo of Nov 22, 1969, and Charles W. Havens III memo of Dec 1, 1969, AFHRC 1018964-30; minutes of DOD POW Policy Committee and Subcommittee, especially Jan 29, 1970, and Mar 9, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-6; minutes of the Air Staff E&E/POW Committee, especially Mar 2, 1970, AFHRC 1018954-16.

53. Excerpt from the Code of Conduct quoted by Lt Gen Maddox, Cmdr ATC, ltr to HQ USAF, subj: DOD Policy on Early Release of PW's by the Enemy, Aug 26, 1970, AFHRC 1018964-30.

54. Harry S. Ashmore and William C. Baggs, *Mission to Hanoi: A Chronicle of Double-Dealing in High Places* (New York, 1968), pp 112-73.

55. Mary McCarthy, *Hanoi* (New York, 1968), p 111.

56. Ibid., p 112.

57. Hist, JCS, *Vietnam*, 1969-70, pp 501-08.

58. Ibid.

59. Hist, JCS, *Vietnam*, 1971-72, pp 587-88. On negotiations to end the Korean War, see U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-54, vol XV.

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61. Lt Col John A. Dramesi, USAF, *Code of Honor* (New York, 1975), pp 105 and 196-97.

62. Schneider, *Heroes*, pp 54-61.

63. HQ USAF, "US Aircrew Members Escape from Permanent Detention Facilities in North Vietnam," Nov 1975, AFCHO K142.04-33, pp 5-12; Hubbell, pp 355-60..

64. See note above; Dramesi, pp 85-119.

65. HQ USAF, "U.S. Aircrew Members Escape from Permanent Detention Facilities in North Vietnam," Nov 1975, AFCHO K142.04-33, pp 46-48; Guarino, pp 195-208, 283-301; Lt Col Jon A. Reynolds, "Question of Honor," *Air University Review*, Mar-Apr 1977, pp 104-10; Dramesi, pp 22-34.

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67. Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War* (San Rafael, Calif, 1978), pp 1, 16-17, 20-21.

68. Intvw, Charles Hildreth and William McQuillen, Air Force historians, with Brig. Gen. Manor, Eglin AFB, Dec 31, 1970, AFHRC 239.0512-700; rpt, Manor, subj: Son Tay prisoner of war rescue operation, Dec 18, 1970, AFHRC; hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, senate, *Bombing Operations and the Prisoner-of-War Rescue Mission in North Vietnam, 91st Cong, 2d sess* (Washington, 1970).

69. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Nixon, 1970, pp 825-31; Manor intvw; Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp 699-701, 980-82; Hersh, *The Price of Power*, p 304; Schermer, pp 114-15; Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1993), p 62.

70. Manor rpt; Manor intvw.

71. Manor rpt.

72. Ibid.; Schemmer, pp 168-71.

73. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p 982.

74. Schemmer, p 148. But Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., "U.S. Intelligence and Vietnam," *Studies in Intelligence*, Special Issue, CIA, 1984, p 84, found no evidence to support Schemmer's contention that Laird told Nixon.

75. Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Senate, *Bombing Operations and the Prisoner-of-War Rescue Mission in North Vietnam*, 91st Cong, 2d sess (Washington, 1970), pp 7, 9 and 22.

76. William Beecher, "U.S. Rescue Force Landed 23 Miles from Hanoi," *New York Times*, Nov 24, 1970, p 1; George C. Wilson, "Helicopter Force Hits Camp Near Hanoi," *Washington Post*, Nov 24, 1970, p 1; Charles W. Cordry, "Helcopter Force Finds Camp West of Hanoi Vacated," *Baltimore Sun*, Nov 24, 1970, p 1.

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78. William Beecher, "Laird Says Raids Struck at Missile and Gun Sites," *New York Times*, Nov 22, 1970, p 1; Peter Braestrup, "Air Raids Limited, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1970, p 1.

79. PACAF, *Southeast Asia Summary*, Nov 1970.

80. Msg, McCain to Moorer, subj: SAM sites in RP-1 and Freedom Bait, 230320Z Nov 70, AFHRC CHECO microfilm roll T94.

81. Ltr, Col Irby B. Jarvis, Cmdr 388 TFW to 7 AF/DO, with att rpt, undated, AFHRC CHECO microfilm roll T96.

82. Ltr, Col H. E. Hayes, Dep Cmdr for Ops, 432 TRW to 7 AF/DO, undated, AFHRC CHECO microfilm roll T96.

83. Ltr, Col Daniel C. Perry, Cmdr, 366 TFW to 7 AF/DO, Nov 24, 1970; msg, hand carried, 8 TFW to 7 AF, 241130Z Nov 1970; both in AFHRC CHECO microfilm roll T96.

84. Ltr, Col H. E. Hayes, Dep Cmdr for Ops, 432 TRW to 7 AF/DO, undated, AFHRC CHECO microfilm roll T96.

85. Guarino, pp 270-301; Hubbell, pp 536-53.

86. HQ USAF, "Places and Dates of Confinement of Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps Prisoners of War Held in North Vietnam, 1964-73," Jun 1975, AFCHO K142.04-13.

87. Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Senate, *Bombing Operations and the Prisoner-of-War Rescue Mission in North Vietnam*, 91st Cong, 2d sess (Washington, 1970), pp 1-2, 25, and 47; Schemmer, pp 135 and 193.

88. Valerie Kushner quoted by George Lardner, Jr., "POW Families Praise Rescue Attempt," *Washington Post*, Nov 25, 1970.

89. Mrs. Howard J. Hill quoted by Lardner.

CHAPTER 8

THE LAVELLE AFFAIR

Curiosity about the attempt to rescue prisoners at Son Tay was especially strong among those who knew men imprisoned in North Vietnam. Many within the Air Force had worked with those men, and occasionally personal relationships ran back further than service together. Lt. Gen. John D. Lavelle had first met Colonel Flynn, the highest ranking prisoner, when they were boys attending the Catholic schools of Cleveland, Ohio. Lavelle was six years older and had dated Flynn's sister. But Lavelle had a still more direct connection with the raid, and the fragile character of that connection confirmed the depth to which his own career seemed to have fallen.[1]

Although Lavelle was Vice Commander in Chief of Pacific Air Forces, he was told nothing about the raid in advance or even afterward--until he watched Secretary Laird brief the nation on television. Lavelle's boss, Gen. Joseph Nazzaro, had been briefed together with key members of his staff, a group from which Lavelle was obviously excluded. During the raid, Nazzaro was away from headquarters on one of his frequent trips to see his farflung

units; as usual he was accompanied by the key members of his staff. When intelligence reported a very high volume of North Vietnamese radio traffic, Lavelle tried to inform Admiral McCain, Commander in Chief Pacific, and was finally told by one of McCain's subordinates to ignore the whole matter.[2]

After years of pressure-filled jobs of considerable importance, Lavelle found himself merely minding the store. An early attempt to make a decision while his boss was away was quickly quashed when Nazzaro returned. Yet despite a lack of authority, Lavelle was expected to remain on Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, whenever Nazzaro was off base even for a few hours. This meant that every time Lavelle wanted to leave the base, he had to ask Nazzaro for permission.[3]

Lavelle blamed his predicament on the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Ryan, with whom Lavelle had some disagreements during his previous assignment. They were very different personalities. Ryan was careful, quiet, almost taciturn. Lavelle was gregarious and impulsive.

Before his encounters with Ryan, Lavelle's impulsiveness had already caused him difficulties. As Seventeenth Air Force commander in 1967, Lavelle nearly sent his alert force at Wheelus Air Base, Libya, to intercept unidentified Algerian MiGs on their way to land at a nearby airport; any confrontation might have been explosive, because Libyans were already rioting against American support of Israel in the Six Day War. Lavelle got in trouble even for having his men start their engines, but he held them on the ground and

although his next assignment came sooner than expected, it was an important one.[4]

For nearly three years, Lavelle directed the Defense Communications Planning Group, the joint organization which had been set up in Washington to implement Secretary of Defense McNamara's plans to build a physical and electronic barrier against North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam. Lavelle took over the group just before McNamara's departure and helped refocus the project on its Air Force component, a sensor field on the Ho Chi Minh Trail monitored by Task Force Alpha at Nakhom Phanom Air Base, Thailand.[5]

In pushing the Air Force component of the barrier project, Lavelle got little opposition from the other services. The Marines had been expected to build a well-defended fence along the Demilitarized Zone from the coast thirty miles inland, and they were glad to avoid their participation in what seemed to them a bad idea. But General Ryan was skeptical about the effectiveness of the sensors and he did not want to contribute the specially equipped F-4s necessary to drop them accurately--using Long Range Navigation (LORAN) electronic ground beacons. At one point Lavelle even offered to resign both from his joint job and the Air Force. Nevertheless Ryan did perceive advantages in Lavelle's project (including funding for new munitions, plus LORAN's utility for all-weather bombing even without sensors), and the Ryan-Lavelle relationship did not run aground on the barrier.[6]

Sensing that his career prospects might improve if he returned to the Air Force, Lavelle made it known that he wanted an Air Force assignment. Ryan offered him management of the Lockheed plant manufacturing the controversial C-5 giant transport. Lavelle replied that despite C-5 cost overruns, the Air Force should not try to take over management of the plant, and he persuaded Undersecretary John L. McLucas to join him in opposition. Ryan seemed so angry that Lavelle believed his career was finished, an interpretation which in his view was reinforced regularly by his new boss, General Nazzaro.[7]

Less than a year after assigning Lavelle to Hawaii, however, General Ryan gave him a fourth star and sent him to Saigon as Seventh Air Force Commander. When Lavelle took command at the end of July 1971, he looked like a natural choice, because his predecessor at Seventh Air Force, Gen. Lucius D. Clay, Jr., had also preceded him as Vice Commander in Chief of Pacific Air Forces; now Clay was returning to replace Nazzaro, who was retiring. But Lavelle was not inclined to give Ryan much credit for the promotion, which Lavelle concluded was the result of a recommendation by his new Army boss, General Abrams. Lavelle had become well acquainted with Abrams while working on the barrier, and Lavelle had learned that Clay's predecessor as Seventh Air Force Commander, General Brown, had lobbied for either Lavelle or Gen. J. C. Meyer (Ryan's Vice Chief of Staff) to become Seventh Air Force Commander when Ryan gave Clay the job.[8]

While Ryan this time went along with Lavelle's promotion, there was evidence that the Chief of Staff saw the job of Seventh Air Force Commander as one of diminishing importance. After all, most American armed forces were apt to be out of South Vietnam well before the 1972 presidential election, and Thailand was less and less enthusiastic about playing host to large American forces. Before going to take command in Vietnam, Lavelle spent a week in Washington trying to see Ryan, but had to settle for a meeting with the Vice Chief of Staff. Meyer gave no instructions other than to improve relations with the Army.[9]

Lavelle found that the trouble which had been brewing between the Army and Air Force staffs in Saigon revolved around the two intelligence chiefs. Since Lavelle's intelligence chief was about to rotate anyway, this problem was soon resolved. But Lavelle's major problems were only just beginning.

As the southwest monsoon spent itself, the North Vietnamese began to prepare for their annual supply surge through the Laotian panhandle from November to March. It became increasingly apparent that this year's surge was going to be much better protected than ever before. In addition to the antiaircraft artillery which had been the mainstay of air defense in the adjacent Laotian and North Vietnamese panhandles, the North Vietnamese increased the number of active surface-to-air missile sites in the North Vietnamese panhandle from two or three to a dozen, and for the first time sites

were suspected in Laos itself. Meanwhile the North Vietnamese had built a new all-weather pierced-steel-plank runway at Quan Lang on the Laotian border west of Vinh (not Quang Lang, which is closer to Vinh), and they were repairing the fair-weather airfield at Dong Hoi only thirty-five miles north of the Demilitarized Zone.[10]

The air defense environment in the panhandles of North Vietnam and Laos was beginning to bear a resemblance to the more formidable one near Hanoi and Haiphong. Fears for the survival of B-52s in such an environment increased on October 4, when for the first time a MiG tried to intercept B-52s in Laos. On November 20, a MiG fired a missile at a B-52 near the Mu Gia Pass. Although no B-52s were lost to MiGs or SAMs during the during the 1971-72 supply surge, a SAM did bring down a C-130 gunship in Laos at the end of March. By then General Lavelle's efforts to combat North Vietnam's buildup and its air defenses had got him into a lot of trouble.[11]

On March 23, 1972, General Lavelle was recalled to Washington, where General Ryan secured his relief as Commander of Seventh Air Force for employing a system of false reporting to cover up unauthorized raids into North Vietnam. General Lavelle insisted that he had been encouraged by his bosses to conduct such raids and that false reporting was the result of misunderstanding and overzealousness on the part of subordinates.[12]

* * *

One of the odd aspects of the Lavelle affair was the relatively inconsequential bombing which he was charged with conducting illegitimately--fewer than thirty missions, about one hundred fifty sorties--when on specific occasions he was authorized to make much larger raids on North Vietnam. But unlike his illegitimate raids, the timing of those bigger, authorized raids was determined by political factors over which Lavelle had no control.

Before Lavelle took command, the Nixon administration had preferred to attack North Vietnamese targets when it was taking heat for some other unpopular action anyway. The first big protective reaction strikes had been associated with the invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970 and the second batch with the Son Tay raid in the fall. When South Vietnamese ground forces attacked North Vietnamese supply centers in the Laotian panhandle during February and March of 1971, American air forces were authorized to hit SAM sites, trucks, and supply depots in the North Vietnamese panhandle with about three hundred sorties; a few of these were sent on February 20, 21, and 28, but most went on March 21 and 22, while South Vietnamese troops were fleeing from Laos.[13]

In September 1971, less than two months after Lavelle took command, he was given his first legitimate opportunity to send a major strike into North Vietnam. This time there was no parallel initiative to share the load of criticism which inevitably accompanied bombing in North Vietnam. Lavelle was not enthusiastic about orders restricting him to targets within twenty

miles of the Demilitarized Zone, and he was even less happy about going in bad weather. But Washington would agree to no more than a day's postponement, and on September 21, Lavelle sent nearly two hundred sorties against three gasoline tank farms. The weather was so bad that the Navy sent only four sorties, and Seventh Air Force relied entirely on specially equipped F-4 pathfinders guided by the LORAN ground beacons Lavelle had done so much to install as part of McNamara's barrier. Without losing an aircraft, he claimed destruction of about thirty buried gasoline tanks with a total capacity of more than 150,000 gallons. In Lavelle's view this amount of destruction was not worth the effort, but he was proud of having directed the first big LORAN fighter strike.[14]

Lavelle was never told why he was authorized to send that first LORAN strike, but he would not have been surprised to learn that it was part of the negotiating process. Henry Kissinger's secret talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris had come to nothing. Despite President Nixon's offer in May 1971 of a cease-fire which would not require North Vietnamese troops to withdraw from South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese government was demanding that the Thieu government in South Vietnam be eliminated before a cease-fire. The LORAN strike served as Nixon's response to the collapse of the secret talks.[15]

Although talks with the North Vietnamese were not going well, Nixon and Kissinger were emboldened by their progress in getting better relations with China and the Soviet Union. Nixon was scheduled to make

unprecedented presidential visits to Beijing and Moscow in 1972. Indeed the surprise announcement in July 1971 that the Chinese would play host to Nixon in February 1972 had chilled relations between North Vietnam and China. By the same token Nixon had gained enough popular support in the United States to risk some of it on limited bombing of North Vietnam. Convinced that the North Vietnamese were preparing an offensive for 1972, Nixon authorized in December 1971 by far the biggest bombing raids on North Vietnam since the end of Rolling Thunder.[16]

Seventh Air Force and the Seventh Fleet sent about a thousand strike sorties against North Vietnam from December 26 through December 30, a period bounded by the Christmas and New Year's holidays which President Nixon was unwilling to infringe. For the first time since Rolling Thunder, strikes were permitted as far north as the twentieth parallel--more than two hundred miles north of the Demilitarized Zone, only seventy-five miles south of Hanoi. Although Christmas day had been clear, the weather closed down on the morning of December 26 just as two flights of Air Force F-4s were approaching the Thanh Hoa barracks and truck repair shop. The attackers got under a fifteen hundred foot ceiling and lost an F-4 apparently to ground fire. The rest of the five-day operation had to be conducted through clouds. Seventh Air Force F-4s guided by LORAN pathfinders made two-thirds of the strike sorties, while Navy A-6s used their onboard radar to guide carrier-based F-4s and A-7s to their targets.[17]

Aside from indicating that the Nixon administration might be willing to resume full-scale bombing of North Vietnam, the December 1971 raids did not achieve very impressive results. Effective LORAN bombing required photography annotated to show the target's exact relationship with the navigation beacons; this painstaking work had not yet been done for most of North Vietnam. In any case, the greater the distance from the beacons, the lower the accuracy. Only about a fourth of the bombs hit close enough to their targets to show up on bomb damage assessment photography.[18]

The strike on Quan Lang airfield was among the most accurate, with more than 160 craters appearing in photographs after about 200 bombs had been dropped. But even here the pierced-steel-plank runway was broken in only 14 places and was quickly repaired. East German television did indicate that two MiG-21s were blown on their backs. As to the 13 buried gasoline tank farms attacked that week, estimates of destruction ranged from a total of 194,000 gallons up to 870,000 gallons out of a capacity of about 3,500,000 gallons.[19]

* * *

General Lavelle was not content with rare opportunities to bomb North Vietnam in bad weather. He wanted routine authority to hit North Vietnam's air defenses and its gathering invasion force at times of his own choosing. But the Nixon administration would not grant Lavelle this much authority, at least officially. Privately, Nixon groused about what seemed to him the Air Force's

poor performance and the lack of imagination found among military leaders as a whole. While he admired the courage of airmen, soldiers, and sailors, Nixon had a low opinion of generals and admirals. The President liked to quote H.G. Wells' comment that military minds were mediocre because bright people would not subject themselves to a military career.[20]

From the beginning of Nixon's term, he had been expecting to end the war even while withdrawing ground forces from South Vietnam and not resuming a sustained bombing campaign in North Vietnam. Since the Air Force had proved unable to work this miracle for him, he blamed air leadership and promised his aides that he would bomb North Vietnam thoroughly before pulling out entirely. So far, however, Nixon had been careful to keep overt bombing of North Vietnam within time limits which minimized protest. By sending the biggest raids while most American college students were home for Christmas, Nixon had further dampened student opposition already cooled by the draft lottery, reduced draft calls, and reduced American participation in ground combat. The situation in Vietnam would have to get worse before the President was ready to authorize sustained bombing operations over North Vietnam.[21]

Lavelle was repeatedly told meanwhile to make maximum use of the authority he had. There was nothing new in this dialogue. General Clay and General Abrams had been requesting expanded authority for months, and Secretary Laird had repeatedly refused. On July 24, 1971, just before Lavelle

took command, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Moorer, conveyed Laird's latest refusal to the Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral McCain, with the admonition to "take full advantage" of the current rules.[22] Admiral McCain in turn urged "maximum use," and General Abrams in one of his first formal messages to General Lavelle spelled out an interpretation of the current rules:

> Interlocking and mutually supporting NVN air defenses constitute unacceptable hazard to air crews attempting to identify a particular SAM/AAA firing site. Accordingly, on occurrence of any SAM or AAA firing or activation against our aircraft, it is considered appropriate for escort forces to direct immediate protective reaction strikes against any identifiable element of the firing/activated air defense complex.[23]

The words "interlocking" and "firing or activation" would provide key ingredients of General Lavelle's rationale for his way of making maximum use of the rules. Before his taking command, F-105 Wild Weasel crews had already been authorized to fire their radar-seeking missiles at any SAM site whose radar was tracking an F-105 or the aircraft it was escorting. An F-105 did not have to wait for a SAM site to fire; activation of its radar was sufficient--as indicated by radar warning gear carried by the F-105 and the F-4. In General Lavelle's view, it was foolish to wait for a signal from the radar warning gear, especially because that gear would only sound the alarm for SAM radars. In an interlocking system, North Vietnam's early warning and MiG-control radars could feed their data to the missile launch sites, which consequently would not have to come on the air until the last minute. Lavelle argued that Seventh Air Force should assume the enemy air defense system

was activated every time American aircraft entered North Vietnam. Hence any aircraft which attacked an air defense target in North Vietnam necessarily did so after activation of the North Vietnamese air defense system and therefore was operating within the rules of engagement as interpreted by Lavelle.[24]

Lavelle's interpretation permitted Seventh Air Force to plan attacks on North Vietnamese air defenses and execute the plans without waiting for the North Vietnamese to shoot first. While his superiors were encouraging a liberal interpretation of the rules of engagement, this was probably not what they had in mind. The customary way of stretching the rules, and one employed to especially good effect by the Navy, was "trolling." Reconnaissance aircraft were used as bait; as soon as the North Vietnamese reacted, previously selected targets were hit by a force waiting nearby. The Navy's superiority in trolling was their use of a bigger strike force. While Lavelle approved of that, he did not like using his men as bait. Trolling seemed to him a silly and unnecessarily dangerous game.

Lavelle claimed that much of his thinking about bending the rules was confirmed by a visit of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to South Vietnam in early November 1971. At that point Lavelle was concerned about the presence at Quan Lang airfield of two MiG-21s which were threatening B-52 operations in Laos. As Lavelle would recall their conversation, Moorer indicated that an Air Force protective reaction strike could hit the airfield even though it was in an area normally patrolled by the Navy. Moorer's recollection, on the other

hand, would be that he and Lavelle discussed only photoreconnaissance, not a protective reaction strike.[25]

On November 8 an Air Force RF-4 with two F-4 escorts flew over Quan Lang. They reported being fired upon and attacking the airfield. The MiGs were nowhere to be seen, but the F-4s did leave some craters near the runway. Lavelle showed Moorer photographs of the empty airfield just before the Chairman left Vietnam. Soon Lavelle learned from General Clay that General Ryan was complaining about how little damage this Quan Lang raid had done. Lavelle concluded that his error had been in sending so small a force armed mostly with cluster bombs for flak suppression.[26]

This was not the first time that Washington had seemed to encourage using routine protective reaction strikes against targets other than air defenses firing on reconnaissance planes. In the wake of the Son Tay raid, President Nixon had told a press conference that if American planes were fired upon, he would "order that the missile site be destroyed and that the military complex around the site which supports it also be destroyed."[27] By then of course, Nixon had already sent special strikes against supply dumps in North Vietnam under the rubric of protective reaction.

In the spring of 1971 Secretary Laird had even suggested using routine protective reaction strikes to hit field artillery.[28] When Laird came to Saigon in early December, he talked to Lavelle at Ambassador Bunker's home. As Lavelle would recall their conversation, Laird indicated that Lavelle should not

ask the Secretary of Defense to make a more liberal interpretation of the rules, but that if Lavelle made a more liberal interpretation, Laird would stand behind him or at least not question him.[29]

Lavelle thought that a similar message was conveyed by Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt, an Air Force officer who was Director of the Joint Staff. Vogt represented Admiral Moorer at a conference held in Hawaii to discuss ways of better protecting B-52s over Laos. Gen. Bruce K. Holloway, the SAC commander in chief, had become so concerned about the MiG threat that he had grounded the B-52s in Southeast Asia for a couple of days. Lavelle's vice commander, Maj. Gen. Winton W. Marshall, returned from Hawaii with a report that Moorer wanted a liberal interpretation of the rules and that the conference had decided to increase both the number of reconnaissance missions and the number of fighters escorting reconnaissance aircraft as well as B-52s.[30]

In mid December, Lavelle attended an Air Force commanders conference at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington. While he was there, five Air Force F-4s were lost over Laos--three of them to MiGs in northern Laos where the North Vietnamese were engaged in an offensive. It was the worst three days the Air Force had experienced since the end of Rolling Thunder. General Meyer, the Vice Chief of Staff, called Lavelle to the Pentagon to hear a briefing on how to destroy the Moc Chau radar, which controlled MiGs over northern Laos. But Moc Chau was in North Vietnam far north of the twentieth parallel

and off limits to reconnaissance planes not to mention their escorts. Lavelle was not quite being told to bomb Moc Chau--just how to bomb it.[31]

Subsequently a pair of F-105 Wild Weasels struck Moc Chau with Standard anti-radar missiles. The radar stayed on long enough to be hit, because the F-105s disguised themselves as F-4s (not armed with Standards or older Shrikes) by flashing the appropriate electronic identification code. Tactical deception was rare in the air war over Southeast Asia, and this instance of it was designed by Seventh Air Force in preference to the Air Staff plan. When Seventh Air Force reported this new expansion of protective reaction, however, Admiral Moorer informed General Abrams that attacking a MiG control radar was not authorized--nor were operations of any kind north of the twentieth parallel except hot pursuit of a MiG. Before the end of January 1972, however, Moorer got Laird's approval to authorize protective reaction strikes against MiG-control radars south of the twentieth parallel whenever MiGs in the air threatened American aircraft.[32]

Although the Moc Chau strike was one of Lavelle's first attempts to stretch the rules of engagement, it was the last time he reported the details to his bosses. When he sent five F-4s against Dong Hoi airfield on January 23, the aircrews reported that there had been no enemy reaction before they bombed the airfield. Lavelle was in the Seventh Air Force command post when this early report arrived, and he complained to his deputy for operations, Maj. Gen. Alton D. Slay, that the crews could not report "no enemy reaction."[33]

The Dong Hoi attack and most of the subsequent illegitimate attacks were performed by the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at Udorn Air Base, Thailand, under the command of Col. Charles A. Gabriel. Unlike the other wings in Thailand, the 432d had reconnaissance aircraft as well as fighter aircraft, and thus it was the natural arm of protective reaction, real or pretended. Lavelle's new reporting requirement gave Gabriel problems that Lavelle may well have known nothing about. There was no honest way of translating into the prescribed after-action message format General Lavelle's theory that the North Vietnamese air defense system was always activated against American aircraft. The after action message had to state exactly the nature of the enemy reaction--what gun fired or what SAM radar locked on.[34]

General Slay and Colonel Gabriel worked out a reporting system that put false data into the formal after-action messages for Washington and accurate data into back channel messages that went from Gabriel to Slay only. This procedure resembled one authorized by President Nixon three years earlier to disguise B-52 raids in Cambodia. Since Lavelle apparently never saw the formal messages (which could be read easily only by those familiar with a fill-in-the-blank format designed to build a computer data base), he could assume that they merely made a vague reference to activation of the enemy air defense system. In fact they often specified enemy gunfire which had not occurred.[35]

Slay and Gabriel called their commander's special strikes "heavies" since they involved four to twelve "escorts" rather than the usual two. Crews were told to drop their bombs whether or not the enemy fired. The targets were usually not enemy guns, SAM sites, or even airfields, but increasingly SAM transporters and trucks. Once the trucks crossed into Laos, they were legitimate targets, but while still in North Vietnam the best rationale available was that they were supplying the air defense sites. In the case of tanks, which were gathering in the North Vietnamese panhandle to invade South Vietnam, Lavelle could not find a rationale to attack them even with his interpretation of the rules governing protective reaction; he left the tanks unscathed. Meanwhile Slay and Gabriel decided that the formal after-action messages should not claim truck kills, but merely use the often true formula "results not observed."[36]

Lavelle's illegitimate strikes might well have gone unremarked in Washington had it not been for a young intelligence debriefer at Udorn, Sgt. Lonnie D. Franks, who wrote about them to one of his Iowa senators, Harold E. Hughes, a Democrat and prominent critic of the war effort. General Ryan sent the Air Force Inspector General, Lt. Gen. Louis L. Wilson, to investigate. Little investigation was required, because Lavelle, Slay, and Gabriel readily told what they had been doing. Lavelle explained that he had not kept Ryan and Clay fully informed because that might put them in an awkward position.

General Abrams was supportive of Lavelle but claimed not to have realized that breaches of the rules of engagement had occurred.[37]

* * *

In the formal chain of command, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force had no authority over the Seventh Air Force commander, who worked for joint commanders wearing Army or Navy uniforms in Saigon and Hawaii. But each service was expected to clean up its own scandals as quietly as possible. While General Lavelle and his many friends thought that General Ryan should have defended Lavelle instead of retiring him, Ryan tried to minimize political damage to the Air Force.

It was not the first time Ryan had removed an officer who had tried to disguise rule breaking. In the summer of 1967 while commanding Pacific Air Forces, Ryan had discovered that Colonel Jack Broughton, the wing vice commander at Takhli, had destroyed evidence that his men had strafed the Russian ship *Turkestan*. Although Broughton was court-martialed, Ryan and Secretary of the Air Force Seamans agreed that court-martial proceedings for Lavelle would invite unwelcome publicity. They advised Secretary of Defense Laird to remove Lavelle from command and have them brief the chairmen of the Senate and House committees on armed services and appropriations.[38]

Laird, however, was even more cautious and kept the Air Force leaders from talking to congressional leaders on this issue. He told Seamans and Ryan that publicity about Lavelle's bombing could provide the North Vietnamese an

excuse for the invasion they were about to launch. Laird himself talked to Senator Symington and a few others, but apparently did not give them the full story.[39]

Laird's quiet removal of Lavelle soon came under a spotlight. Senator Hughes persisted in his effort not only to increase the severity of General Lavelle's punishment, but to punish others as well. The senator did not like the fact that because Lavelle's retirement came before his formal relief from command of Seventh Air Force, he would receive the retired pay of a four-star general even though the Senate refused to approve Ryan's recommendation of Lavelle's advancement from permanent major general to lieutenant general (let alone full general as customary) on the retired list. Lavelle's situation was made more comfortable by the fact that he was retired with a medical disability which sheltered much of his income from taxation; on the other hand, Lavelle's physical problems were genuine, and he would die seven years later from a heart attack.

Senator Hughes was on the Armed Services Committee, which held hearings on Lavelle in connection not only with his advancement on the retired list but also with the nomination of General Abrams as Army Chief of Staff. These hearings were the committee's most dramatic investigation of the bombing of North Vietnam since 1967, when the committee had supported the Joint Chiefs in their effort to remove restraints imposed by Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Johnson. Once again, Senator Stennis was

in the chair, but this time the committee seemed in favor of restraints or at least opposed to any breach of civilian control over the military.[40]

General Abrams, Admiral Moorer, and General Ryan all denied they had told Lavelle to break the rules of engagement. Lavelle claimed only that he believed his liberal interpretation of the rules was supported by their injunctions to make full use of the rules. If he had received more explicit instructions, he said almost nothing about them to the Senate committee--either because he wanted to protect his superiors or because he believed with some justification that his interpretation of the rules was winning support in Congress. Earlier hearings by the House Armed Services Committee had been more friendly, and that group applauded Lavelle for showing the initiative to do something about the enemy buildup.[41]

In the case of Quan Lang airfield, however, Lavelle did tell a story with potential for getting his superiors in trouble. Admiral Moorer and General Ryan had some difficulty refuting Lavelle's contention that they expected his crews to strike MiGs on the ground. Moorer claimed that he was only interested in photographs to determine whether the MiGs were there, but Ryan had complained about the quality of the bombing and his testimony did not entirely dispel the impression that the targets missed were more than antiaircraft guns. The rules of engagement sought to confine attacks on MiGs to those in the air; those on the ground and their runways were off limits. The only legitimate targets on the ground for routine protective reaction were the

guns and SAMs which had fired on or were at least tracking American aircraft. There was apparently not much interest among senators on the Armed Services Committee in pursuing this issue.[42]

Senator Hughes turned his attention from Lavelle and his superiors to Lavelle's subordinates. Since many of these men still sought promotions, Hughes had considerable leverage over their careers. For two years he monitored promotion lists to stop the promotion of any officer who had been involved in illegitimate missions or false reporting. But in 1973 revelations about the false reporting system authorized by President Nixon for the bombing of Cambodia undercut Hughes' campaign against Lavelle's subordinates. In any case, most of Hughes' colleagues saw merit in General Ryan's position that General Lavelle's subordinates had no way of knowing how high was the source of the orders they were getting from Lavelle. Three of those subordinates achieved four stars (Slay, Gabriel, and Gabriel's vice commander, Jerome F. O'Malley), and one of them became Air Force Chief of Staff (Gabriel).[43]

General Lavelle's greatest strength as a commander was his concern for the welfare of his men. But in Vietnam his concern got him into trouble, got them into trouble, got the Air Force into trouble--all for the sake of bombing too slight to make much difference. A less generous man might have risked the lives of his men trolling to bend the rules in a more acceptable way. A wiser man would have avoided the risks to his and their integrity for so little

benefit to the war effort. Even before he could be retired, a North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam made both the military justification and the military insignificance of his illegitimate bombing obvious.

Notes

Chapter 8

The Lavelle Affair

1. Intvw, Wayne Thompson with Lt Gen John P. Flynn (USAF, ret), on flight from Randolph AFB, TX, to Andrews AFB, MD, Jun 25, 1981.

2. Intvw, Lt Col John N. Dick, Jr., AFHRC, with Gen Lavelle, McLean VA, 17-24 Apr 78, AFHRC K239.0512-1036. See also intvw, Maj Scott S. Thompson, AFHRC, with Gen Nazzaro, Tucson AZ, Feb 3-6, 1980, AFHRC K239.0512-1189.

3. Lavelle intvw.

4. Ibid.

5. See Bernard Nalty's manuscript on the air war in southern Laos at the Air Force History Support Office, Bolling AFB. See also Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960-1968* (Washington, 1993).

6. Intvw, James C. Hasdorff, AFHRC, with Gen John D. Ryan, San Antonio, May 15-19, 1979; Lavelle intvw.

7. Lavelle intvw. In his 1979 intvw, almost a decade after the fact, Ryan said he did not remember anything about discussing the C-5 with Lavelle.

8. Lavelle intvw.

9. Lavelle intvw.

10. *Defense Intelligence Digest*, Jan 1972, p 38.

11. PACAF, *Summary Air Operations Southeast Asia*, Oct 1971 - Mar 1972.

12. The best introductions to the Lavelle affair are: Col Gordon A. Ginsburg, "The Lavelle Case: Crisis in Integrity," Air War College, Apr 1974; Col James R. Olson, "Preplanned Protective Reaction Strikes: A Case Study on Integrity," Air War College, Apr 1974; George C. Wilson, "The Lavelle Case," *The Atlantic*, Dec 1972, pp 6-27.

13. The Feb and Mar 1971 strikes were called Louisville Slugger and Fracture Cross Alpha. See the msg traffic for those operations in CHECO microfilm rolls T114 and T115, AFHRC.

14. Lavelle intvw, pp 603-12; HQ PACAF, Summary Air Operations SEA, Sep 1971, p 4-A-4 and p 4-1. See also msg traffic on Operation Prize Bull in CHECO microfilm rolls T110 and T125, AFHRC.

15. Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp 1037-38.

16. Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp 1042-43.

17. See msg traffic on Operation Proud Deep Alpha in CHECO microfilm rolls T110, T125 and S589, AFHRC.

18. Mel Porter, *Proud Deep Alpha* (Project CHECO, Hickam AFB, Hawaii, 1972), p 50.

19. Porter, *Proud Deep Alpha*, pp 32-39.

20. H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, compact disk, Santa Monica, Calif, 1994 [a condensed paper version was published in New York], entries for Apr 23, 1970; Mar 30, Jun 2 and Jun 23, 1971; Jan 8, Jan 17 and Feb 5, 1972.

21. Hist, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vietnam, 1971-73, Part I, pp 254-96; Capt Paul W. Elder and Capt Peter J. Melly, "Rules of Engagement, November 1969 - September 1972," CHECO, 1973; Lt Gen Phillip B. Davidson (USA, Ret), *Vietnam at War* (Novato, Clif, 1988), pp 669-70.

22. Msg, Adm Moorer to CINCPAC, 241609Z Jul 71, quoted in HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authority, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137, AFHRC.

23. Msg, COMUSMACV, 010940Z Aug 71, quoted in HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authorities, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137, AFHRC. See also msg, CINCPAC to MACV, 251345Z Jul 71, quoted in same source.

24. Lavelle presented his rationale extensively and repeatedly in hearings before the House and Senate committees on armed services. See Hearing before the Armed Services Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, *Unauthorized Bombing of Military Targets in North Vietnam*, 92d Cong, 2d sess (Washington, 1972); Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services, Senate, *Nomination of John D. Lavelle, General Creighton W. Abrams, and Admiral John S. McCain*, 92d Cong, 2d sess (Washington, 1972).

25. Lavelle intvw; Moorer testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 442-59. See also HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authority, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137,

AFHRC.

26. Lavelle intvw; Moorer testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 442-46; Ryan testimony, pp 263-64; Gabriel testimony, pp 205-08; HQ PACAF, Summary Air Operations SEA, Nov 1971.

27. President's News Conference, Dec 10, 1970, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Nixon, 1970, p 1101.

28. Msg, JCS to COMUSMACV, 101716Z Apr 71, quoted in HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authorities, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137, AFHRC.

29. Lavelle intvw.

30. Lavelle intvw; Moorer testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 446-47. See also msgs, CINCPAC to MACV, 050410Z Dec 71, and JCS to MACV, 222208Z Nov 71, both quoted in HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authorities, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137, AFHRC.

31. Lavelle intvw; PACAF, *Summary Air Operations Southeast Asia*, Dec 1971.

32. Lavelle intvw; testimony, Maj Gen Alton D. Slay, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 292-95. The two versions differ. Slay said that the raid occurred while Lavelle was still in Washington and was approved by Abrams; and that the raid failed to knock out the radar. Seventh Air Force and PACAF records appear to confirm Lavelle's claim that he had returned and that the radar was out of commission for almost three weeks. The after action msg on the raid by the 388 TFW, 051215Z Jan 72, is quoted in HQ MACV memo on protective reaction authorities, Mar 18, 1972, CHECO microfilm roll T137, AFHRC, as is the JCS response: 051658Z Jan 72 and 072347Z Jan 72.

33. Lavelle testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, p 7; Slay testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, p 299; Lavelle intvw.

34. Gabriel testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, 197-225; Capt Douglas J. Murray testimony, pp 225-39; Sgt Lonnie Douglas Franks testimony, pp 156-95.

35. See Lavelle, Gabriel, and Slay testimony in Senate Lavelle hearings.

36. See note above.

37. Lt Gen Louis L. Wilson, Jr, "Report of Investigation Concerning Alleged Falsification of Classified Reports for Missions in North Vietnam," Mar 20, 1972, with supporting intvw summaries, Office of Air force History; intvw, Lt Col Arthur W. McCants, Jr, with Gen Louis L. Wilson, Jr, Tucson, Ariz, Nov 7-8, 1979; Franks testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 156-95; Daniel St. Albin Greene, "The Sergeant Who Shook Up the Brass,"

National Observer, Sep 23, 1972.

38. On Col Broughton and the *Tukestan* incident, see Chapter 13.

39. Seamans intvw.

40. On the 1967 hearings, see Chapter 14.

41. Report of the Armed Services Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, *Unauthorized Bombing of Military Targets in North Vietnam*, 92d Congr, 2d sess (Washington, 1972); Senate Lavelle hearings.

42. Lavelle testimony, Senate Lavelle hearings, pp 16-17, 59-60; Ryan testimony, pp 263-65; Moorer testimony, pp 444-49.

43. Correspondence relating to Senator Hughes' requests for information, in AF/IG files on Lavelle case, Office of Air Force History.