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FILE SUBJ.  
DATE SUB-CAT.  
2/74

# Civilian Casualties

## THE AIR WAR CAUSES A HIGH DEGREE OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

The heavy civilian toll taken by the bombing in the past has been well-documented, though the Department of Defense said in April, 1971 that it had never attempted to study the number of civilians wounded or killed by American bombing. Although there is no way of knowing actual numbers of killed and wounded at the present moment, we may assume that they are quite high. There are still several million civilians living in areas under bombardment, and still 50,000 tons of bombs falling monthly. The drop in monthly bombing tonnages which has taken place under Nixon does not reflect a decline in civilian casualties. His Administration has switched the focus of the bombing to Laos and Cambodia, where there are even fewer military targets than in Vietnam.

A recent Government Accounting Office report shows that the air war has been a major factor in producing nearly 2 million refugees in Cambodia, or one-third of the population. The Cornell study shows that the U.S. has dropped 140,000 tons on Cambodia, compared with over 1.5 million tons on Laos, where nearly a fourth of the population, or 700,000 have been refueged.

## THE AIR WAR CAUSES FAR MORE CIVILIAN THAN MILITARY CASUALTIES

U.S. bombers cannot locate guerrilla soldiers who sleep by day and move through the forest at night in small groups. Bombers usually wind up striking at the only signs of human life they can see from the air: fires, cultivated fields, footprints, cut or trampled grass, etc. These are located in and around villages. They are most often produced by civilians, who are tied down by their families and cannot live a life on the move. Those fixed targets designated as "military"--roads, ferry crossings, bridges--are precisely where the highest concentrations of civilians are. In rural lands such as Indochina, it is the roads, bridges and ferry crossings which attract civilian concentrations.

"The Defense Department maintains that air activities are conducted under a rigid policy of avoiding civilian targets. All the same there is ample visual evidence of the civilian toll--even though our own authorities don't include them in the body counts. And we know that one purpose of the bombing has been to accomplish economic and social destruction in areas deemed controlled by the enemy. But I fail to see how such debates are relevant to the victims. Their suffering is no less if we explain that they were hit by accident instead of design. Their injuries are no less painful if we tell them we tried to avoid them but could not, because our sophisticated weapons just are not that discerning. It makes little difference to the dead that they happened to be living in a militarily important part of their own country."  
(Press release from the office of Sen. George McGovern, 12/14/71)

"Our studies indicate that for every military casualty we get [from the bombing], we cause 50 civilian casualties."  
(Sen. Mike Gravel, CR, 10/5/71)

"Most Lao civilians learn very quickly that

bombing necessarily follows the North Vietnamese."  
(Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan, written reply to SRS question)

"The weight of air-drop munitions deployed by the U.S. in the years 1965-69 was more than 200 times the total weight of all types of munitions used by the insurgents during the same period."  
(Cornell study)

An American once intimately involved in U.S. bombing operations in Laos says an erosion of safe-guards against indiscriminate bombing there has taken place during the Nixon Administration. According to Mr. Jerome J. Brown, a reserve Air Force Captain and former Senior Air Force Photo Reconnaissance expert attached to the Vientiane Embassy, 1966-68, restrictions on American Air Force operations have been quietly relaxed while control over the air war by the American Ambassador in Vientiane has been reduced.  
(PAW)

"The rules of engagement were strictly adhered to from 1966 to 1968, but for all practical

purposes after Ambassador William Sullivan left (in March, 1969) they appear to have been discarded and are only cited to placate congressmen in Washington," Brown said.  
(Michael Morrow, Am Rep, 12/3/71)

"There just aren't any villages in northern Laos anymore or in southern North Vietnam either, for that matter."  
(Aerial reconnaissance pilot in interview with Rep. Paul McCloskey, SRS, 4/71)

"A strategic target is any installation, network, or group of buildings, or the like, considered vital to a country's war making capacity, and singled out for air attacks."  
(USAF ROTC Manual)

In Laos, "Cluster bombs and white phosphorous were used against the civilian population of a country against whom the United States is not at war...both the extent of the bombing and its impact on the civilian population of Laos have been deliberately concealed by the State Department."  
(Rep. Paul McCloskey, SRS, 4/71)

"A hooch destroyed is a 'military structure'; a sampan is a 'waterborne logistic craft'... There are no spaces on bomb-damage forms for reporting civilian damage."  
(Cornell study)

"In Indochina the flow of refugees and the occurrence of civilian war casualties continues. In Vietnam nearly all indicators--including official reports to our government--document that the situation among the people continues to deteriorate. For them the war is not winding down. The monthly flow of refugees continues at a high level, some 100,000 by official count, during the first five months of of this year. Civilian casualties are also on the increase..."  
(SRS, 7/71)

## LAOS

"The bombing contributes to at least 75% of the refugees, who number more than 700,000 of Laos' less than 3 million population."  
(Sen. Ted Kennedy, Chairman, SRS, 4/71)

"The intensity of the bombing was such that no organized life was possible in the villages... jet planes came daily and destroyed all stationary structures...the villagers lived in trenches, holes or in caves."  
(UN Advisor George Chapelier, from a paper on life in the Plain of Jars, SRS, 4/71, Appendix IIA)

"There used to be about 20,000 persons living in the town (Sam Neua) and adjacent villages. Today not a soul lives in the town. Not a single dwelling was spared by the American bombing. The destruction was more than any I had seen in N. Vietnam."  
(Richard Ward, UPI release, 8/2/71)

"The bombing is clearly the most compelling reason for moving. 95% of the respondents indicated their village had been bombed, 49% could not count the number of times, 61% had seen a person killed."  
(USIA survey of 200 refugees from nearly 100 villages in the Plain of Jars, cited SRS, 4/71)

"Until recently the area (Plain of Jars) provided a living for a population of more than 20,000. Now it is empty and ravaged, a striking example of what less than 3 years of intensive U.S. bombing can do."  
(T.D. Allman, Newsday, 1/17/72)

## CAMBODIA

"Inevitably the familiar pattern of Vietnam and Laos--in the destruction of the countryside, the generation of refugees, and the occurrence of civilian war casualties--is being repeated in Cambodia."  
(Staff report of SRS, 9/70)

"The town is destroyed. But you have to expect that."  
(Lon Non, younger brother of Lon Nol, commenting on the use of air power to retake a Cambodian town, Star, 12/12/71)

"Cambodia is the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form."  
(Pres. Nixon, 12/12/71)

#### SOUTH VIETNAM

"Aerial bombardment...(has) contributed significantly to civilian casualties, mass movements of people and the destruction of forests and farmlands. For the period from 1965 to April, 1971, the estimate of civilian casualties in South Vietnam is 1,050,000, including 325,000 deaths, while over 6 million of the population is thought to have become refugees. These figures mean that there is hardly a family in South Vietnam that has not suffered a death, injury, or the anxiety of abandoning an ancient homestead."  
(Cornell study)

"South Vietnam has been devastated by an alien air force that seems at war with the very land of Vietnam."  
(A former South Vietnamese Minister of Information, from At War With Asia by Noam Chomsky)

"More than 90% of the air strikes within South Vietnam are classed as interdictionary. Guerrillas cannot readily be interdicted without assaulting the civilian population at the same time."  
(Cornell study)

#### NORTH VIETNAM

"Despite elaborate civil defense measures taken by the North Vietnamese, the civilian impact of the bombing was very heavy. In 1966 there were more than 23,000 casualties, 80% of them civilian. In 1967 the civilian noncombatant casualty rate was quoted at 1,000 per week."  
(Cornell study, based on estimates by the CIA and DoD)

The bombing of North Vietnam is strategic bombing. "Targets in a strategic bombing campaign are situated near predominantly civilian areas."  
(Cornell study)

"A military target is any person, thing, idea, entity, or location selected for destruction, inactivation, or rendering unusable with weapons which will reduce or destroy the will or ability to the enemy to resist."  
(USAF ROTC Manual, 5/61)

"The concept of pinpoint bombing is clearly a gross idealization...to offset bombing inaccuracy many more bombs are dropped than are in principle necessary to destroy the target... (best illustrated by the saturation bombing of

the B-52s)...more than half of the ordnance delivered falls outside the intended target zones because of purely technical factors..."  
(Cornell study)

Before he resigned as Secretary of Defense in 1977, Robert S. McNamara warned Lyndon Johnson: "There may be a limit beyond which many Americans will not permit the U.S. to go. The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 non-combatants while trying to pound a tiny, backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one."  
(Clayton Fritchey, NYP, 1/10/72)

"Our pilots have never cared about being accurate in Laos. No one has any scruples except for one guy. Every strike out of here drops, but only about 1 in 10 are on target.

"The thing is the pilots don't care what they bomb. For example, in Cambodia there was this civilian caught out in the open. One of our pilots was cruising overhead with 8 CBU 46 bombs; the CBU has about a mile range. The son of a bitch just went in and dropped all 8 of them to get this one guy, who was killed. When they later told him it was a civilian, he didn't give a shit. All he had to say was 'too bad he got in the way.'"  
(From a confidential interview with a pilot, PAW)

"The FAC pilots...said that we could not destroy an area until we had cleared the action with the Province Chief...[later] I asked Colonel Tho [Note: the Province Chief] what his role had been in the planning of Operation Benton...I learned that his method of giving clearance in an American military operation was not to review the targets of individual air strikes or shellings but to give the American ground commander a blanket clearance before the operation was launched...he said, 'I got a report this morning that V.C.'s blew up two churches,' I said that I had seen American planes bomb the churches. The Province Chief laughed for several seconds, and said, 'Well, in the fighting you cannot always tell what is happening, and you cannot always tell the difference between just regular houses and church.'"  
(Jonathan Schell, The Military Half)