

# Saturday Review

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guns a crowd in the attempt to get at a murderer?

An American aviator, writing in the November issue of *Flying* magazine, says he looked down on his assigned target and reported by radio to his base that there must have been some error in his instructions, for he saw nothing below but a village with women and children moving about. He was ordered to hit the village just the same. He dropped the bombs but later admitted he was careful to see that they landed in an open field.

In drawing up targets for bombing and ground attack, our military forces lean heavily on briefings supplied by South Vietnamese intelligence officers, some of whom have proved to be overzealous or incompetent. Long lists of targets to keep our aviators busy have not been wanting, but no one can certify to the accuracy of the designated targets or can assure our aviators that they may not on occasion be unwitting participants in random slaughter.

Administration officials have acknowledged that the bombing has not produced the expected military results. Why, then, are the bombings continued? One of the main reasons openly given is that the bombings help to bolster the morale of the South Vietnamese government. This admission amounts to an indictment that history will not take lightly. It is an indictment of those who can be buoyed up by news that bombs and fire have been rained down on people in their homes and not just on military supply lines and installations. The incredible irony, of course, is that many of the villagers who are hit are citizens of South Vietnam, not North Vietnam. It is even more an indictment of ourselves, for we *know* the bombings are having a limited military effect at best.

Another highly relevant factor in any consideration of civilian casualties has to do with the possible prolongation of the war because of missed opportunities to negotiate. The *Washington Post* has substantiated stories appearing in various world capitals to the effect that exploratory talks which might have led to negotiations were under way in December of last year but were aborted by the bombings of Hanoi. Also, Secretary General U Thant of the United Nations has been quoted as saying that a genuine opportunity for negotiations *did* exist in 1964 and 1965, but that he was told by Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., that our government feared the negotiations would have an adverse effect on the morale of the South Vietnamese government, possibly causing its collapse.

What, then, is our main purpose in Vietnam? Is it to maintain a government of our own creation in South Vietnam, or is it to bring about an honorable

## Morale and Morality in Vietnam

**T**HE PHOTOGRAPHS accompanying the lead article in this issue by David McLanahan by no means exhaust the pictorial horrors of the war in Vietnam. It would be possible to publish equally dramatic photographs of American soldiers whose legs had just been amputated after being spiked by poisonous bamboo shoots planted by the Vietcong. It would also be possible to publish gruesome photographs of Vietnamese teachers and village leaders who had been beheaded by the Vietcong because they refused to cooperate.

It should not be necessary to write this preamble to an editorial on nonmilitary casualties in Vietnam caused by our bombing policy or by the difficulty in distinguishing between innocent villagers and Vietcong. But there is an unfortunate tendency in some quarters to assume that anyone who talks about wounded civilians is either oblivious of Vietcong terrorism or doesn't know that war is hell.

The response of Americans to the problem of civilian casualties cannot be confined to their indignation over Vietcong actions or to the fact that people are going to be hurt in war. The essential question Americans must ask is whether human beings, Americans or Vietnamese, may be dying because of mistakes in policy, serious miscalculations, or missed opportunities to end the war honorably. The question has to do with human values and not just with military policy.

Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown, at a recent press conference, referred to the inevitable "risk factor" for

civilians in any military operation. It is difficult to regard the Secretary's statement as a complete or satisfactory explanation for the death of thousands of Vietnamese, most of them in South Vietnam, who have been killed by the bombing from the air, or by the widespread burning and leveling of villages. No one knows how many Vietnamese have failed to come out of their dugouts when summoned because they were paralyzed by fear and were thereupon incinerated inside the tunnels.

**T**HERE is much in the news about wrong targets being bombed from the air, not just in Vietnam but in Laos and Cambodia, and even about American soldiers being hit by their own bombers, but little is said about civilian casualties resulting from the difficulty of making accurate identification of Vietcong. Increasingly, the tendency in dealing with the Vietcong is to saturate the general target area. Few chances are taken with suspects. This is not simply a matter of holding suspected Vietcong for interrogation, but of pouring lead and fire into a village which is believed or known to contain Vietcong. Members of the Vietcong did not come to these villages by invitation. The Vietnamese in these villages desperately wish only to be left alone—by everyone. The United States has announced it is in South Vietnam to protect the people against the Vietcong. How do we protect them, how do we liberate them, when we set fire to their huts or destroy their villages in the attempt to get at the Vietcong? Does a policeman fulfill his duty if he machine-

settlement that can end the war under conditions that would provide for the stability and safety of the area? How many American soldiers and Vietnamese have been killed or wounded because of missed or spurned opportunities to get into valid negotiations? If it is true that possible openings for such negotiations have in fact existed, despite official assurances to the contrary, then it is not the morale of the South Vietnamese government but the moral position of our own government that is in jeopardy.

There is no doubt that Hanoi has been watching American public opinion carefully. There is no doubt that President Johnson is right when he says that North Vietnam will have little incentive to sit down at a peace table if it holds to the mistaken idea that American public opinion will force a withdrawal from Vietnam. But it is equally true that the Administration itself, because of a declared policy that is sometimes at variance with its own actions, because of air bombings that produce an unnecessarily high rate of civilian casualties, and because it apparently underestimates the instinct of a free society to find its way to the hard facts, is bringing about the very situation it fears. The American people cannot be expected to ignore or

overlook questions that go to the roots of their own history. If the government requires public support as an essential ingredient for mounting a successful policy in Vietnam or anywhere else, it has the obligation to mount policies that are worthy of support.

The major issue in Vietnam before the American people has long since ceased to be whether we ought to stay in Vietnam or get out. Most Americans recognize that abrupt unilateral withdrawal could set the stage for wholesale chaos and slaughter in South Vietnam. They similarly recognize that total war in Vietnam could become the torch for world war. The major issue is how best to bring the war to an end with a minimum expenditure of human life, creating not just a situation of safety and stability but a situation in which the scientific and compassionate intelligence of the United States can be put to its fullest use in restoring Vietnam and in rehabilitating people who for thirty years have known nothing but war and daily peril. These are the declared aims of the American government. Any compromise or distortion of these aims is chargeable not just to the American government but to its people. This is in the nature of a free society.

—N.C.

## Alaska's Art in Peril

**I**N A SMALL WOODEN Community House on Shakes Island at Wrangell, Alaska, four magnificent Tlingit house poles face daily danger of fire. Aside from their historic and esthetic value, these handsome artifacts are worth an astonishing amount in cash. For some time experts have advised the U.S. Department of the Interior to fireproof the interior of the Community House, a procedure that would cost absurdly little compared to the monetary value of the carvings. Year after year nothing is done, though we are repeatedly reminded of the present administration's devotion to art, beautification, and culture.

The article "Alaska's Vanishing Art" [SR, Oct. 22, 1966] described how neglect, disinterest, ignorance, vandalism, and bureaucratic bungling are dissipating America's peerless totemic carvings of the past. The article focused on certain outstanding Indian artifacts, such as the house poles in Wrangell, that could still be preserved were action taken immediately before fire, dry rot, encroaching northern jungles, or untrained restorers inflict further damage. Among the many letters SR received in response were a number also sent to the Department of the Interior offering

specialized help. How these offers were received is a matter worth recording. Intrepid citizens eager to provide professional assistance have emerged scarred, weary, wary, and convinced that each step forward ends in two steps backward.

Twenty-one years ago a detailed report on extant Indian carvings in Alaska was commissioned, paid for, and subsequently ignored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Now, rather than hasten to save what little remains, Under Secretary of the Interior Charles Luce recommends that another report be prepared, this time financed by private sources, for, as he admits, many of the important objects described in the first survey "have in the interim been destroyed by fire, rot, vandalism, or sheer neglect." The federal government thus continues to abdicate responsibility as, indeed, it has for the past two decades, during which time little or nothing was done to implement the report already at hand. A new survey, prepared without cost to or effort by the government, might well provide a reprieve long enough to assure the complete destruction of all Indian art in Alaska. And then the matter could be pleasantly shelved.

This attitude seems curiously at odds

with everything we read about Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. Is it possible that communications to him are unable to pierce the surrounding red tape? Take, as an instance, the treatment that two University of California campuses recently received. During the summer of 1965, representatives of the University of California, Los Angeles, visited certain remote sections of Alaska and later offered to rescue the few remaining masterpieces they found at Old Kasaan and Village Island, two of the state's most important Indian sites. The offer was promptly turned down by the U.S. Forest Service, though neither the State of Alaska nor the federal government had or has plans for restoring these deserted areas where some of America's noblest carvings are rapidly rotting away. In a letter of last November, a professor at UCLA wrote, "A year ago we tried to approach the problem of the totem poles through Secretary Stewart Udall. Unfortunately, we were given the run-around from the Forest Service in Juneau to the Alaska Historical Society to local Indian tribes, etc. Somehow we must cut through this mish-mash." But how?

At the University of California, Davis, the Curator of a Laboratory for Research in the Fine Arts and Museology offered his well-equipped facilities to the Department of the Interior, explaining that the laboratory's "prime interest is the preservation of cultural objects." The Chancellor at Davis even took time himself to write Secretary Udall suggesting that the Department of the Interior and the university combine forces in "remedial action" to preserve Alaska's Indian art. His letter was handed over to someone bearing the impressive title of Director of Management Operations, who in turn assured the chancellor that SR's article had exaggerated the situation, though this accusation was neither documented nor true. He then blandly advised the university to prepare a further report. Reports, it would seem, are the government's secret weapon.

**I**N addition, a member of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, also under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, requested the art editor of SR to send still another report to Mrs. Stewart Udall listing those objects and sites in Alaska that most urgently need immediate attention. On receiving the outline last November Mrs. Udall wrote suggesting that she, Under Secretary Luce, and the art editor of SR meet to discuss the problem more fully. But no meeting ever materialized.

Polite letters, aimless requests for reports, vague oversimplified statements, and consistent evidence of misinformation characterize the Government's

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