

LUU QUY KY

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
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What is happening in Viet Nam after nearly half a million American soldiers have landed in the South, and that for three years now bombs have been falling every day on the North?

What accounts for the Vietnamese people's resistance to the American aggressors these last thirteen years, a resistance which will continue much longer if necessary?

What difference is there between the Vietnamese and the American stands?

How to put an end to the conflict?

Those questions form the theme of casual discussions between the author, a Vietnamese journalist, and a foreign guest, a woman writer.

This booklet may help our readers understand what is in the minds of the Vietnamese, Vietnamese realities, and the truth in the Vietnamese problem.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
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LIFE CONTINUES IN THE FACE OF BOMBS

Gia Lam airport, one summer evening, 1967. A fresh breeze brought a pleasant coolness, in spite of the threat of Phantoms and Thunderchiefs which could turn up at any moment.

Hanoi was three kilometres away, as the crow flies.

Since June 28, 1966, for over a year now, American aircraft had been continuously violating its air space, and had repeatedly attacked its suburbs and centre. Founded ten centuries ago, the city had then born an evocative name: Thang Long — The Rising Dragon. In the course of its long history, Hanoi had had to repel many foreign invasions, but it had remained the "age-old cultural capital" which, according to the season, was bathed in the shade of weeping-willows or splashed with the red patches of flame-trees. Never did the Hanoi people, deeply attached to peace, want to see it transformed into a battlefield.

Explosive bombs, napalm bombs, steel-pellet bombs, rockets... had been rained on Hanoi. Planes had crashed on its pavements, barely 300 metres from Ba Dinh Square, which had seen the birth of the D.R.V.N. American pilots had parachuted on public gardens or even sewers and been captured.

In the city now lived a few hundred thousand people, who had not yet evacuated it. It had recorded on its scoreboard the shooting down of over 100 American jets of the most modern types, and been awarded the Independence Medal by the Government.

From a civilian aircraft a woman passenger alighted. She was presented with a bouquet of flowers and given a warm welcome. She had come from a Western country whose government was tightly bound to Washington and nurtured no friendly feelings for the D.R.V.N. A woman writer of good will and loving justice, Mrs B. had much sympathy for the Vietnamese people. This was her second visit to Viet Nam. Hugging the bouquet, she gently stroked the flowers.

“When the plane approached Hanoi,” she said, “I saw the capital city bathed in light. The airport with its neon lights was a tempting target for enemy aircraft. I felt at the same time reassured and anguished. I was happy to see that Hanoi was standing firm, but I was worried by what I felt might be a lack of vigilance. Why don’t you have a black-out?”

“We do our best to defend the capital,” the answer came, “but to maintain a normal life for the population is also our major concern. While fighting, we continue our production work, the building of the country, and our studies. Only in this way could we pursue a long war and defeat the American aggressors. Of course, even if Hanoi should have no electricity, we would stand firm. We shall fight on as resolutely as ever. It won’t be easy for the air pirates to attack our power station. They will smart for it!”

"I had thought that Hanoi was... I had expected to come to a valley of tears! But now I see smiling faces everywhere. I am rigged out to live in the jungle, and have left at home my face powder and lip-stick..."

"We haven't come to that point yet. You'll find in Hanoi a simple, but normal life. But you did well to prepare yourself to face all eventualities. There is still electricity in Hanoi, but each family has got paraffin lamps ready. We have everything needed to live and fight under all circumstances."

Mrs B. entered the airport sitting-room. She glanced around at the walls decorated with typical Vietnamese drawings.

"This building wasn't here two years ago," she said. "Why should you build such beautiful things in times of war?"

"American bombings have caused us difficulties. But foreign friends have been coming to visit us. The longer we fight on, the more friends we have in world. We want to give them a decent reception. All branches of activity — economic, cultural, social — necessary to the maintenance of normal living conditions and war efforts are developed. Better still, we are getting ready even now to give a strong impulse to the economy as soon as peace is re-established."

"I have been following closely the news from Viet Nam. But I must confess that I could hardly imagine what life is like in North Viet Nam and in Hanoi after three years of bombing. At home, every time we received a letter with the Hanoi postmark, we felt great

joy. I could not imagine that it would be possible for me to visit you in Hanoi. I could not imagine that such a warm welcome would be extended to me in this well-lit and flower-decorated air building."

Right at this moment, the loudspeakers broadcast an air raid warning. The calm voice of a woman was heard: "Attention, compatriots! American aircraft spotted 30 kilometres from Hanoi. Let the armed forces get ready to fight!" I handed an electric torch to Mrs B. and told her that we could continue our conversation: should the alert be actually given, she would be led to a shelter. Meanwhile, a smiling customs officer asked her if she had anything to declare. A waitress brought refreshments. Seeing that everybody had stayed calm, Mrs B. remarked:

"This is the first time I've heard a preliminary warning of a possible air raid. Something new in a war!"

"If the siren were sounded every time an American aircraft was spotted, we would be in a state of permanent alert, and thus be paralysed!"

At the hotel, after a light meal, Mrs B. sent a cable informing her family of her arrival in Hanoi. At 3 o'clock in the morning, the alert sounded, a real one this time. She was led to the hotel shelter. An attendant switched on the electric lights and a fan, and offered her a chair and a hot cup of tea.

"I lived through the Second World War and bombings by the fascists," she said. "More than twenty years have passed, but the wail of the alarm siren still makes me nervous. Please excuse me."

"It was the same with us. The first time one heard the siren screaming and bombs exploding, it was hard

to keep calm. After these twenty years of struggle our people are accustomed to keep their sang-froid. Now when we hear the siren blowing and bombs crashing, we feel mostly anger and hatred, which urge us to action."

A young girl in a black jacket, a first-aid kit slung over one shoulder, a rifle on the other, entered, inquired after the guest's health, then went out. Mrs B. asked:

"Is she a member of the armed forces or a civilian nurse?"

"Well, she waited upon you at dinner. She was then wearing a white apron. Now she is in battle gear, wearing a cap of the self-defence militia."

"How many militia members are there in this hotel?"

"As many as there are members of the hotel staff. All take up their combat positions when necessary. All have received basic military training. Just look for yourself."

Mrs B. stepped towards the entrance, looked out and saw everywhere people in their combat positions, in foxholes, at the corners of buildings, in the garden, pointing their rifles or machine-guns towards the sky.

"That's the 'Three Readies' movement, isn't it?"

"It's only one aspect of the movement: to be ready to fight. It's the same everywhere, in government offices, factories, construction sites, enterprises, agricultural co-operatives, trains, fishing-boats, secondary schools and higher-education establishments. All our people participate in the fight. We'll show you the two other 'readies' when the time comes."

From the loudspeaker came a woman's voice, calm and firm: "Attention, compatriots! Enemy aircraft have violated the air space of our beloved capital. Let our armed and para-military forces stand ready to fight. Aim straight at the enemy! Let your fire be accurate and timely! Don't let them escape!"

Thousands, tens of thousands of projectiles of all calibers traced red streaks in the dark sky, converging on the American aircraft. Mrs B., attracted by this fireworks display, and also by shouting and laughter around her, had forgotten about her first alarm. She ventured completely out of the shelter. When the militiawomen urged her to go back there, she replied:

"I am a writer. How could I take refuge underground with such a beautiful theme to write about?"

She looked up and saw two aircraft falling in flames. A series of explosions were heard: bombs dropped at random on the northeastern part of the city by aircraft which had escaped the ground-fire. Another salvo resounded. Then everything returned to calm. The fight had lasted barely six minutes.

From shelters and foxholes, people emerged. They commented on the anti-aircraft defence, praised those who had taken accurate aim, blamed others who had wasted their ammunition, discussed the number and types of aircraft shot down. Fire engines and ambulances were rushing to the northeast of the city.

Mrs B. lingered a while near the shelter and asked:

"The American president has declared on several occasions that the Americans only strike at steel and concrete and not at economic and civilian objectives. Is there any truth in it?"

"Let's dot the i's: even our concrete and steel works, nobody has the right to attack. Our country is

independent and sovereign. We have never attacked the United States. The Americans have no right to strike at any target on our territory. And indeed, have they limited their bombings to concrete and steel? You'll see for yourself. But you have already seen that they have conducted a night raid, in which they dropped their bombs at random. How could anyone guarantee that even this hotel couldn't have been hit by rockets or bombs?"

One evening, Mrs B. went to a village in the suburbs of Hanoi. It was located about three kilometres from the central offices of the D.R.V.N., four kilometres from the General Post Office, and quite close to the Red River dyke. American aircraft had bombed this village, whose people were specialised in vegetable and flower growing. Mrs B. saw collapsed houses, burnt-out gardens, a completely destroyed grocery store. On the ruins of a primary school, she saw a half-burnt textbook, a broken inkstand, and, between two crushed bricks, a broken pencil. Standing before the graves of 19 children and many adults, innocent victims of the bombing, she could not contain her emotion.

"You see," I said, "if our anti-aircraft fire had not driven the American air pirates away, our losses would have been much more important. The village people would not have been the only victims. Downtown districts would have been razed. If we had not organized civilian defence, Hanoi wouldn't have remained as you've seen it."

"This reminds me of Oradour... of Nazi savagery."

"There have been innumerable Oradours during the three years of American bombing of North Viet Nam

and the long years of American aggression in the South. You know that B.52 super-bombers have carried out thousands of sorties over the South and even some regions of the North.”

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Coming back to the central part of the city, Mrs B. stopped at Phuc Tan, a district strung along the bank of the Red River. A raid had destroyed 400 dwellings. A few hundred metres away from Phuc Tan were the Municipal Theatre and the Great Market. She also visited the Trade Union School, several civilian factories (a soap factory, a cigarette factory, an electric-bulb and thermos-flask factory) which had been partially destroyed, and various places in town hit by rockets.

“From afar,” Mrs B. sighed, “we never could believe the Americans had reached such a degree of barbarity.”

“Our hearts bleed. Each human life, each piece of property destroyed fans up hatred in our hearts. But we must say that the Americans have committed a much greater crime against us. We hope that you will energetically denounce it before world opinion.”

“What crime can be greater than the killing of men and the destruction of the fruits of their peaceful labour?”

“It’s the crime of aggression, that of laying violent hands upon the independence, freedom, territorial integrity, and the very existence of the 30 million Vietnamese, of pursuing a war of aggression of a genocidal