A Reporter and Citizen: Harrison Salisbury's Trip to North Vietnam

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On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on 4/25/12
we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be awarded Highest honors
in History.

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Introduction

Above all I seek to spell out the virtue and total necessity for our society of reporting the unpopular event at the most – especially – at the most difficult touchy moment. It is easy to ride with the mob, but that path leads to Hitler and Stalin and the tosspot puffins we've so often put our money on. To me the First Amendment is our richest jewel.[1]

- Harrison Salisbury

The moment was undoubtedly peculiar for Harrison Salisbury. A lifelong reporter who earned considerable fame through the bylines attached to his articles was now the subject instead of the author of numerous outraged editorials across the nation. In a career marked by a stubborn insistence to always outwit official barricades, Salisbury now sat behind his own blockade on the tarmac of the San Francisco International Airport shielded from a throng of hungry reporters looking for a scoop on the man whose articles the past two weeks shocked the country. Though dawn had yet to break, the crowd eagerly wanted to question the man nicknamed "Hanoi Harry" about his recent stint with the "*Ho Chi Minh Times.*" Only minutes earlier Salisbury had slipped past the crowd waiting for him at the gate on his arrival from Hong Kong by escaping through the flight crew's secluded exit door. He was then driven to his connecting flight and allowed to board the plane using the food elevator. As Salisbury sat waiting for takeoff, thankful to have dodged the scrutiny, a young reporter burst through the doors, fighting wildly against the flight attendants attempting to stop him. The man made it midway through the cabin shouting, "I know he's here" but could not spot his target before being restrained. Once the crew had removed the intruder from the plane, Salisbury came out from his hiding spot behind a newspaper fortunate to escape detection. The flight to New York, his home, was without incident but for some reason the paranoia of fame did not leave.[2]

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[1] "Tosspot puffins" is a term meant to insult someone in a similar way as "drunkard" or "idiot"

[2] Harrison Salisbury, *A Time of Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 1-5.

His series from North Vietnam had run on the front page of the *New York Times* and challenged the accuracy and effectiveness of the American bombing campaign. The controversy brewed over the breadth of the first amendment. It was an unprecedented situation in American history for never had a reporter from one of the country's leading newspapers traveled to an enemy nation to report their side of the war. It was legal, as the United States had not declared war against North Vietnam, yet many voices weighed in on the wisdom of such a venture. Editorials nationwide chided, dismissed, or lauded the endeavor while readers flooded his inbox with letters expressing their feelings towards Salisbury and the *New York Times*. Even the government weighed in, arguing vehemently against much of what Salisbury claimed. For a month in 1967, Salisbury stood at the center of a nationwide spectacle in an already tumultuous time in American history. The political firestorm set off a fit of fear amongst Salisbury and his colleagues. Before even returning to the United States, others correspondents had warned Salisbury of the "geyser of rage" that spewed straight from the highest offices of government. According to these men President Johnson was extremely upset and Salisbury had to be careful because "It's a lynching party, and Lyndon wants blood." The message was taken seriously. When he finally arrived home, Salisbury stayed awake for most nights cautioning his wife, Charlotte, not to say anything out of fear that the government was electronically monitoring their house.[3]

Salisbury was not new to controversy, in fact it seemed to follow him wherever he worked. The University of Minnesota suspended the young Salisbury for protest he made while serving as editor of the school's newspaper. Post college, Salisbury ran into trouble with his superiors at the United Press (UP) after publishing reports describing the poverty of 1930s Minneapolis and reflected poorly on New Deal legislation designed to curb it. The reports would

[3] Ibid

keep him blacklisted for the rest of his career at the agency and leave him unable to earn larger stories or a higher pay grade. After World War II, the UP sent him to Russia where he quickly developed a strong mistrust of government. While there, he earned a reputation for unrelenting skepticism that caught the attention of the *New York Times* who offered to let him return stateside. Once in America, Salisbury again enraged those in power, this time in Birmingham, Alabama where his coverage of the civil rights movement caused an uproar in the southern community. The city was so upset by Salisbury's portrayal of widespread racism that it sued the reporter for libel in a case that would reach the Supreme Court and become a landmark decision in the field. And of course, he was the first American journalist to report from North Vietnam and offer onsite evidence contradicting the military and the presidency. In all his endeavors, Salisbury measured reporting by how much agitation he caused. Salisbury knew firsthand the danger that came with his position and warned:

> To be a reporter is no slick or easy task. If you are getting too many bouquets, too many words of praise – watch out! Something is wrong. You are not getting the whole story. If you are telling it all, and like it is, there will be brickbats mixed in with the bouquets.[4]

Over the course of his career, his critics threw many brickbats his way, calling him a Nazi spy, a Russian spy, a radical, a communist and a traitor. But none of the labels kept him from doing what he believed to be his job as a journalist.

In all his ventures he showed an obsession with reporting the truth nearly regardless of consequence. Considering himself a "first amendment absolutist", Salisbury brought an unwavering skepticism to his interactions with authority whether at home or abroad.[5] He grounded his career in this mantra because he witnessed first hand the consequences of abusive majorities in power. He lived through bigoted ignorance in Minnesota during World War I, in

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[4] Salisbury, *A Journey for Our Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 534.
[5] According to Salisbury, troop movements during wartime were the only thing that should not be reported

Russia during World War II and in Birmingham during the civil rights movement. His trip to Vietnam was another example in a well established pattern of advocacy journalism. For months he had heard the reports from President Johnson and the Pentagon claiming that American bombs were only hitting military targets in North Vietnam. But something seemed off. Salisbury had worked in London during World War II and learned how imprecise bombing could be. He had talked to American pilots involved in the "precision bombing" over Germany and knew that the term was a misnomer. Thus, when he heard the administration claim pinpoint accuracy, he knew he had to do something to verify the assertions. He spent months petitioning the North Vietnamese for entrance into the country until finally he received his visa. Once in the country, Salisbury sought to find the hidden truth as he explored city streets and rural villages inspecting the bomb craters that littered the landscape. Through interviewing citizens, officials, and foreigners, the reporter found evidence that contradicted American beliefs in precision bombing and rushed to publish his observations and tell America the truth about what was going on in Vietnam.

In hindsight, it is easier to understand Salisbury and his reports. Driven by the fear of an overly powerful executive branch, Salisbury's story was three "mis's" – Exploiting a hole left by the President's rhetoric concerning a limited war, he traveled to Vietnam to correct mischaracterizations of the bombing campaign, he wrote his articles to correct America's misperceptions of the Vietnamese, and he defended his efforts from critics but misunderstood the power his words held. In his later years, he would cling passionately to what he perceived to be the truth for his defense. He believed strongly that an adversarial press was the best defense of liberty and sought to do his part. Salisbury warned of the dangers of demonizing the press and believed that such attacks only paved the way for dictators. Whether or not he was right, it was

this fear that drove Salisbury to Vietnam. Unfortunately, it was the same fear that blinded Salisbury from seeing the full impact of his reporting.

A close analysis of Salisbury's reports reveals that he oversold his case to the public. The journalist carried into his coverage certain beliefs about the effectiveness of precision bombing during wartime. Once in Vietnam, he found evidence to support his beliefs as the bombing had neither been as effective nor as accurate as the Johnson Administration had claimed. But these previously held convictions may have clouded his vision and kept him from obtaining objectivity in more subtle areas. For example, while it was easy to see whether or not a bomb struck a house, it was much more difficult to draw conclusions about the North Vietnamese political situation from evidence gained in meetings with government officials and interviews with citizens. Had he been given a longer period of time in the country and allowed full access to interact with the people and the government, maybe he would have been qualified to make such controversial judgments. But this is not what happened, as Salisbury did not speak the language nor was he ever left alone to interact with the populous. Instead, he relied heavily on North Vietnamese translators to escort him around the country. Nonetheless, Salisbury reported groundbreaking ideas about the character of the Vietnamese as if he were an expert on the subject. In essence, he fell into the trap of believing that because he was right about bombing, he must then be right about everything else. As such, he partook in a one-way scrutiny in which he was extremely skeptical of claims made by the United States government but was not skeptical towards statements made by the North Vietnamese. This lapse of judgment caused Salisbury to report statements as "facts" from the North Vietnamese leadership that turned out to be false. These lapses damaged his credibility within the American media and made him vulnerable to criticism for poor reporting. Most interesting is the fact that Salisbury fell into the same trap the he

accused the Johnson administration of falling into as both underestimated the North Vietnamese capability to fight a war on and off the battlefield. While Salisbury failed to see the way in which he was manipulated and lied to, his story offers a compelling chapter on the historiography of the North Vietnamese campaign to win international public opinion.

Salisbury's story also holds a great significance to the historiography of the press in American democracy. It questions the boundaries of journalism and examines whether claiming something is the truth is an acceptable defense when that truth hurts the nation's stated goals. It challenges the definition of patriotism and shows that the term can mean multiple things to many groups. It stands as a testament to those who believe that journalists hold a supranational loyalty and acts as a beacon for the rise of advocacy journalism in the public sphere. All these issues fall on the backdrop of an unpopular and ultimately unsuccessful war that divided the country to a level unknown since the Civil War. Salisbury's reporting in this extraordinary time is crucial to understanding how the government and media interact during wartime and the challenges the two actors face in advancing their own agendas. To some he was a hero, to others a traitor. But this extreme split in opinion reveals a greater debate in American society and a clash of beliefs.

Chapter 1: The Four Actors

After World War II, the United States began a long involvement in Southeast Asia. After unsuccessfully helping the French reassert control over Vietnam in the early 1950s, the United States spent the next decade gradually escalating its fight against the communist insurgency. The slow descent into war was peculiar because even though the United States would eventually send hundreds of thousands of soldiers to the remote area, war was never officially declared. Instead, the U.S. first sent advisers, focusing on counterinsurgency and eventually the administrations advanced the idea of a limited war. The limited war in Vietnam meant that the United States did not fully commit the totality of its resources nor did it strive to make the enemy completely surrender. In the limited war presidents and their administrations were quick to lay out their case on why it was essential for America to intervene in this part of the world all while being careful to keep public anger towards the North Vietnamese low to avoid escalating to total war. Commenting on the peculiarity of the situation, Secretary of State Dean Rusk remarked that the administration "made a deliberate decision not to stir up war fever" in order to keep the conflict from reckless escalation.[6] To try to maintain normalcy within the country, political leaders did not initially mobilize the population to the same level that it had during previous wars. Nor did the government attempt to initially censor the war's coverage. The balancing act of juggling enthusiasm with restraint resulted from recent history within the geopolitical landscape. As the United States pursued this path, it fell into contradictory and incoherent foreign policy that opened the path for Harrison Salisbury and others to question the legitimacy of the venture in Vietnam.

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[6] Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle For America's Hearts and Minds* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 20.

U.S. policy sought to blunt the advance of global communism. After World War II, communist regimes seemed to be on the march. Beginning with the consolidation of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1940s, communist expansion challenged pro-western capitalism worldwide. As espoused in the famous Cold War document NSC 68, the newly termed "cold war" was "in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world" was at stake. By embracing communism, the U.S.S.R had accepted "a new fanatic faith, antithetical" to American interests that led it "to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world." Policymakers in the document called for "the United States to maintain a state of war even during peacetime" as "any substantial further extension of the area under the domination of the Kremlin would raise the possibility that no coalition adequate to confront the Kremlin with greater strength could be assembled." Fear of the proverbial wolf at the door led policy makers to conclude that communism was the "gravest threat to the United States" as Soviet expansion represented "destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself" and therefore had to be undermined at every point where it reared its ugly head. The Soviet menace only "understood strength" thus the United States had to maintain a large standing army, capable and willing to "develop a level of military readiness which can be maintained as long as necessary."[7] Mao's conquest of China in 1949 sparked debate in the United States over who "lost" the once friendly nation and in 1950 communism seemed to attack again when the North Korean army marched into South Korea. In the early 1960s fears of communist aggression rose when the United States and Soviet Union stood at the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis creating a sense that the Cold War was closer and more dangerous than ever. When Vietnam first entered American thought, it was framed as yet another incident of communist aggression against a legitimate and free government. Springing to action, the United States felt that it must make a stand against the

[7] National Security Council 68: Washington: 1950 http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/pdocs/nsc68.pdf

international communist movement to send a strong sign to the global community that it would fight communism wherever it attempted to usurp power. Thus, the United States had to commit sufficient resources to Vietnam to convince its ideological enemy that it would not cede an inch of territory.

Still, total war in Asia was no longer a viable option after the Korean War as lessons learned from this experience dominated American thinking during Vietnam. Only a decade before, allied forces had come too close to the Chinese border in their pursuit of the North Koreans. Fearing that their borders were threatened, the Chinese responded by sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers into Korea to fight against the western forces. The Chinese offensive nearly pushed the Americans off the entire peninsula until the US recoiled and managed an uneasy stalemate. Though it seemed to be a draw, the Chinese effort sufficiently bloodied American noses to such a degree that neither side was eager to come to blows again. With Korea fresh in mind, American policy makers tried their best to avoid provoking the Chinese giant by ruling out an invasion of North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese, though fiercely independent, openly entertained the idea of calling for reinforcements if needed. In an interview Prime Minister Pham Dong made an ominous proclamation that though the nation was not tiring under the weight of American attacks, it could always call on "volunteers" if necessary.[8] Realizing China's role as overseer, the American goal was to force the North Vietnamese into peace discussions. Outright conquest and total war were entirely out of the question.

Stuck in this conundrum, leaders in the United States were left the tough job of explaining a contradictory policy to the public on how to defeat communism without threatening China. Such efforts were on display in 1966 when the American war effort maintained a steady bombing campaign against the North, named Rolling Thunder, to help relieve pressure in the

[8] Harrison Salisbury, "A Turning Point in the War Is Seen By Hanoi Visitor," *New York Times*, January 18, 1967

South. It was a dangerous game as China supplied a heavy dose of materiel and training advisors to help their communist neighbors. The bombing campaign began, then quickly halted to determine whether the North Vietnamese would seek peace after receiving such an onslaught of American military might. With no response from the North Vietnamese, the bombing resumed anew. Such a delicate and tentative approach came about because "the government was trying desperately to avoid the implications of 'total war,' and thus could go only so far in stirring sentiment against the enemy."[9] It did not want to push too far or bomb too fiercely because of fear that the limited war would morph into a total war and bring China into the battle. In an attempt to avoid the perception of escalation, the bombing campaign was limited and portrayed in such a way that it was only hitting military targets. It was not total war so citizen collateral damage could not be expected or tolerated. The United States would not engage in propaganda campaign to dehumanize their enemy; instead it would try to keep the populace's anger to a minimum.

Against this Cold War tension the story of Harrison Salisbury unfolded. Entwined within it were four separate actors all with four separate goals. First, there was Salisbury a lifelong skeptical journalist, seasoned in war coverage, and eager to correct the government's claims of bombing precision. Second, sections of the American public believed that the *New York Times*, the leading American media institution, was sympathetic to communism. Third there was the Johnson Administration, which attempted to convey the most optimistic coverage on the war and especially of the bombing of North Vietnam. And last, there was the budding anti war movement, seeking legitimacy and acceptance into mainstream American political debate. The collision of the Johnson Administration's characterization of the bombing with Salisbury's

[9] Clarence Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 156.

reporting was in the making as each of the actors in the drama and all had established a pattern of behavior that came to a head when Salisbury's reports hit the front page of the papers. Through his endeavors, Salisbury would become the embodiment of moderate liberal criticism of the war.

Salisbury's Career

Born November 14, 1908, Harrison Evans Salisbury was "a Victorian child" in middle class Minnesota. Nicknamed "Bunny" by his mother, Salisbury hardly acted like one and grew into a boy obsessed with war. Coming of age during World War I, the young Salisbury showed an early fascination with the Russian Revolution. His parents often found him pacing back and forth in front of the house, emulating Russian soldiers that stood guard over the new government thousands of miles away. The "child of war" soon shifted his allegiances to join the rest of his family in America's fight against the Germans. Days he spent with this mother, sowing socks and rolling bandages for the Red Cross while nights he spent with his father, studying the atlas and wishing that America had conquered more of the world. His upbringing originally bred within him a staunch conservatism; hating "Yellow Dog" Woodrow Wilson and believing that "only town drunks and Irishmen were Democrats." Looking back on the period, Salisbury saw the worst of American bigotry in his upbringing. In his memoirs, Salisbury labeled his younger version "the small chauvinistic patriot," overzealous for the American cause. He believed that the environment he grew up created an unconstrained ignorance and hatred towards those who thought differently. Much of this bigotry was directed towards those with German ancestry who refused to buy war bonds. Salisbury believed that "no one was more vigilant than I against the 'pros,' that is, the pro-Germans, secret enemies of Our Cause" a sentiment he likely picked up from his father, who had previously intimidated the local Scandinavian, German, and Irish

immigrants suspected of having socialist leanings. Salisbury later reflected back in horror on the time that a local pro-war parade set off "a violent wave of xenophobia" that turned "the liberal state of Minnesota...into a pre-fascist fief." When Minnesota created a Public Safety Commission, it held so much power that in Salisbury's view it "established a dictatorship" in which "hatred, racism, xenophobia, was as naked as in Nazi Germany." Apart from pressuring people into buying war bonds, such an atmosphere demanded that the populace say things like "liberty cabbage" to conform to American zeal. The passion and intensity of the period was not a part of his life that Salisbury was proud of, saying "I was not a thoughtful child and I enthusiastically joined the chorus of hate. I had never, I am certain, heard of the Bill of Rights or the First Amendment." His early exposure to prejudice so disgusted the adult Salisbury that he would forever be an enemy to xenophobia and blind patriotism. He dedicated the rest of his career to rooting out such causes at home or abroad.[10]

Bothered by his adolescent ignorance, Salisbury developed skepticism towards authority. Upon graduation from high school, Salisbury attended the University of Minnesota. According to Salisbury, the school's intellectual climate was "no Athens", and its repressive conservatism bothered the teenager. Seeking less conformity, the young student drew close to a teacher, Oscar Firkins, a famous critic in residence, known for his eccentric and rebellious spirit. Firkins instilled within his pupil many lessons as the two met frequently to converse at office hours or over dinner. During this period Firkins helped foster the attitude Salisbury would make a career out of: skepticism. As a non-conformist, Firkins warned Salisbury of "not taking anyone's word" but instead urged him to always "go back to the source." The critic believed life was too short to "accept banality" and that, Salisbury should "rebel" often against the world and its norms. If there was one good thing to pursue in life, Firkins thought it should be to forge one's own path

[10] Salisbury, *A Journey For Our Times*, 1, 9, 10, 12, 13.

without ever sacrificing one's independence.[11] Taking Firkins' advice, Salisbury soon caused problems as editor of the school's newspaper. The climate of the day put the liberal paper against the traditionalist administration. As all good stories must have a villain, Salisbury believed the school's administration to be "violently reactionary, dictatorial and geriatric" and their supervisors, the state legislature, as a body filled with "bumpkin Republicans and lobbyists for big interests." Salisbury and his fellow journalists fashioned themselves as local muckrakers, dedicated to uncovering controversial subjects. Conflict between the two organizations occurred often and Salisbury's greatest clash with the establishment came his senior year when the school passed a law banning any student from smoking in the library. Offenders were subject to a yearlong suspension from school. Thinking the law ridiculous, Salisbury went to the library, smoked, and talked to the janitor before writing an article for the paper on the incident. Once Salisbury left, the janitor told the administration about what had occurred and Salisbury was suspended for one year.[12]

The incident made national news, showing up on the front page of the *New York Times* and the publicity earned Salisbury an offer to join the United Press covering the upper Midwest from Minnesota to Montana.[13] It was during his time at the UP that the Great Depression descended upon America. As the economic condition of the country worsened, the UP began running a "Good News" column highlighting economic growth in the local regions. On assignment in Minneapolis, though not writing in the "Good News" column, Salisbury investigated the degree of economic damage the city had suffered so far. He spent time combing through the city's migrant labor market looking to see if anyone was hiring manual labor. No one

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[11] Idid, 74.
[12] Ibid, 82,85.
[13] At this time, the United Press had yet to merge with the International News Service and was still named the UP, not the UPI

was. The men were homeless and drunk, with little hope for an income. In the same story, Salisbury interviewed leaders of the Industrial Workers of the World to gauge their feelings on the recent downturn. The reporter also polled the chamber of commerce and wrote of men who had "done all the right things – worked hard, invested their money, tried to make a decent profit" yet were currently struggling to support their families. His article wove together these three downtrodden groups into an expose of Minneapolis' current economic plight. Struck by the piece's blunt and pessimistic prognosis, the story was trashed as "defamatory" to the city by the local government. Its content so offended the higher ups that the head office of the UP in New York called the Minneapolis bureau to demand that the story be retracted and the journalist responsible immediately fired. As cooler heads prevailed the situation calmed and Salisbury managed to barely keep his job. From then on known as "that goddamn radical kid from the university" Salisbury struggled to earn promotions and stories during his time at the UP.[14]

While abroad, Salisbury grew even more disenchanted with government figures. His first major assignment was in London during World War II, covering the war as it raged in the skies above Europe. Thinking himself a country bumpkin, Salisbury was initially overwhelmed by the complicated nature of British society. But what bothered him more than British subtleties was the way in which the American air force portrayed the bombing campaign against the Germans. According to Salisbury, there was a brewing rivalry between the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and their United States counterparts. The RAF was responsible for night raids on the continent while the U.S. Eighth Air Force had the unenviable task of bombing during the day. While nighttime bombing was relatively safe, Salisbury thought the whole concept of daylight bombing was a needless danger to the men involved. In fact, he believed that the "someone had invented the daylight bombing doctrine" solely to further the rivalry between the British and Americans.

[14] Ibid, 93, 125.

In his view, brash American commanders were unwilling to play second fiddle to the British during nighttime raids so they stubbornly committed all their resources to daylight attacks to retain control. After speaking with members of the air force, Salisbury concluded "To fly in the Eighth Air Force in those days was to hold a ticket to a funeral. Your own." In spite of the danger, military press representatives tried to convince the public that technological advancements meant that bombing was like "shooting fish in a barrel," a platitude that Salisbury scoffed at constantly. Still, the war was no laughing matter as the air force's casualties quickly grew. Salisbury witnessed the way in which:

> The command tried to justify daylight bombing in every possible way – by exaggerating results, by lying about losses, by long winded theories of how the day-and-night pressures produced by round-the-clock British and American driving the Germans to the brink. I thought there was a lot of mush in the theory…

It all added up to a military blinded by stubbornness, devoid of common sense. The results were tragic as Salisbury watched many men senselessly die. Salisbury years later would sarcastically write about the bombing campaign's rationale: "If this cost the lives of many fine young men and inflicted no really serious damage on Germany's fighting capability, that was too bad. War was war and people were bound to be killed." His experience in London eroded a serious amount of trust he held in the United States government and would forever make him skeptical of the idea of precision bombing in war.[15]

After spending the first part of the war with the UP as a correspondent in London, Salisbury went to Moscow to cover the eastern front. Wartime Russia suffocated foreign correspondents with censorship and the reporters felt immense pressure to print positive portrayals of the U.S.S.R. Soviet officials frequently chastised Salisbury and others for their stories. According to Salisbury, the Russians believed that: "If we were fighting the war together,

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[15] Salisbury, *A Journey of Our Time*, 196-197.

the Russians said, why do you insist on putting in those 'bad things' – i.e. references to secret police, arrests, shabby treatment, Soviet mistakes, ruthless diplomacy, the Katyn case, persecution of the Poles…The list was endless." Though it was challenging for all reporters, Salisbury in particular struggled in the this climate because he thought of himself "as a hard-hitting, two-fisted, call-them-as-they-come reporter" unwilling to call "a spade a goddamn shovel." In one instance, Salisbury met with the Vice Commissar of Foreign Affairs regarding an article the UP had run that accused Stalin of striking one of his Generals with a bottle for being too drunk during Winston Churchill's birthday party in Teheran. The incident gave the impression that Russian diplomacy consisted of a raucous and classless group. The Vice Commissar read a statement from a note written in red pencil, a practice used almost exclusively by Stalin. The note demanded a public apology from the UP to be made in newspapers across the world. Faced with immediate expulsion, Salisbury convinced the UP to oblige. Years later after Stalin died, Salisbury found evidence that the original story printed by the UP was most likely true. In this instance, "it was the truth – or a slight distortion of the truth – that had caused the trouble." The experience had taught Salisbury that governments would go to great lengths to protect embarrassing incidents. It did not matter the nationality, those in power would try to silence those who presented embarrassing truths.[16]

After the war, Salisbury began working for the *New York Times* as a foreign correspondent in Russia through the 1950s until returning stateside. He carried his reputation for skeptical reporting back to the United States where he was chosen to cover racial tensions in Birmingham, Alabama in the spring of 1960. Salisbury trudged to the unfamiliar region to interview the victims of prejudice, though he was admittedly frightened of Bull Connor and his pledge to the black community that "as long as you live and as long as Connor lives, there will

[16] Ibid, Salisbury 232-238, 250.

be segregation in Birmingham and the South." Salisbury spent time with a black minister recently threatened by the Klu Klux Klan and heard "the Birmingham story," a diatribe filled with disturbing incidents of racial hatred. He then interviewed a rabbi who had experienced similar hatred from the white community because of his beliefs. Salisbury published his findings in an article titled "Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham" on the front page of the *Times*. The article was raw and inflammatory. Salisbury had originally written:

> To one long accustomed to the sickening atmosphere of Moscow in the Stalin days the aura of the community which once prided itself as the "Magic City" of the South is only too familiar. To one who knew Hitler's storm trooper Germany it would seem even more familiar.

Though editors removed that particular statement, Salisbury admitted that the rest of the piece "layed it on thick." Upon publication, Birmingham was outraged as the *Birmingham News* ran the headline "N.Y. Times Slanders Our City – Can This be Birmingham?" prompting city officials to bring a $1.5 million libel suit against Salisbury. The controversy quickly boiled over. Jefferson Country, Alabama issued a warrant for Salisbury's arrest if he were to ever enter the state. As lawyers fought in courts, Salisbury was shocked that his agitation had caused such a reaction within the United States. In fact, years after the incident researchers in Birmingham would discover that the Birmingham police had bugged Salisbury's hotel room during his stay in the city.[17]

The incident in Birmingham was just another in a long string of Salisbury's controversial stories while in pursuit of uncomfortable truths. Though the circumstances changed, Salisbury experienced the same hindrances everywhere he reported. In his words, it was always the same message. He believed that those in power, angered by his reporting and the exposure of truth, would stop at nothing to keep embarrassing details from coming out. When made public, he

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[17] Salisbury, *A Time of Change*, 51-54, 61.

learned that in many situations "the truth is no defense; the truth is dangerous; it upsets applecarts." But what really bothered Salisbury was that it was often ignored in times of crisis. He believed that in many situations "There was no truth" because it was "blown away by power and passion, the first casualty of conflict." Because of his experience in reporting, Salisbury professed to be a "First Amendment absolutist" meaning he was against any restriction on freedom of the press. Particularly within the United States, Salisbury thought that "democracy and secrecy are incompatible" and that a free press was the best means to protect against corruption. He summed up his reporting career saying:

> Sometimes it was the administration of a Midwestern university, sometimes the city fathers of my own city; President Lyndon Johnson or the rulers of the Kremlin; World War II generals or Bull Connor in Birmingham; but the message was always the same: Shut up! Don't rock the boat. Keep those unpleasant truths to yourself. The truth, I was ultimately to learn is the most dangerous thing. There are no ends to which men of power will not go to put out its eyes.[18]

It would be this same spirit that would take him to Vietnam as he added another controversy to his growing list of episodes in which he challenged the status quo and relied on truth as his defense.

Salisbury's self perception is worth noting. First, for a reporter who claimed to be blacklisted for much of his career, Salisbury had managed to earn coveted spots abroad. These opportunities hardly seem to be what one would expect for a disfavored journalist. Second, and more importantly, his comments on his ability to find truth speak to an air of confidence that was borderline arrogant. In recounting his career, Salisbury claimed that in instances where others were duped, he would find the real story. He believed that his experiences had created a journalist that could not be intimidated by power or thrown off by lies. He established objectivity and tenacity as the pillars on which his reporting stood and could not be shaken from his

[18] Salisbury, *A Journey of Our Time*, 93, 94, 130, 144.

foundations. For these reasons, Salisbury named himself Arcturus in honor of one of the brightest stars in the sky. The idea was that he shone so brightly that the darkness could never blot out the truth he spread onto the world. For a reporter, the title is certainly grandiose and this self-perception grew as he began to work for the *Times*. His standing and accomplishment established him as an expert in the field of foreign events and would affect his relations and interactions while in North Vietnam.[19]

The *New York Times* and Communism

When Salisbury came to work for the *New York Times*, a sizable number of Americans were concerned that the paper looked sympathetically on communism. In the 1930s, the Moscow bureau chief, Walter Duranty, earned a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on famine in Russia. In his reports, Duranty worked to set straight popular misconceptions and argue that the famine was not actually happening to the degree that western papers reported. The problem was that he was wrong, very wrong, as a severe famine did strike the U.S.S.R and inflict terrible losses on the country. Charged with letting his own affinity for the Soviet Union compromise his objectivity, Duranty's eventual exposure and the ensuing embarrassment bestowed upon his employers the nickname the "Uptown Daily Worker," a derogatory swipe at its political leanings. Twenty-five years later, Herbert Matthews, another *Times* correspondent, sought out then rebel leader, and eventual communist dictator, Fidel Castro for an interview. At this time Castro and his followers were in hiding while the Batista government in power claimed they were dead. Matthews' interview with Castro "was more important for us than a military victory" according to compatriot Che Guevara because it gave the movement legitimacy and publicity. The piece was highly criticized within the American public for its sympathy towards far left movements and

[19] Ibid, 125.

added more fodder to the flames of those who believed the *Times* was too tolerant of communist views.

Regarding Vietnam, many felt that the *Times* showed sympathy towards the North Vietnamese, or at the very least, that it was not as hard on the enemy as other papers. Daniel Hallin notes that "coverage of Vietnam in a liberal 'prestige paper' like the *New York Times* was very different from coverage in a conservative paper" as "someone who followed the war in the *New York Times*...got a much more critical view."[20] The examples are numerous. The *Times* was one of the only papers to print the opinions of those who complained about working with South Vietnamese President Diem and openly blamed the initial failings of the war on Diem's inability to win the loyalty of the South Vietnamese people. Later it publicly revealed that there were plans for a coup against Diem, embarrassing the Kennedy Administration into a series of denials. In 1963 it wondered whether there was any hope of stability in Southern Vietnam and was quick to pessimism, as in David Halberstam's comment on the battle of Ap Bac: "Today the government troops got the sort of battle they wanted, and they lost." The paper broke with the administration in 1965 when it ran a series of editorials against bombing North Vietnam saying there were "unexhausted" alternatives that could better save American lives and shorten the war. Regarding the success of the bombing, the paper ran statements from unnamed officers saying that "I never saw a place where so many military orders are disobeyed as in Vietnam" and suggested that American orders to hit only military targets were disregarded. As the war continued and grew, the *Times* bristled at the idea of escalation saying that "American escalation had been matched by the communists...and the stalemate has merely...moved to a high level of

[20] Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 11.

combat, casualties, and destruction."[21] Later in the war, the *Times* called for negotiation over escalation and constantly complained of the secrecy within administration policy.[22] Its reputation was evident during the Salisbury affair as Senator Bourke Hickenlooper would later say "It's strange to me that they [North Vietnamese officials] will let a *New York Times* reporter in but not objective reporters."[23] Rightly or wrongly, the perception was that the *Times* was sympathetic to communism and that its writers and editorialists were primarily liberals who let their political feelings infiltrate their writings.

The interesting part about this mentality was that in spite of these incidents, the *New York Times* was unique at this period in the American foreign policy arena. It stance as one of the nation's most prominent newspapers gave it an unmatched legitimacy in foreign policy debates. In Salisbury's own words the paper was "neither a Congress, a court, a church nor a public body of any kind yet it exerts a pervasive influence on its epoch as a breeding place of political innovation, a forcing furnace for national and foreign policy (even of war and peace)." In this view, the paper was the establishment as it set debate and issued its opinions to the rest of the country. Because of its pervasive influence, Salisbury himself referred to the paper as "the alchemist of culture, a preceptor of education and science a maker of mores."[24] Clearly, the long time employee of the paper realized the prestigious role the *Times* held in American society. But paired with reader skepticism, it is evident that the "alchemist of culture" was burdened with the perception that it was sympathetic to America's greatest enemy, communism.

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[21] William Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 23, 25, 33, 57, 102, 219, 269, 316.
[22] Hallin, 65.
[23] Wyatt, 153.
[24] Harrison Salisbury Collection, Box 168, Columbia University.

Presidential Portrayal of Vietnam

Meanwhile, the war had escalated again and President Johnson was seeking to persuade the American people that progress was being made in Vietnam. In a series of press conferences in 1966, rhetoric from the president brimmed with optimism regarding the war. Records of Lyndon Johnson's press conferences demonstrate America's position. While addressing the media on February 26, Johnson declared that the war was for the protection of human rights and self-determination, not the aggrandizement of America's influence:

> We are not trying to seize power and overturn other governments and try to dominate other peoples. We are trying to defeat aggression in South Vietnam. We are trying to defeat social misery. We are trying to establish a stable democratic government, and we are searching for an honorable and just peace.

Johnson framed the conflict as one in which the United States was in Vietnam to protect the South Vietnamese from unwanted foreign invaders seeking to implement a repressive government. On March 22 after talking with a commander in Vietnam, Johnson praised their heroism, saying that American soldiers "have had a wonderful effect on the Vietnamese, and that the boys felt they had a mission and they were fond of the Vietnamese people and they were working very well together." Again, Johnson stressed that the war was for more than just military victory – it was to improve Vietnam. To emphasize this sentiment, he mentioned that soldiers "would protect themselves during the day…and spend the evenings trying to fix up the schools and teach the children" to show that the American soldier was outstanding on and off the battlefield. Though the venture was challenging, the president said that its success was something he cherished and confessed that when he felt upset about domestic problems, he would read letters from soldiers in Vietnam to cheer up because they were full of optimism. Johnson was also optimistic about the progress American troops were making against the North Vietnamese. On March 31 he told reporters that the enemy was suffering irreparable losses and

that within the last four months the North Vietnamese army had suffered 10,000 soldiers killed and 50,000 wounded. In addition to the weight the American military had come to bear on them, the Vietnamese lacked food, medical supplies and were dealing with a rampant malaria problem. Such good news was confirmed in "diplomatic reports" assuring Johnson that "the opposing forces no longer really expect a military victory in South Vietnam."[25]

In spite of his assurances that the war was going well, President Johnson still openly discussed his desire for peace. Much of this concern came for the impact the conflict had on the nation's finances, specifically its effect on Johnson's domestic programs. On May 21 Johnson told reporters that "No one wants peace in the world more than the United States of America" and that "there is no one willing to go further to obtain it than this President." Johnson believed that his efforts had been unsuccessful because the North Vietnamese were "determined to swallow up the people of South Vietnam and by force bring them to their knees" before they would discuss peace. Thus, the blame was placed on the enemy and not on the United States. As proof of this blame, President Johnson urged those who thought his desire for peace was insincere to look at his record on the issue:

> We have had two pauses. We have had economic proposals. We have had diplomatic invitations extended to all 115 or 120 countries. We sent Ambassadors to some 40 of them...We have asked the United Nations to help. We have supported the Secretary General U Thant when he proposed that he take a trip. They [the North Vietnamese] would not receive him. We sent Mr. Harriman, Mr. Goldberg, and the Secretary of State to other capitals.

At this point none of these ventures had been successful. Johnson maintained that he was willing to go as far as the North Vietnamese in the process for peace but that such steps would not include any more pauses to the fighting without a reciprocal gesture from the enemy. To his critics who suggested that the Vietnamese would come to the peace table if Johnson initiated a

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[25] The American Presidency Project, Press Conferences, University of California Santa Barbra, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/news_conferences.php: February 26, March 22, 31

pause in bombing, he responded that "I don't quite understand, though, why you want me to have our Marines and our airmen pause and put their hands behind their backs while the other people don't pause, and continue to shoot at them." Johnson's attempts for peace talks sent a strong message to the American public that the United States was not looking to escalate the war any further than necessary to secure peace for the South Vietnamese.[26]

In February 1965 Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, an aggressive bombing campaign against North Vietnamese territory. The rationale was to "raise the cost of aggression at its source" by bombing "selected military targets" essential to the Vietnamese army. However, Johnson talked himself into a hole by giving the impression of pinpoint accuracy during the operation. During the July 5 press conference the president claimed that the latest "very accurate target operation" in "the vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong" struck 86% of the areas petroleum storage capacity, rendering 57% of the area unusable. The United States was "very careful to select military targets that were not in the center of the area and to spare all civilians" by taking "every precaution available to us." On July 20, Johnson communicated that American planes had struck oil supplies in Haiphong, destroying nearly 70% of the facility all while doing "a very careful but very perfect job." Reports indicated that "there were few civilian lives lost, if any" and by one estimate the only collateral damage was a man working at the alarm center of the factory. In sum, he said that within the effort "We were very careful not to get out of the target area, in order not to affect civilian populations." On November 4 the president contrasted the American war effort North Vietnamese tactics. The North Vietnamese were "folks that throw the bombs at our Embassy in Saigon" while the Americans "have never bombed their population." In all instances in which the president spoke on the accuracy of bombing, he went out of his way

[26] Ibid, May 21, April 22.

to emphasize that the bombing was not causing civilian damage and that the planes were accurately hitting their intended targets.[27]

The administration labeled the bombing a success. Intelligence indicated that the bombs had thwarted an anticipated North Vietnamese offensive by hurting supply lines to such a degree that the North Vietnamese front line lacked adequate food and medicine "rendering entire units ineffective." Secretary McNamara took the stand during the November 5 conference to outline the three goals of the bombing. The first, was to increase the morale in South Vietnam; the second was to reduce the flow of men from the North to the South; and the third, was to let the Northern leaders know that if they continued to support the war in the South then they "would pay a price in the North." At this point in the war he claimed the Air Force had accomplished all three goals. Regarding Southern morale, he told reporters "surely we have achieved that objective." Regarding the flow of men, he argued that the American bombing effort had "increased the cost" of the venture. In addition it was also "very clear that North Vietnam had diverted about 300,000 men from other activities in their society to the repair" of damaged communication and supply lines. And last, regarding punishing the North, it was "very clear they were paying the price" though he admitted that "We never intended, and we don't believe now, that the bombing of the North will, by itself, lead to a termination of the activity in the South." In all, he, along with President Johnson, gave the public a glowing review of the bombing in the North.[28]

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[27] Ibid, June 18, July 5, 20, November 4.
[28] Ibid, November 5.

The Anti-War Movement

Any discussion of the war cannot be complete without mentioning the role of popular protest. Demonstrators held two main complaints: that the bombing should be stopped and that the United States should not be involved in a Vietnamese civil war. First, once Rolling Thunder began, anti-war activists believed that the United States compromised its morality by engaging in an indiscriminate bombing campaign. As Melvin Small remarks "The images of modern air force raining down death on helpless peasants who were not engaged in comparable attacks on Americans took away the moral high ground from the United States in its battle to win not only the hearts and minds of its own citizens but also foreign observers." Because bombing struck military targets but it was notoriously inaccurate and often landed on non combatants, many wondered how the United States could say that they were fighting for the wellbeing of the Vietnamese when their country was under a relentless aerial assault unmatched in history. As the media began to cover this topic more often, the humanitarian outrage acted as a catalyst to encourage greater participation in nationwide protest. Second, many believed that the United States was engaged in a civil war, not an interstate conflict. As a civil war, the United States was on questionable ethical grounds for intervention. Protestors questioned why Americans had the right to meddle in the affairs of a sovereign nation and whether or not it was right to deny the people the right to self determination. Of course, the administration and its defenders framed the issue in a different manner but it was undeniable that the bombing and character of the conflict lay at the heart of the anti-war movement during this period.

In 1965, media coverage portrayed the protesters as out of touch radicals. Though most marches and demonstrations comprised an overwhelmingly majority of moderates, television cameras sought those who openly waved North Vietnamese flags or in some other physical

manner appeared to be societal outliers. The degree to which the movement seemed distant from middle class America only grew when members of the Women Strike for Peace met with North Vietnamese officials in Jakarta, Indonesia to "express solidarity with those whom they viewed as fighting for independence from the West." As immolations and other demonstrations continued, only 17% of Americans wished for the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. Simply put, the anti-war movement was perceived to be too much on the fringe to gain legitimacy.[29]

In 1966, the movement gained steam as popular mainstream figures began to protest the bombing. First there was Senator J. William Fulbright, a liberal politician who had helped pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Senator Fulbright starred in political debate during Senate sessions on the Vietnam War that aired in living rooms across the nation. Soon after, anti-war advertisements signed by 6,400 teachers ran in the *New York Times* while certain clergy members began speaking out against the war. Though still a minority, the anti-war movement gained more momentum when housewives in California temporarily disrupted shipment of napalm along the state's roads.[30] In a strong break from the protests 1965, none of these groups were extreme and signaled a shift to more moderate liberal criticism of the war. Students, professors, and democrats concerned with social issues began to be the base for a movement that would soon grow in popularity.

Conclusion

On December 14, 1966 six waves of Navy fighters dropped 500 pound bombs on the North Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. Hoping to hit only military targets, the planes met stiff resistance and jettisoned their bombs across surrounding neighborhoods. Unknown to the public

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[29] Small, 17, 20, 24, 25, 27, 31.
[30] Ibid 41, 43, 44, 51.

at the time, one of the flight crews admitted that they were "uncertain of the exact release coordinates" of their bombs and believed that they could have missed their intended targets due to cloud cover and aircraft defenses. The result could not have been more catastrophic. American ordinances severely damaged much of the Chinese Embassy, the Xinhau news agency, and shattered windows at the Czech and Romanian chanceries. Outraged, the North Vietnamese claimed that that "the U.S. imperialists again brazenly sent many formations of aircraft to bomb and strafe residential quarters in the city itself and its suburbs causing to the people losses in terms of human lives and property." Other outlets were quick to pick up on the events as the next day news broke on the front page of international papers though it was largely ignored in the American media. News organizations in Paris and London claimed that American bombs had left "several civilians dead" while eastern bloc media reported "numerous residents killed and 'scores of buildings …destroyed in the fire.'"[31] The limited war now seemed to be escalating.

Left to explain the damage, United States officials bumbled their way through categorical denials. State Department spokesman Robert McCloskey addressed the media and "vehemently denied that sites within the capital could have been hit." But McCloskey struggled when asked about the limits of the strike. A reporter asked directly if the United States had bombed Hanoi, he responded with "What do you mean by Hanoi?" Undeterred, McCloskey repeated throughout his press conference that United States bombs only struck military or "militarily associated" targets that were outside of Hanoi's bounds. The next day, military sources at the Pentagon joined the chorus in denying that American bombs struck Hanoi or anything inside of its city limits.[32]

Salisbury, already on route to North Vietnam, unintentionally timed his visit perfectly. He would be able to check with his own eyes exactly what had happened and to see whether the

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[31] James Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Palo Alto: Stanford Univeristy Press, 2012), 364-368.
[32] Ibid, 373,368.

Johnson administration's portrayal of the bombing was accurate. He had spent years applying his trained skepticism to the subjects he reported on. As a *New York Times* reporter, he was aware of the paper's reputation and supposed sympathy towards the far left and knew that he must make his reports beyond reproach. He had heard President Johnson give the bombing glowing reviews and knew that it must be wrong. Most importantly, Salisbury's critique would run at a time in which many were looking for more mainstream criticism of the war. His expertise would allow him to become the embodiment of the rising antiwar group – educated liberals against the bombing.

Chapter 2: Salisbury in Vietnam

Walking down the streets of a foreign capital was nothing new to the weathered correspondent but this time it was different. It was not the region, for he had traveled extensively throughout Asia in his storied career. It was not the wartime atmosphere either, for he had reported from London during the great German bombing offensives in the 1940s. It was not even the nature of the regime, for the man had spent extensive time in other communist countries, gaining an expertise on socialism in Russia and China. No, this experience was different. As he walked down Pho Nguyen Thiep Street he could not help but be alarmed by his surroundings. Craters spread in all directions, blowing holes not in barracks or munitions factories but rather in pockets of suburban houses. He could not find a factory, an anti-aircraft gun or anything else resembling a military structure. His guides listed the time of the attacks, the type of aircraft responsible and most troubling, the casualties. Many women and children had not survived, and even more were homeless. His experience the past few days had shown the horrific picture in front of him repeated throughout the country – in sprawling neighborhoods and rural Catholic convents – all subject to indiscriminate and incomprehensible devastation. He had had enough and turned to leave when a victim of the bombing ran up to him. This man, Tran Ngoc Trac, was not a government official or soldier on duty. He was a normal man whose life dramatically changed when an American bomb fell on his house. Trac carried a leaflet dropped by American aircraft earlier that month. It was dirty but not too filthy to make out a simple message from the enemy: "Don't live near a military target." Bewildered to a point of fury, Tran asked the American reporter standing in front of him to point him towards the military target. Dumbstruck, Harrison Salisbury "turned away without an answer."[33]

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[33] Harrison Salisbury, *Behind The Lines: Hanoi* (New York: Harper and Row: 1967) 63.

December 1966 in North Vietnam found Harrison Salisbury in a situation nothing short of bizarre. Salisbury had embarked earlier that month on a two-week assignment in North Vietnam, a nation with which the United States was currently fighting, even though it had not declared war officially. There was a sizable contingent of foreigners in the country, mainly representing communist regimes like China, the Soviet Union, Cuba and many of the eastern European bloc nations. The French and British along with other western nations also maintained official offices in the country's capital city, Hanoi. There were even other Americans in the country but most were working with peace organizations or helping Bertrand Russell collect information for an upcoming war crimes trial of President Johnson. The international presence did not make the experience any blander for Salisbury. Unlike the other foreign residents and visitors Salisbury had a peculiar mission. He was a citizen, not a diplomat, on a quest to find the facts on the ground regarding the American bombing campaign. But given that his mission involved learning more about America's battlefield enemy, such a charge meant walking a thin line between reporting and disloyalty. The gravity of the situation was not lost on Salisbury as he noted the unique nature of his trip as a reporter and a United States citizen:

> To an American who is constantly taken to see houses blasted by American rockets: hospitals where men, women and children hurt in the bombing are being treated; who hears survivors tell how wives, husbands or children were killed, or who hears provincial authorities proudly announce the number of American planes shot down or describe the capture of an American pilot, there is a nightmarish quality that is hard to avoid. [34]

It was this nightmarish quality that wove its way throughout Salisbury's articles. As he traveled across North Vietnam, Salisbury saw a country indiscriminately ravaged by imprecise bombing. But more than inaccuracy, Salisbury saw that the bombs failed to disrupt Vietnamese industry or transportation and instead placed a heavy burden on the country's pursuit of religion and education. To voice his concerns, Salisbury elected to publish a series of articles as well as an

[34] Harrison Salisbury, "Hanoi Inviting Westerners To Inspect Bomb Damage," *New York Times,* January 11, 1967.

extended diary both seemingly sympathetic to the North Vietnamese cause. Laced with his own observations, Salisbury saturated his pieces with his own voice. He presented the facts but interpreted and analyzed them in a way that emphasized teaching above neutral presentation. In this presentation, what was remarkable was that the reporter was not reporting but instead arguing. He looked at the evidence of bombing in North Vietnam and argued that much of what American population believed about the campaign and the nation itself was flawed. Using his articles and his diary, Salisbury argued that the bombing was not as accurate or as effective as the Johnson administration claimed it to be and the North Vietnamese were not the stereotypical communist caricatures American made them out to be.

Belief One: Precision Bombing

Extending from Christmas 1966 through the middle of January 1967, the Salisbury series appeared on the front page of *New York Times.*[35] Many articles included an introductory paragraph explaining Salisbury as an "assistant managing editor" of the newspaper who was "summing up observations on his recent visit to North Vietnam." Twenty articles total, Salisbury's dispatches stood out on the page due to their explosive headlines such as "No Military Targets, Namdinh Insists" and "Bomb Controversy: View From the Ground: U.S. Says Its Targets Are All Military – Hanoi Dissents" that struck readers by presenting the North Vietnamese voice.[36] To have the enemy's official line printed in the nation's leading newspaper gave the reports an air of credibility. The move was unprecedented in wartime America, for it bordered on disloyalty. Such legitimacy was particularly powerful when examining the

[35] The only article not to be on page one was the December 31 dispatch entitled "No Military Targets, Namdinh Insists"
[36] Harrison Salisbury, "Bomb Controversy: View From the Ground, " *New York Times,* January 13, 1967. Harrison Salisbury, "No Military Targets, Namdinh Insists," *New York Times,* December 31, 1966.

bombing's effects. In his articles, Salisbury attacked two beliefs associated with the American bombing campaign against North Vietnam: first, that American bombs exclusively struck military targets, second, that the bombing sufficiently crippled Vietnamese industry, transportation and morale.

Upon arrival in North Vietnam, it was evident to Salisbury that President Johnson lied when he said that American bombers only hit "steel and concrete." Within his opening article, Salisbury attacked the military's accuracy writing that "contrary to the impression given by United States communiqués, on-the-spot inspection indicates that American bombing has been inflicting considerable civilian casualties in Hanoi and its environs for some time past."[37] The charge struck at the heart of American faith in precision by suggesting that attacks were not landing where they were intended to hit. As he traveled throughout the country during the following two weeks, Salisbury only saw more to confirm his initial accusation. Destruction engulfed both civilian and military targets across North Vietnam. It was true that American aircraft had successfully attacked railroad lines, bridges, highways, anti-aircraft guns, truck parks, barracks and oil depots in Hanoi and the surrounding regions. But these military outlets were not campaign's sole casualties. Bomb craters peppered neighborhoods in Hanoi while bullet holes from strafing aircraft bore into rural churches and schools.[38] Most disconcerting, Salisbury found evidence that American planes had attempted to bomb many of the dikes and levees around Hanoi. Such an allegation was not leveled lightly for if the dam system was

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[37] Harrison Salisbury, "A Visitor To Hanoi Inspects Damage Laid to U.S. Raids," *New York Times,* December 25, 1966.

[38] Harrison Salisbury, "Villagers Tell Of Raids In North: Bombing and Strafing Are Reported in Phatdiem," *New York Times,* January 2, 1967.

breached, the ensuing flood would devastate much of the farmland and cause massive famine in the country.[39]

Faced with seemingly unequivocal and widespread evidence, Salisbury searched for possible explanations for the lack of bombing accuracy. The troubling question Salisbury had to answer was whether this bombing was done with premeditated intent, as a careless and dangerous accident, or inadvertently. After seeing Salisbury's initial report published on Christmas 1966, the American government blamed misfired surface-to-air missiles for the damage done in the neighborhoods. But when Salisbury checked for verification of this explanation he could find "no one in Hanoi either official or unofficial, either North Vietnamese or foreign, either Western or Eastern" who believed that the civilian damaged resulted from misfired anti-aircraft weaponry. Unsatisfied by the American response, Salisbury investigated further by touring more sites and polling the diplomatic community in Hanoi. The most obvious answer for the lack of accuracy was that military targets were placed near neighborhoods and civilian centers. But Salisbury did not find any proof of such tactics and concluded that the North Vietnamese did not engage in the practice. Pentagon spokesman Arthur Sylvester would later say that if Salisbury had traveled down Namdinh's main street he would have found an anti-aircraft installation in the middle of the road. Salisbury responded in his book that while driving down that specific spot in Namdinh, there was no such installation on that day or any other day when other reporters traveled to the area. In fact, the only military presence Salisbury saw "was a rather pretty militia woman" holding a pistol on her belt that would not "have been effective against a supersonic attack bomber." In his pursuit of truth, Salisbury claimed to have done his best to be skeptical of the North Vietnamese officials but could not help but agree with their conclusions. While touring Namdinh, the reporter heard officials claim there were no legitimate

[39] Harrison Salisbury, "Bomb Controversy: View From the Ground," *New York Times*, January 13, 1967.

targets in the city. Once Salisbury looked for himself he found no targets in sight and mused that there might be an objective "which was not visible to the eye, some secret installation which we were relentlessly trying to destroy or cripple" but concluded it was "unlikely." Instead, he had the impression that American bombers flew missions trying to bomb "some phantom which ever eluded them because it never had existed."[40]

If American pilots were not striking real military targets, Salisbury went to great lengths to investigate what could possibly explain the bombing's inaccuracy. He quoted a diplomat in North Vietnam saying that though the practice is forbidden by the United States military, many pilots tried to "lighten the load" while flying out of North Vietnam because such a tactic carried with it no accountability because "if the bombs or rockets hit civilian targets, who is to know."[41] Alternatively, after finding many buildings in the countryside above one story with bullet holes, Salisbury speculated that target specialists might choose objectives without knowing whether the buildings held any military significance. Salisbury went so far as to question "whether it might be that the targeting authorities, hunting vainly over the dreary rural scene for something to attack, had decided that substantial buildings *must* have some military significance" though he could find no evidence to support his speculation. A separate explanation rested with the Vietnamese air defense system. Salisbury hypothesized that perhaps the vast network of anti-aircraft batteries could force pilots to drop their bombs with less accuracy. But, the defense did little to impress the veteran reporter. After looking over the system and witnessing it attempt to shoot down American planes, he concluded that the network did "not appear to be in a class with the defenses of London or of German cities during World War II." He believed that American pilots who complained of the difficulty of flying over North Vietnam misrepresented and

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[40] Salisbury, *Behind The Lines – Hanoi*, 98-99, 103.
[41] Harrison Salisbury, "Bomb Controversy: View From the Ground," *New York Times*, January 13, 1967.

"overestimated" the sophistication of the country's defense. After discrediting all other alternatives, Salisbury questioned the entire concept of precision bombing by looking at the venture's facts. He wrote, "These bombs are plummeting out of aircraft that may be moving at speeds of 600 miles an hour or more. A fraction of a second's delay in release may make a difference of hundreds of feet in the landing point."[42] Here lay the reporter's final allegation: he did not believe that there could be such thing as precision bombing. Any statements from the Pentagon or president reflecting pinpoint accuracy were wrong because, according to Salisbury, bombs inevitably fall in unintended locations.

Belief Two: Bombing Hampered Industry, Transportation and Morale

Regardless of whether or not bombing harmed Vietnamese civilians, Americans held the belief that the practice could effectively handicap North Vietnam's industrial and transportation system while also crippling the enemy's psyche. In theory, such beliefs made sense, for if a country could not produce weapons needed for war or lost its ability to distribute imported weapons to its soldiers, the opposing side would hold a great advantage. It was also reasonable to see how a nation so battered by a relentless onslaught of bombs would capitulate to make the horrific experience stop. Coming of age during World War II, Salisbury drew his lessons from the classrooms of London during the German blitz and Leningrad during the great siege of the city. He experiences made him skeptical to claims that bombing could be as detrimental to the enemy as its proponents suggested. History showed that both cities felt the weight of colossal and unyielding attacks and managed to not only survive, but also win their respective wars. Thus, as Salisbury wrote his articles he tried to persuade his readers that the American military effort to bomb North Vietnam rested on faulty logic in three ways. First, Salisbury believed that Vietnam

[42] Ibid.

was not an industrialized nation but rather "a peasant country" and consequently it made little sense to use manpower to bomb factories that contributed little to the war.[43] Second, Vietnam depended much more on transportation than on industry to distribute military imports and despite their best efforts, American bombers failed to stop supplies from moving across the country. Third, bombing had the opposite effect on morale; instead of draining Vietnamese resolve, the bombs strengthened the nation.

Even though Salisbury found that American bombing had effectively destroyed most of Vietnam's factories, industry was never extensive in the country and the military relied little on mass production. Without dependable industrial capability, Vietnam imported weapons from China and the Soviet Union. Supplies reached the country through the railroads in the North and Haiphong harbor on the Gulf of Tonkin. From these two points, trains and trucking convoys brought the supplies inland to Hanoi as well as to the frontlines in the southern part of the country. With vast amounts of materiel coming into the country, railroads and highways were the lifelines of the Vietnamese war effort. According to Salisbury's articles, American efforts to bomb the supply lines were hardly as effective as hoped because the Vietnamese fought American technology through ingenious simplicity – bicycles and bamboo pontoon bridges. Upon his arrival to Hanoi, Salisbury marveled at the efficient use of bikes to transport material. In the opening paragraph of his first dispatch, Salisbury described the "throngs (of bicycles) on the roads" and their remarkable ability to carry a husband, a wife, and a child clinging to the mother's shoulders.[44] Salisbury's appreciation for bicycles only grew as he related a story in a later article titled "North Vietnam Runs on Bicycles" that told of a section of railroad disabled by American bombs. Within an hour of the attack, "a brigade of hundreds of bikes" came to the

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Harrison Salisbury, "A Visitor To Hanoi Inspects Damage Laid to U.S. Raids," *New York Times,* December 25, 1966.

scene and began transferring material from the train. Incredibly, each bicycle held 600 pounds of material that was peddled to and reloaded onto another train. The critical role the bikes held in Vietnam made Salisbury realize that if the Americans could find a weapon capable of destroying all the bikes the "war would be over in a twinkling."[45] Salisbury's amazement at bicycles demonstrated how ineffective bombing was in Vietnam. Perfectly tailored to take advantage of Vietnam's large population, it was a highly effective transportation system that could not be stopped by American planes. The bikes were inexpensive and technologically simple yet entirely integral in maintaining open supply lines in Vietnam.

In other instances, American planes attacked bridges, the most vulnerable link in the supply chain. The road from Haiphong to Hanoi passed through the Red River delta and thus relied heavily on bridges for trucks to pass. Despite dedicating a large amount of force to the goal, the United States military could never stunt transportation through this susceptible region. The reason why was that the Vietnamese counteracted the American effort to destroy bridges by implementing a pontoon system. The idea was simple; as the Americans took out the bridges by day, the Vietnamese stored supplies of pontoon planks near the river. With the normal bridge out, workers would quickly set up a pontoon bridge to float on top of the water's surface. Restoration was completed promptly allowing trucks to cross and was so effective that Salisbury referred to the efforts as "the best pontoon bridge system this correspondent has ever seen." The system allowed the Vietnamese to keep the supply lanes open to a degree that bombing caused "no really serious handicap to movement."[46]

After showing that the bombs had yet to place a significant burden on transportation and supply, Salisbury argued his last point: that Vietnamese morale only grew stronger in the face of

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[45] Harrison Salisbury, "North Vietnam Runs on Bicycles," *New York Times,* January 7, 1967.
[46] Harrison Salisbury, "North Vietnamese Roads Come to Life at Nightfall," *New York Times,* January 12, 1967.

bombing. It was thought that the tediousness of repair work joined with the high stress of bombardment would cause the Vietnamese to fold under pressure. Salisbury believed that if this idea were true, he would find a downtrodden citizenry ready to capitulate under overwhelming force. But the reporter saw no trace of a defeatist attitude within the population or government. As he traveled through the country, he began to understand what he called the Vietnamese national spirit. The spirit, according to Salisbury, was "a combination of natural vitality and intense patriotism, a determination to run Vietnam for and by Vietnamese and an element of teen-age cockiness and daredevilry." Such spirit shined brilliantly within Salisbury's articles as the reporter spoke frequently of a resilient and courageous citizenry that fully expected to win the war. On January 15, 1967 the headline "North Vietnam Spirit Found High" ran across the front page of the *Times*. The accompanying article described Vietnamese airmen's dedication to wake up at four every morning to work in the rice patties for three hours before relocating to airfields to fly planes against the Americans. Not to be outdone by their older counterparts, teenagers would "speak simply and often about heroism and their willingness to die for their country" saying that "the best way (to die) is to die fighting for Vietnam."[47] According to Salisbury, on the front lines soldiers joked and laughed often while on the home front, families claimed to have grown in patriotism because of the bombing. [48] Salisbury reported that in the capital, "despite air defense training, civil defense work, and military training, life went on in Hanoi. Women visited the beauty parlors to have their hair waved, children played in the streets, couples visited the lakeside cafes, shoppers thronged the stores, strollers paused to look at newspapers..." Clearly, the bombing had not rendered life unlivable and no section of society had pushed for peace to escape hardship. It was evident within the dispatch that the shared

[47] Harrison Salisbury, "North Vietnam Spirit Found High," *New York Times,* January 15, 1967.
[48] Harrison Salisbury, "Hanoi's Industry Being Dispersed: Plants Continue to Operate With Remaining Machines," *New York Times,* January 14, 1967.

suffering of all strengthened the whole. Bombing was not weakening Vietnam; it was strengthening the country. For Salisbury, the only explanation for such undeniable resolve was that the nation was not new to war as Vietnam's fight for independence had taken much of the twentieth century. After speaking with officials and the citizenry, Salisbury concluded that the Vietnamese could fight "for two or three more decades" because at the end they would possess a "most priceless" gift, their "liberty and independence."[49] In all this, Salisbury communicated clearly to his readers that the national spirit would keep the North Vietnamese fighting until the Americans left.

Thus Salisbury argued two points, one about the physical reality on the ground and the other about the psychological state of Vietnam. The first argument set forth that the lack of industry in Vietnam combined with the stunning effectiveness of bicycles and pontoon bridges rendered American bombing ineffective. The United States could destroy every factory in North Vietnam and the country would still be able to wage war due to the amount of imports from China and the Soviet Union. Even more discouraging, American bombs could eradicate bridges and railroads but the North Vietnamese labor force would quickly repair the infrastructure and continue transporting materials. Simply put, the bombing did not have much of an impact on transportation. Given what he called a game of "tug of war" between the American air force and Vietnamese laborers, Salisbury's argument was that the bombing was senseless and that in such a rural country, the reporter believed it was a waste of resources when "most American bombs are falling in mud and wattle villages, on dirt roads, on rice fields."[50] The second argument advanced the idea that the bombing was not weakening Vietnamese morale. The Vietnamese national spirit was not only strong enough to overcome the American barrage, it was absorbing

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[49] Harrison Salisbury, "A Turning Point in War Is Seen by Hanoi Visitor," *New York Times,* January 18, 1967.
[50] Harrison Salisbury, "Bomb Controversy: View From the Ground," *New York Times*, January 13, 1967.

the blows and using the onslaught to its advantage. Bombing brought common suffering to the citizenry and united the people as a whole. As patriotism increased, the Vietnamese resolve also increased. In Salisbury's logic, bombing was then extending the war, not shortening it.

Salisbury's Attack on American Stereotypes

What Salisbury said about bombing could have been said in a few articles due to the content's straightforwardness. Simply put, it did not take a twenty part series to describe how American bombs had hit civilians and failed to cripple the Vietnamese supply chain. Yet, how could Salisbury still manage to produce such a long series of articles? The answer is that his claims about the bombing campaign's failures were only one part of his greater argument. In other reports, instead of limiting himself to analyzing the shortcomings of the bombing campaign, Salisbury developed the second half of his argument around the unintended effects. Salisbury created two levels of analysis within his reports. On one level, he investigated the detrimental consequences American bombs had on Vietnamese society. He saw that though the bombs failed to halt trains from running, they succeeded in preventing churches from meeting and education from growing. On a separate level, Salisbury attacked American stereotypes of communism in North Vietnam. At the time of his writing, socially, Americans associated communism with atheism, educational backwardness and oppression. Politically, Americans thought the North Vietnamese were part of a larger international communist movement that had marched through Russia, China and Korea. And militarily, Americans believed that the National Liberation Front (NLF), the communist insurgency in South Vietnam, was a wing of the North Vietnamese government. As Salisbury spent more time in Vietnam, he came to believe that all these stereotypes were harmful misperceptions.

Salisbury attacked American social characterizations of a godless communism by establishing the religiosity of the North Vietnamese. At this point in history, Americans associated communism with Karl Marx's famous dictate branding religion the opiate of the people. Such degradation insulted many religious Americans and made it easy to brand communist governments as offensive and evil. Seemingly confirming such fears, regimes in Russia and China alike committed to atheism and showed little tolerance for any organized system of belief. North Vietnam was thought to be no different than these two states after many Catholics fled the country in 1954 to escape religious persecution. Yet Salisbury attacked the idea of atheism in North Vietnam by highlighting key points that resonated with American Catholics to distinguish the nation from other regimes. The reporter laced within his articles descriptions of religious fervor such as "the iron toll of church bells called the faithful to early mass." In other accounts Salisbury mentioned that "In Hanoi's Catholic churches mass was celebrated" and that North Vietnamese men traveled long distances from the country to celebrate Christmas, the important Christian holiday, with their wives.[51] Through these descriptions, Salisbury established spirituality as a major part of Vietnamese life. He suggested that the common stereotype of communist atheism was simply not present in North Vietnam. In fact, the Catholic Church, according to statistics presented by North Vietnamese officials, was growing. On January 9, 1967, Salisbury published an article titled "Catholic Charity Aide Visiting Hanoi" that stated there were approximately 1,000,000 Catholics in the North with 82 functioning churches. North Vietnamese officials maintained that after the mass exodus of Catholics to the South, the North replaced all the lost bishops, reopened ten seminaries, and ordained 100 priests.

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[51] Harrison Salisbury, "Villagers Tell Of Raids In North: Bombing and Strafing Are Reported in Phatdiem," *New York Times,* January 2,1967.
Harrison Salisbury, "A Visitor To Hanoi Inspects Damage Laid to U.S. Raids," *New York Times,* December 25, 1966.

With this evidence of tolerance, Salisbury assured his readers that the fears of communist oppression were unfounded. For one, the government's "official position was one of noninterference in religious matters" and second, the government went so far as to pledge funds to help reconstruction of churches damaged during the war. The North's admirable progress spurred the Vatican to send a messenger, Georg Hussler a Secretary General of a West German Roman Catholic organization. When Salisbury spoke with Hussler, he expressed that the Vatican had "abiding interest in strengthening ties with Roman Catholics in the North."[52]

Despite considerable religiosity in the North, Salisbury concluded that American bombing was hurting the ability of churches to meet. In one instance he traveled to Phatdiem, a Catholic region in the countryside outside Hanoi. During his visit, Salisbury learned that the money to support the churches had come from the United States and now, the churches were suffering due to American bombing. American attacks had killed two nuns, two priests, and also landed on the city cemetery. Many of the buildings showed bullet holes from strafing attacks and the church could no longer congregate out of fear of bombing. Within the article, "The priest expressed the hope that there might be fellow members of his faith in the United States who might sympathize with Phatdiem's time of trouble" but did not sound hopeful. Accompanying the piece, Salisbury included a photograph of Phatdiem's main cathedral in ruins after a recent bombing attack.[53] The article as well as the photograph insinuated that America was hurting western affiliated Catholics. Of course, Salisbury did not argue that American bombers were attempting to systematically destroy every church in North Vietnam for such a claim would be ridiculous. He argued instead that American bombs hurt things Americans valued and the nation should reconsider its stance on bombing. Religion was at the core of America and bombing hurt

[52] Harrison Salisbury, "Catholic Charity Aide Visiting Hanoi," *New York Times,* January 9, 1967.
[53] Harrison Salisbury, "Villagers Tell Of Raids In North: Bombing and Strafing Are Reported in Phatdiem," *New York Times,* January 2,1967.

Christianity in Vietnam. The reality on the ground was that believers of a common faith in Vietnam were too scared to meet in buildings that America paid for. Bombing destroyed people of the same religion, not faceless members of a stereotypical godless horde.

Similar to his attack on what he believed to be unfair religious stereotypes, Salisbury sought to disprove beliefs of North Vietnamese academic repression. Like religion, education threatened totalitarian government by enabling citizens to think independently. American stereotypes had excluded the possibility of an increased standard of living in a communist nation. Against such a backdrop, Salisbury visited a school system that he believed showed exceptional promise. The reporter spent time in the village of Xuan Dinh a few miles outside Hanoi and found that the education system in North Vietnam had improved dramatically under the communists. There he met with the Minister of Education, Nguyen Van Huyen, who provided a long description of the school system's improvements during wartime. The minister informed him that when the French left the country, nationwide illiteracy was 90 percent and in some areas it was nearly 100 percent. At that time across the country, only 500-600 students graduated high school annually and the University of Hanoi had 600 students. Since then, the Ho Chi Minh government had nearly eradicated illiteracy and placed over 3 million students in the school system. The government reorganized the curriculum into a ten-year study and established a kindergarten and a version of what Americans called preschool. Graduates of the system could attend either the University of Hanoi or one of the other 35 higher educational institutions in the country. To ensure long-term success, the government had trained 90,000 teachers to educate the population. In North Vietnam, science and patriotism walked hand in hand as the minister

claimed that the nation had increased the rice yields by educating the citizenry on improved farming methods.[54]

Despite the progress, the minister admitted that the biggest problem facing the education system was American bombing. Learning from the minister that the "bombing offensive had severely handicapped the whole educational process" Salisbury discovered that American planes had bombed many schools. The Vietnamese recognized this danger and placed networks of trenches, foxholes, and supplies for emergency situations in schools. Students underwent training on what to do during an airstrike but the tactics were not always effective. The particular school Salisbury visited had not been struck but the minister told him that on October 21, 1966, American planes bombed the Thuy Dan school killing thirty students and their teacher. In another instance, the Polish Friendship School in Hanoi was struck leaving six students injured but no one dead. Unfortunately, later bombing had left the school unusable.[55] Such accusations again portrayed the United States as accomplishing an unenviable goal. According to the North Vietnamese, their country was embracing education but would continue to struggle if the United States continued to bomb schools. Salisbury's readers were led to wonder why the bombing hampered a legitimate pursuit like education.

In another surprising development, Salisbury failed to see the amount of oppression many Americans expected in a communist nation. In fact, oppression was not the case at all but rather an overwhelming commitment to the regime. Stories from Russian gulags and North Korean prison camps sculpted American stereotypes in the 1960s on how communist governments treated their people. But the North Vietnamese stood as outliers to such forced loyalty as best illustrated by the government's willingness to distribute guns to nearly every citizen. Never

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[54] Salisbury, *Behind The Lines – Hanoi,* 128-131.
[55] Ibid.

fearing that these weapons would be used against the regime, Salisbury remarked that "Guns seemed to be everywhere in North Vietnam. Sometimes it appeared that every other person walking down the street had a rifle or a submachine gun slung across his or her back" a fact that even the North Vietnamese knew was "unusual especially in a communist country." The reasoning behind the widespread distribution of guns was to give everyone a part in the anti-air defense. When sirens sounded, the citizens would grab their guns and begin looking for American aircraft. An uncharacteristic tactic to say the least, there was no fear of a revolution in the country; in fact, the officials bragged about their liberality. One source Salisbury quoted took a shot at the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese government asking Salisbury if he could imagine the regime in the South handing guns out to the people. The idea was preposterous.[56] All of this was intended to illustrate that the people believed in the government they were fighting for. One night Salisbury traveled to watch a series of plays put on by North Vietnamese youth. The American reporter picked out a motif from the entire night: a celebration of Vietnamese bravery and sacrifice. From reenactments of troops crossing rivers defended by Americans, to soldiers on Con Co Island withstanding relentless artillery shelling, each story emphasized Vietnamese soldiers succeeding in the face of overwhelming odds.[57] Careful of official manipulation, Salisbury claimed he was initially skeptical of the unanimous support the government held within the population. But the more Vietnamese he met, the more he found that the feeling was rampant. In his words:

> At first I thought that such expressions might reflect government propaganda and that the individuals had been coached to talk like this. But when I found Catholic priests and Buddhists saying the same thing in much the same words as simple peasants in the

[56] Harrison Salisbury, "Hanoi's Industry Being Dispersed: Plants Continue to Operate With Remaining Machines," *New York Times,* January 14, 1967.
[57] Harrison Salisbury, "Hanoi Propaganda Stresses Tradition: War Against Odds," *New York Times,* December 30, 1966.

> villages of the Phatdiem area, I began to realize that this was a national psychology. It might have been inspired by the regime, but it certainly was entirely natural.[58]

Far from being oppressed, the people seemed to love their government and their country. Salisbury tried to show the government did not have to force loyalty; it only had to enjoy it.

Not only were American stereotypes wrong about the character of the Vietnamese people, they were also mistaken on the North Vietnamese government's relationship with communists in South Vietnam and the rest of the world. For Americans, it was popularly believed that the Soviet Union and Chinese held strong influence over North Vietnamese and that the NLF was merely a branch of the North Vietnamese government. After conducting an extensive interview with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and speaking with diplomats of foreign countries close to the North Vietnamese government, Salisbury found evidence of NLF independence from the Hanoi government.

Belief in the United States was that China and the Soviet Union guided the North Vietnamese extensively. These two nations assumed an enormous amount of influence due to the economic and military contributions they made to the North Vietnamese. In this model, the two larger nations forced the North Vietnamese to submit to their policies and wishes by threatening to withdraw supplies. But, Salisbury found nothing of this sort while in the country. Though the North Vietnamese relied heavily on military and agricultural imports from China and Russia, the small nation refused to let the two stronger powers have a say in the way in which they ran the war. According to observers in the country, the Vietnamese had gone to "fantastic lengths to preserve and maintain independent control of their affairs and their destiny."[59] In fact, "their determination to be independent of both the Soviet Union and China had often (driven) their closest friends to despair." For instance, the Vietnamese military refused help in some of the

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[58] Harrison Salisbury, "North Vietnam Spirit Found High," *New York Times*, January 15, 1967.
[59] Harrison Salisbury, "A Turning Point in War Is Seen By Hanoi Visitor," *New York Times,* January 18, 1967.

most vital matters. One of the diplomats revealed that upon receiving anti-aircraft missiles from the Soviet Union, the North Vietnamese declined to let the Russians show them how to use the missiles more effectively. The Vietnamese instead elected to learn and train on their own even if that meant the system would not perform to its fullest potential. Such stories led that same diplomat to remark that the Vietnamese cherished their independence so much that "even the Russian don't dare give the Vietnamese advice on military subjects."[60] Salisbury realized that the Vietnamese presented a portrait of self-sufficiency, even if it was a façade. He observed that within Hanoi, the propaganda posters made no effort to honor the Chinese or the Russians despite the enormous contributions these two nations made to the war effort. Instead, the posters gave homage to the communist world as a whole with no particular accolades to any particular country.[61] Further than posters, the sentiment for independence ran so deep that Prime Minister Dong said he would delay as long as possible to call for "volunteer" soldiers from the communist world because it would be a "deadly blow to their most cherished ideal – national independence."[62]

Similarly groundbreaking to the audience was Salisbury's claim that the NLF was independent of the North Vietnamese. The NLF, the communist force fighting against the American backed government in South Vietnam, was widely perceived to be an extension of the northern government. But, Salisbury heard differently when he interviewed Prime Minister Dong. Discovering that there were considerable differences between the two forces, Salisbury learned that the NLF was more cosmopolitan and worldly than their "simpler, more direct, blunt, and forceful" brothers in the North. The NLF was content to wage a hit-and-run war while the North preferred a strategy of open confrontation against the United States. Nowhere was the gap

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[60] Harrison Salisbury, "North Vietnam Spirit Found High," *New York Times*, January 15, 1967.
[61] Harrison Salisbury, "Soviet-China Rift Hurting Hanoi Aid," *New York Times*, January 17, 1967.
[62] Harrison Salisbury, "A Turning Point in War Is Seen By Hanoi Visitor," *New York Times,* January 18, 1967.

greater than in the plans for the post war settlement. Shockingly, the North declared that there would be "socialism in the North (and) democracy in the South" when the war ended. Within the post war settlement, the NLF, according the North, "was the only legitimate representative of the people of the South." And even though the North eventually hoped the country would be reunited, it would not resort to forceful annexation as Premier Dong called such an idea a "stupid, criminal" thing and unification would only be done "by mutual agreement."[63] Salisbury was stunned by the implications this news could have on the American war effort. Calling it a "genuine possibility for constructing" stability, Salisbury urged Americans to comprehend what was being said by the North Vietnamese officials; for here was a fact that could change everything about understanding the enemy. Salisbury believed it was "undoubtedly the most important factor in understanding what the possibilities were in the South."[64]

Conclusion

As Salisbury saw more of Vietnam, his argument became more powerful and controversial. He had toured villages and seen where bombs had fallen on houses. He had walked the streets and could not find the vaunted North Vietnamese air defense system. He had heard stories of ingenious simplicity as bicycle brigades moved imported weapons from one train to another after American bombers disabled a stretch of railroad. He had heard stories of inspiring patriotism in the face of an enormous blitz of bombing. He had traveled to see schools crushed by bombs and churches riddled with bullet holes. He had watched his waitress drop everything to grab a rifle and shoot at a low flying jet. He had interviewed the nation's Prime Minister and heard him promote North Vietnam's fierce independence and plans for socialism in

[63] Harrison Salisbury, "Hanoi Denies Aim Is To Annex South," *New York Times,* January 16, 1967.
[64] Salisbury, *Behind The Lines – Hanoi*, 169.

the North and democracy in the South. He had experienced all of this during his two weeks and concluded that so much of what Americans believed was wrong. The bombing campaign was not working. The facts on the ground showed that it was not as precise or devastating to the enemy's war effort as the administration and Pentagon characterized it to be. Even more importantly, the people the United States fought were vastly different than the careless stereotypes they were made out to be. They were a people of religion, of education, and of liberty. They were fighting for their country by relying on their national spirit. They fought for self-determination, not just socialism. Seeing all this, Salisbury wrote with the intent to recast American misperceptions. He hoped to change the way the public saw the bombing campaign as well as the enemy. He was not merely a reporter. He had tried to become much more.

But, was Salisbury duped? Left without an interpreter, the American journalist relied heavily on his Vietnamese hosts to filter his conversations with North Vietnamese citizens. How accurate could he have been? Looking at the historical record, Salisbury was in fact correct on many of his assertions. First, regarding the bombing, Salisbury rightly reported that American bombs had not solely struck military targets as a CIA study from 1967 estimated that there had been 29,500 North Vietnamese civilian casualties inflicted by the bombing effort. Second, Salisbury's held an accurate impression that the air assault was not particularly effective. Mark Clodfelter verifies much of Salisbury work when he concludes that "Although bombing hindered the movement of men and supplies, it did not significantly affect infiltration." Clodfelter seems to echo some of the same points Salisbury made by pointing to the use of pontoons, bicycles, and sheer manpower as well as the lack of targetable industry in the country as the reason for failure. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara added further credence to Salisbury's reports when he expressed similar sentiment in 1967 by admitting "The agrarian nature of the economy precludes

an economic collapse as a result of the bombing." Third, Salisbury was also correct in his idea that the bombing was in some ways strengthening the North Vietnamese war effort by building popular support for the government. Oleg Hoeffding, an analyst for the RAND corporation, said in 1966 that "In terms of its moral effects, the U.S. campaign may have presented the regime with a near-ideal mix of intended restraint and accidental gore." His reasoning was that by limiting airstrikes to purely military targets, the United States had failed to inflict considerable damage on the citizenry thus never prompting any portion of society to push for peace as a means to escape the bombing. But because American attacks were sometimes inaccurate, the cost on civilians, though low, did have a rallying effect in which many felt greater affinity towards their government's fight against the American aggressors.[65] Last, the picture of Vietnamese stubbornness was partially correct. In a history of the Vietnam War collected by historian Illya V. Gaiduk from previously unseen Soviet records, the Russians were extremely frustrated by their ally:

> North Vietnamese troops violated storage rules for Soviet military hardware and neglected Soviet advice on the use of equipment, both of which led to spoilage. One adviser complained that despite providing the Vietnamese with sufficient radars, refusal of army commanders to use them according to the recommendations of Soviet specialists reduced the efficiency of the DRV's antiaircraft defense.[66]

In this instance, the North Vietnamese were not taking their orders directly from Moscow. Instead, they clung fiercely to their independence even if it was detrimental to their war effort.

In spite of his successes, Salisbury built a record of wrong impressions of the North Vietnamese. First, claims made by the Prime Minister that the North had not asked for volunteers from China were entirely false. The two countries had come to a secret agreement in December 1965 and by this point in the war, estimates place the number of Chinese military units deployed

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[65] Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 134, 136, 138, 144.
[66] Illya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and The Vietnam War* (Chicago: I.R. Dee), 70.

in North Vietnam between 60,000-100,000.[67] Second, Salisbury grossly underestimated the quality of North Vietnamese air defense. Clodfelter explains that by 1967, "the North possessed roughly two hundred SAM sites, seven thousand anti-aircraft guns, a sophisticated ground-controlled intercept GCI radar system, and eighty MiG fighters…" Far from being the hapless metropolis reliant on small arms that Salisbury made it out to be, Clodfelter explains how "Hanoi gained the reputation as the world's most heavily defended city." The dense network prompted Colonel Jack Broughton, Deputy Commander of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing, to describe North Vietnam as "the center of hell with Hanoi at its hub."[68] Third, the North Vietnamese were notorious for moving their defenses to precarious locations and showed a crude strategic awareness of geopolitics while defending their country. The army "took advantage of the self imposed American restrictions on firing within thirty nautical miles of Hanoi and ten miles of Haiphong and had moved almost all their SA-2 (antiaircraft weapons) battalions within this area."[69] Inside of these lines, war was not always played according to fair rules. Soviet records complain that

> (Vietnamese) port authorities had deliberately delayed the unloading of Soviet vessels and held them in port because they would discourage bomb damage to the port in the event of U.S. air raids. Moreover, port authorities usually placed the Soviet vessels close to the most sensitive areas, as, for instance, near antiaircraft guns, in order to ensure those guns' safety during air strikes. And during U.S. air raids Vietnamese military boats used the Soviet vessels as cover while firing at enemy bombers.[70]

Paired with the knowledge that the North Vietnamese were closely linked with the NLF and that the two would eventually reunite the country, such gamesmanship creates an impression that the Vietnamese were much more cunning than Salisbury gave them credit to be. They had an

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[67] Ibid, 65.
[68] Clodfelter, 131.
[69] Ronald B. Frankum Jr, *Like Rolling Thunder* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 38.
[70] Gaiduk, 71-72.

impression they wanted to give the world – one of independence, one where they were the David to the mighty American goliath – that they communicated through Salisbury.

Perhaps most damning is Salisbury's reporting of American prisoners of war held in North Vietnam. After government officials refused to let Salisbury visit the POWs, the journalist petitioned diplomats and officials in Hanoi on the fate of men missing and found that they "were fairly well treated but that they had complained of the rice diet." According to these officials, the blame for the shortage of quality commodities lay with the Americans because all the bakeries had been bombed. The official's reasoning is absurd. First, how could all of the bakeries in Hanoi have been bombed? If this were true there would have to have been a larger food crisis in the country. Second, it was common knowledge that the North Vietnamese had a shaky record on their treatment of American POWs, Recently, the North Vietnamese had paraded American POWs through the streets of Hanoi, subjecting them to taunts and abuse from citizenry. In spite of this, Salisbury did not comment on the official's statements. His account of the POW issue lacked necessary criticism by not drawing more attention to the sheer ridiculousness of the Vietnamese excuses. It seems naïve to believe that the only complaint from a POW in the custody of a country known for POW violations is the overabundance of rice. For someone who had seen through official manipulation in the past, Salisbury's omission of any further details or observations on this subject was shocking.[71]

In all, it seems that Salisbury oversold his case. He seemed to believe that because he was correct about some aspects, he must then be right about all aspects. His experiences during World War II had engrained in him the belief that the strategic bombing was not as effective as its proponents believed. And in Vietnam, he found evidence to support his preexisting belief as neither its accuracy nor its effect were what the Johnson Administration had made it out to be.

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[71] Salisbury, *Behind The Lines – Hanoi*, 220.

But when it came to subtler things that Salisbury was not an expert on, he drew overly strong conclusions. He was not an accurate judge of air defenses nor did he have enough information to make statements on the current state of North Vietnamese political affairs. The question is whether the notorious truth seeker dropped his skepticism in order find evidence to support his preexisting views. Why else would he take a politician like Prime Minister Dong's word at face value when he had spent his entire career doing the exact opposite? It was either a loss of objectivity or sloppy reporting.

Chapter 3: The Double Standard of Power

In the spring of 1967 the Pulitzer Prize committee met to discuss their annual award. The contest for international reporting had entered its final stages with only two candidates remaining: R. John Hughes of the *Christian Science Monitor* for his coverage of a political massacre in Indonesia and Harrison Salisbury for his reports on American bombing in North Vietnam. With two superbly qualified contenders, it was hardly a surprise that the board fell into a fierce debate over the more deserving candidate. But the debate's character was different that year than in other years. By the time the committee convened, Harrison Salisbury's reports had gained national recognition and ignited a countrywide debate over journalism's role during wartime. Nearly every major newspaper, television station, and pundit had presented their opinion on the matter, while the Johnson administration and Pentagon dramatically reformed their portrayal of American bombing. Given the high degree of controversy, the Pulitzer panel split into two factions. On one side, Chairman Joseph Pulitzer and four others fought passionately for Salisbury believing him to be the most qualified and his reports the most important. Bothered by questions regarding Salisbury's sources, other voters in the room disagreed with Chairman Pulitzer and thought Hughes deserved the prize. The final tally was: Salisbury 5 Hughes 6. When the *New York Times* executive editor Turner Catledge, a member of the board, who was required to abstain from the deliberations due to his position, heard the vote he launched into a passionate tirade against those who voted for Hughes and accused them of voting on political grounds instead of individual merit. Regardless, the vote held and the Pulitzer committee awarded R. John Hughes the prize for international reporting in 1967.[72]

[72] John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Diaries: Inside America's Greatest Prize* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 176.

What occurred on the Pulitzer Board was a microcosm of journalism during early 1967 as the world reacted to Harrison Salisbury's audacity. Never before had the nation's leading newspaper sent a correspondent to an enemy nation and given voice to its leaders and citizens. Such a venture, one that even Salisbury admitted would have constituted treason if Congress had declared war against North Vietnam, caught the country by surprise and ignited a debate over the wisdom and patriotism of the reporter's actions.[73] As criticism and praise sprung up from different sectors of the public arena, Salisbury found himself in the eye of the storm. Winds passionately blew from the political left and right, as arguments for freedom of the press collided with pleas to keep Salisbury from voicing enemy propaganda. As the storm raged stronger, Salisbury entered into a struggle to shield his reports from criticism he considered unfair. Once the forces of government, media, and public opinion battered his articles, Salisbury passionately defended his reporting in multiple mediums. Given the perceived gravity of the situation, Salisbury confronted those who accused him of aiding the enemy with biting sarcasm and self-confident superiority. But his drive to exonerate the press led him into a paradox regarding the power of the media. For he was quick to assert that his articles had the power to encourage peace talks to end the war, but when asked whether they were harmful to the war effort, he claimed that his articles had minimal relevance and merely added to a greater pool of national knowledge. In essence he thought that the media deserved credit for positive accomplishments but no responsibility for detrimental outcomes. Salisbury evaded his position as a journalist, blindly clinging to a double standard- that he could only help and never hurt.

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[73] Ibid

Salisbury's Return to the United States

Armed with remarkable reports, Salisbury returned to the United States intent on publicizing his findings through mediums beyond his newspaper. He released a longer diary entitled *Behind The Lines – Hanoi* as a supplement to his articles in the *New York Times* that provided an in depth account of the trip by detailing his journey across the globe, his tours to various sites of American bombing, as well as his views on the wisdom of the bombing campaign. In addition to the book, he embarked on a speaking campaign, gave interviews to the major television news services and lectured at Columbia University. In these publicity ventures, Salisbury made no effort to recant or qualify any part of his reporting. When he appeared on the Peter Jennings show January 12, the anchor questioned Salisbury on the subject of Nam Dinh, a North Vietnamese port city frequently targeted by American bombers. In his articles, Salisbury had reported that the city was not nearly as heavily defended by anti-aircraft installations as the United States military made it out to be. When Jennings pushed him on the issue, Salisbury characterized the disagreement between him and the military as "one of these typical controversies between the view of the target as it's seen by the man up in the air, and the view of the target, as it is observed by the fellow who's on the ground." Believing he possessed the superior perspective, Salisbury remarked "It was not my impression, from the number that I saw in their location, that Nam Dinh was as heavily defended as this Navy flier says it is." He believed his on-site observation provided enough evidence to maintain two charges against the bombing campaign in North Vietnam. First, that the American military had misled the public on the magnitude of danger the North Vietnamese air defense network posed and second, that the military and administration had failed to disclose the inaccuracy of bombing.[74]

[74] "Peter Jennings and the News" January 12, 1967

As the publicity campaign gained momentum, media outlets across the country began dissecting Salisbury's reports. Many saw Salisbury as a hero of the press. Letters from fellow journalists praised his courage in reporting the war's unflattering details. In an editorial that Salisbury said "hit the nail on the head", Pete Hamill in the *New York Post* wrote "the higher the barriers, the more important it is that a reporter go in and take a look. He may not see everything he wants to and he may not see it all straight, but he's got to go in there and try."[75] Walter Lippmann, a distinguished journalist and founder of *The New Republic*, expressed a sentiment similar to Hamill when he told Salisbury that his reports "will long be remembered as an example of the fact that the highest obligation of a newspaper is to put the search for truth in the first place, second to no other consideration."[76] Lippmann's compliment contained a passionate justification for freedom of the press felt by many in the industry. To these journalists, the truth came above nationality and it was a reporter's job to report stories that often contradicted the government's official positions. Such reporters who met the high calling deserved praise for their valor and Salisbury was as worthy a recipient as any. The feeling of admiration spread outside of New York as other newspapers echoed similar admiration. An editorial in the Montana based *The Great Falls Tribune* said "While one may not agree with a story, or not like to learn an unfavorable truth, a worse thing than the content of a story would be to not report it at all," and *The Courier Journal* ran an editorial with the headline "News From Hanoi Is Useful Even Though It Upsets Us."[77] Even some famously conservative newspapers like the *Flint Journal* praised Salisbury once witnessing the Johnson Administration's reaction to the story concluding that "The *Times* dispatches have caused enough pain to force the Pentagon to lift the lid at least a little on its 'confidential' file of information from Vietnam. Our hat is off to Timesman

[75] Pete Hamill, *New York Post* January 25, 1967.
[76] Walter Lippmann, *The New Republic*, January 7, 1967.
[77] Editorial, *The Courier Journal* January 16, 1967.

Salisbury."[78] Attached to the article was a note from Salisbury's editor saying "this is no liberal minded newspaper; congratulations for speaking out for decency."[79] Perhaps Clayton Fritchey in *Newsday* best summed up the feelings of many when he told Salisbury that he "should know that many of your fellow journalists are proud of you...a great service for all of us."[80] Voicing many of the concerns of the contemporary middle-left anti-war movement, Salisbury's articles accomplished a great deal in the national campaign against the Vietnam War. Liberal outlets believed Salisbury had stood eye to eye with the powerful United States' government and sent a message that it could not mislead the American public without consequences. Though upsetting, editorialists believed Salisbury's revelations could spur on the peace process in Vietnam.

Domestic Criticism

Meanwhile on December 31, the president held a press conference at the White House to address the recent developments across the nation. Immediately after taking the stand, a reporter asked "Mr. President, what is your reaction to the reports by the *New York Times* from North Vietnam about the results of our bombing there?" In response, the president measured his statements carefully but reflected a sentiment unseen in the past. Initially he reasserted "it is the policy of this Government to bomb only military targets." But his next sentence broke from the prior pattern as Johnson admitted that "inevitably and almost invariably there are casualties, there are losses of lives." The president continued: "We regret to see those losses. We do everything we can to minimize them. But they do occur in North Vietnam as they do in South Vietnam." In a stunning reversal, President Johnson seemed to imply that American bombs had

[78] Editorial, *The Flint Journal* January 4, 1967.
[79] Salisbury Papers, Columbia University
[80] Clayton Fritchey, *Newsday,* March 21, 1967.

damaged non-military targets and killed civilians. In the past he had claimed perfect accuracy but now the tone had changed. Now, though it was not policy, he was willing to admit that mistakes had been made. Johnson finished his answer with a strong statement of faith in the military saying "Only military targets have been authorized. And I am informed that our men who are responsible for carrying out our orders have done their very best to execute those orders as given." As the press conference moved onto the next question, Johnson's admission of bombing inaccuracy demonstrated that the party line had weakened, if only a little.[81]

Despite the limited concessions, the government was far from agreeing with Salisbury's arguments. In the days that followed, the administration's attack made four main points regarding Salisbury's conclusions, observations and sources. First, though Johnson had conceded that not all bombs fell on military targets, the administration set forth that it was impossible to determine whether an American bomb or the remnants of a falling anti-aircraft missile caused damage in Vietnamese residential areas. Second, the Pentagon presented evidence that Nam Dinh, a city Salisbury claimed contained no military targets, in fact held many key industries including a power plant and a railroad yard both of which were defended by an advanced anti-aircraft network nearly unrivaled in Vietnam or the rest of the world. Third, the Pentagon attacked Salisbury's photographs of the damaged Catholic church in Phatdiem by showing that the "church" was not actually a real church but rather a separate building. The real cathedral Salisbury reported as destroyed was in fact still standing. And last, and perhaps most damning for Salisbury, the government casted significant doubt on the articles by pointing out that many

[81] President Johnson, December 31, 1967.
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28076#axzz1mE9AinQu

of the statistics Salisbury used were drawn from a North Vietnamese propaganda pamphlet entitled "Report of U.S. War Crimes in Nam Dinh City."[82]

Following suit, media outlets soon picked up on the government's criticism and unleashed their own editorials attacking Salisbury on a wide variety of grounds. To his critics, Salisbury was guilty of four sins: a lack of expertise, ignorance towards the enemy, acceptance of false information, and possession of sinister motives. First, beyond the government's battering of Salisbury for using a Vietnamese propaganda pamphlet, many editorials criticized the information Salisbury used to draw his conclusions by wondering how a man who spent his days writing in an office in New York could be a munitions expert. One of these critics, General Thomas Lane, doubted Salisbury's qualifications for judging the on-site bomb damage. A retired Army General who had taken up journalism, General Lane in the *Lebanon Daily News* asked how a "casual visitor" like Salisbury "could tell whether observed destruction has been caused by U.S. bombing, by unconnected fire damage, by explosion of locally stored munitions or by impact of North Vietnamese defensive missiles." The General surmised it was preposterous that a reporter could declare himself an expert on the subject because such a person lacked proper training. Lane concluded that Salisbury's training deficiency rendered him overly reliant on the North Vietnamese to explain the on-ground conditions thus allowing an element of bias in the articles.[83] Similarly, the *Marine Corps Gazette* attacked Salisbury's reporting as "a flight from reality and a clouding of the facts through effective propaganda and control to which the idealist is easily susceptible." According to the review:

> Mr. Salisbury's main fault lies in his attempt at formulating hypotheses and clear-cut solutions using incomplete, semi-truthful and often completely false premises. The most

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[82] Hammond, 278.
[83] General Thomas Lane, *Lebanon Daily News*, January 1967.

> noticeable aspect of Salisbury's report from start to finish is the almost complete lack of logic, frequently bordering on paradox throughout.[84]

Both criticisms believed that Salisbury's articles mischaracterized the bombing and therefore his reports could not be credible. These military outlets discounted Salisbury's position as a reporter because it left him unqualified to draw conclusions on the bombing damage.

John Scali on "ABC Scope Eyewitness" similarly criticized Salisbury for his reliance on the North Vietnamese. Claiming Salisbury had "some serious errors of his own to account for" Scali believed that Salisbury left himself exposed to criticism when he "accepted the false Communist claim that the attacks on Nam Dinh had never been announced (and) that the city contained no military targets." In this account Salisbury had in fact been wrong, given that the Pentagon mentioned Nam Dinh frequently and presented physical evidence of military infrastructure present in the city. Thus Salisbury's problem, according to Scali, was that he lacked a reliable way to verify his sources while in Vietnam. Salisbury stayed in the country for only two weeks and depended on the North Vietnamese for transportation from one site to the next. Reporters and ambassadors from other communist nations made up the only other international presence in the country and neither group provided information that contradicted the North Vietnamese. Scali's criticism of Salisbury's "serious errors" focused on why the reporter chose to publish his stories so quickly in such an unfavorable atmosphere. Scali saw no need for immediate publishing because Salisbury had the option to return to the United States and verify the claims with an expert. Had Salisbury waited he would have filtered out blatant North Vietnamese misrepresentations and done much to place the articles beyond refute from a journalistic perspective.[85]

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[84] Editorial, "*Marine Corps Gazette* 51.10 (1967): 52.
[85] John Scali "ABC Scope Eyewitness" January 14, 1967.

Apart from his reliance on the North Vietnamese as the sole source of his information, many reporters criticized Salisbury for the lack of skepticism he showed towards his hosts. For Salisbury, the trip to North Vietnam may have seemed like simple fact finding but many accused the reporter of being an unwitting participant in a great North Vietnamese ploy for public opinion. Salisbury's himself admitted that his entrance to the country appeared peculiar given that at the time the North Vietnamese rejected a similar request from an African communist journalist.[86] Sensing a conspiracy, reporters across the country told a similar narrative in which the North Vietnamese, frustrated by relentless bombing, conspired to use public opinion to help end the war. Tom Wolfe in his article on the experience of American pilots in Vietnam viewed Salisbury's reports as a North Vietnamese ploy to counter the damage. Wolfe's article spoke of an instance in which an American pilot mistakenly dropped a bomb prematurely and hit a church. Unexpectedly, after the initial explosion, the pilot saw that the church suffered many more explosions. As smoke billowed, the pilot discovered that the place of worship was actually a weapon's cache. The poignant example illustrates the tricks the North Vietnamese tried to play to win world opinion. It seemed evident to the pilots, as well as to Wolfe, that the world held a double standard when it condemned American atrocities and blindly accepted Vietnamese propaganda. In this context Salisbury played right into the communist scheme. Just prior to Salisbury's reports, the United States had bombed Dai Phong, an important transportation center. Crippled, the Vietnamese responded with a "weapon that no military device known to America could ever get a lock on," Harrison Salisbury's reports. Wolfe wrote, "To Americans who knew the air war in the north firsthand, it seemed as if the North Vietnamese were playing Mr.

[86] Salisbury, *Behind the Lines- Hanoi*, 31.

Harrison Salisbury of *The New York Times* like an ocarina...and the song was coming forth better than they could have played it themselves."[87]

Other reporters joined the chorus of suspicion. In one instance the story was told by Melvin K. Whiteleather, a longtime war correspondent. Whiteleather wrote: "When Ho Chi Minh saw that he was not going to win a clear cut military victory in South Vietnam, he began to work on world opinion" by inviting Salisbury to tour the bomb damage. In Whiteleather's view, the North Vietnamese believed that the publicizing of American bombs killing women and children would be so devastating that it would cause public morale within the United States to dry up. This plan predicted that as the public outrage grew, the citizenry would be forced to reign in what they perceived as an irresponsible and embarrassing military. Without support, American bombing would end and the North would be free to invade the South to win the war. Thus, in a zero sum game, the outrage Salisbury's report caused amongst the nation's public was a "success" for the North Vietnamese. In all, Whiteleather criticized Salisbury for his naivety and for never realizing that the North Vietnamese held an agenda in allowing him to visit. To present their views in an uncritical way without appropriate skepticism was nothing less than foolishness.[88]

More than just misunderstanding the North's gamesmanship, domestic reporters believed that Salisbury also failed to see the North's blatant hypocrisy. This time, the outrage was not with what Salisbury said but with what he omitted. The *Chattanooga News Free Press* took issue with Salisbury for his one sided portrayal of the struggle in Vietnam. It struck the newspaper that Salisbury showed so much concern for the death of noncombatants in North Vietnam but so little

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[87] Tom Wolfe, "The Truest Sport: Jousting with Sam and Charlie." *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism, 1959-1975* (New York: Library of America, 2000), 270-302.

[88] Correspondence with Melvin K. Whiteleather as found in Salisbury Collection at Columbia University

sympathy for the noncombatants in South Vietnam. The paper wondered why Salisbury placed no emphasis on the 30,000 South Vietnamese "murdered or kidnapped by the Communist aggressors." The editorial argued that unlike the causalities caused by the Americans in North Vietnam, the 30,000 South Vietnamese had not been taken by accident or killed by mistake.[89] To the paper, it was a crucial omission on Salisbury's part. The difference of intent rendered equating the United States with North Vietnam not only inaccurate but also irresponsible. For Salisbury to even faintly accuse the Americans of intentionally bombing North Vietnamese citizens was misleading and illogical.[90] To these reporters, Salisbury's mistake lay in being too receptive to North Vietnamese accusations. Such a nation, who openly waged war against civilians, should have little room to complain about stray bombs falling on their own population. Uncritically reporting the North Vietnamese line that the United States was waging a war against its civilians was shockingly negligent.

Other newspapers took a different angle by examining the utility of Salisbury's reports and concluding that they could only reinforce enemy propaganda. The *Saint Louis Globe Democrat* ran the headline "Parroting Red Propaganda" across its opinion section.[91] The *Tampa Tribune* said the reports "produced no news" other than "serving the propaganda purposes of the Communist world nicely."[92] General Thomas Lane in the *Lebanon Daily News* took an even stronger stance, arguing that "A free press may decline to serve the propaganda aims of its own country but it has no excuse whatsoever for serving the propaganda aims of the enemy."[93] Such perspectives believed that reporting from an enemy nation held no benefits. These journalists

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[89] Editorial, *Chattanooga Free Press,* January 6, 1967.
[90] Melvin Whiteleather pointed out that "if the US wanted to attack civilians, it would hardly go about it in such a gingerly fashion."
[91] Editorial, *Saint Louis Globe Democrat* January 4, 1967.
[92] Editorial, *Tampa Tribune* January 6, 1967.
[93] General Thomas Lane, *Lebanon Daily News.*

lamented that Salisbury's writings lacked new intelligence, failed to help the soldiers on the ground, and meant little to the prospects of peace. Specifically, the *Tribune* chastised Salisbury as an unnecessary player in a future settlement saying that "when the Communists are ready to talk peace, they'll get the word to Washington with no difficulty."[94] These papers concluded that Salisbury's reports solely helped the North Vietnamese because they gave the enemy a legitimate mouthpiece to spout propaganda. In comparison to the portrait of journalism painted earlier by Lippmann and Hamill, articles from the *Tribune*, *Saint Louis Dispatch*, and *Lebanon Daily News* articulated a more limited view of journalism. To newspapers critical of Salisbury, journalists held a responsibility when reporting in which simply reporting the truth did not constitute a carte blanche in every situation. A reporter must use the relative benefits of a story as the metric for whether or not to publish a story. Though Salisbury claimed his reports provided the United States with information, other newspapers disagreed, claiming that the benefit was far greater for the North Vietnamese than it was for the Americans and therefore should not have been published.[95]

Once convinced that Salisbury's intent was to advance communist propaganda, some editorials openly asked whether he had sinister motives in reporting. Again, General Lane led the charge against Salisbury and even took shots at the *New York Times* saying "The *Times* deliberately reports what it knows to be false or misleading in order to curry special favor with

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[94] Editorial, *Tampa Tribune*, January 6, 1967.

[95] Salisbury did address this point saying in a letter: "any news report of the situation would have a propaganda effect and this cannot be denied. If a reporter goes and interviews a murderer there is going to be a certain propaganda effect in that interview. Nevertheless the effort must be undertaken and I think the plus values for ourselves far outweigh any minor propaganda benefits for Hanoi. I believe, and I am sure you share this belief, that it is a fundamental rule of war to know your enemy as well as possible and more particularly to know precisely what his situation is during the course of the war…I was able to go into North Vietnam and come out with a report which really put us in the picture as to exactly how effective our offensive had been and what kind of results it had produced."

the communist leaders."[96] Such inflammatory remarks cast doubt on Salisbury's objective in traveling to North Vietnam by framing the trip as a leftist scheme. They insinuated that Salisbury worked for the communists and thus was fighting against American forces. This was a grave charge and was not treated lightly during a time of war. Outside of Lane, few other papers so openly questioned the loyalty of the *New York Times* or Harrison Salisbury but others did take shots at the reporter.[97] As mentioned earlier, the *Tampa Tribune* remarked that it was "pointless for the world's peace-wishers" to try and end the war in Vietnam claiming that when the North Vietnamese were ready to make peace, they would not go through a newspaper as they had direct contact with Washington. The use of the term "peace-wisher" was a naked barb at Salisbury to paint him as a far left journalist biased toward reporting content that would end the war.[98] The characters attacks discounted his writings by making him out to be a radical fringe journalist.

What made this criticism from other members of the media unique was that in spite of Salisbury's reputation as an excellent journalist, pundits across the country criticized him for doing his job poorly. In 1967, Salisbury was at the top of his field for multiple reasons. First, his tenure was well established as he had worked in journalism for nearly 40 years. Second, his experiences were nearly unmatched as he spent significant time both in the United States and abroad where he had broken stories regarding war, politics, and racial tension. Third, he was respected outside of his field for his flexibility in publishing multiple books and fielding invitations to speak at various clubs and organizations within New York City. And last, and perhaps most importantly, he worked at the *New York Times,* the most powerful newspaper in the

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[96] General Thomas Lane, *Lebanon Daily News*. Lane however did go on to also accuse Salisbury and the *Times* of being motivated by money saying "Lenin despised the bourgeois avarice which would sell soul and principles for a dollar advantage. The American public must learn to despise it too." He never specified whether Salisbury was driven more by communism or money.

[97] Many readers did in fact join with Lane in accusing Salisbury and the *Times* of furthering a communist agenda. Such readers drew a line between Herbert Matthews and Salisbury to accuse the newspaper of being too sympathetic towards communist movements.

[98] Editorial, *Tampa Tribune*, January 6 1967.

world. So when criticism erupted from journalism circles after the release of the Vietnam articles, the last thing anyone expected would be criticisms of Salisbury's skill as a reporter. But, it happened. When John Scali spoke of "serious errors" he was questioning whether Salisbury had done his due diligence while checking facts, a reporting fundamental. General Lane thought that Salisbury's experience and qualifications were not strong enough evidence to back up his conclusions. Melvin Whiteleather believed that Salisbury misunderstood his subject while newspapers like the *Chattanooga News Free Press* took issue with Salisbury's lack of research into the situation in South Vietnam. Salisbury's prior experiences had hardened him to withstand any critiques on his story's effects, which is why he had been able to report uncomfortable truths. But this time, the outrage came from the fact that many believed Salisbury had done a poor job of reporting. It was not that they were mad that Salisbury was the bearer of bad news. Rather, they were upset that Salisbury was a poor bearer of the news. Critics were not just taking issue with the content, but also with the reporter himself.

Salisbury's Paradox

Angered and frustrated by the danger the government and media's ceaseless attacks posed, Salisbury spent much of his energy communicating directly to the public. From his speaking tour to his book, Salisbury sought to explain as thoroughly as possible to interested Americans why he traveled to Vietnam and how his trip could benefit the United States. In addition, Salisbury spent countless hours crafting responses to readers who questioned, criticized, and praised his efforts. In these letters, Salisbury again took time to explain his mission in Vietnam, his opinions on patriotism and the Johnson Administration, as well as his own omission of atrocities the South Vietnamese suffered. But as Salisbury engaged his readers,

he fell into a double standard in which he never admitted his own influence. On one hand, he fully believed that his findings were so significant that they had the power to help end the bombing campaign and bring forth an opportunity for peace. However, when questioned on whether his writings had a negative effect, such as sapping morale or communicating enemy propaganda, Salisbury was quick to limit his role in war as merely adding information to the public discourse. In essence, he selected details so that he would get credit for helping end the war but no blame if his articles either prolonged or worsened the conflict. Such was the paradox that dictated Salisbury's responses to readers as he taught, informed, and berated those he wrote, failing to understand that the public would not accept it both ways.

The public was the main audience for Salisbury and when speaking to this group, he rationalized his trip by claiming the information he gained played a vital part in enriching the nation's discourse as well as influencing the outcome of the war. Thus, as Salisbury wrote hundreds of letters, he explained that he traveled to North Vietnam to report on what the North Vietnamese "were doing and saying" and that there was "no need to apologize to the American people for providing them with information." The trip's purpose was to provide "full news coverage" of the Vietnam War and to "enable you and all the other citizens of this great country to have a little deeper appreciation of what is going on in the world." In Salisbury's mind, the job of a reporter was to collect information and give it to the public to use. If the information upset people then so be it. He held strongly to the belief that a free country needed different opinions and information, even when the information was unpopular. Thus, Salisbury took pride in his reports claiming that he gave "an objective and wide picture" which was "essential for the involved American to have if he is going to form an intelligent opinion." These statements reveal how Salisbury stretched his power as a reporter to an extreme. To him, his observations from

Vietnam were "essential" to the public discourse and not to be taken lightly or even contradicted. But more than just providing vital information, Salisbury believed his observation could potentially change the course of the war. He claimed that his insights should be valued so highly because it was "possible that more knowledge of the enemy…would make the conflict a little less protracted and possibly a little less bloody." In essence, Salisbury believed his findings could bring peace to Vietnam. Salisbury's journalistic ventures had not only the power to make intelligent citizens but also to end wars. Such a view looked highly on the power of the media and gave credence to the mantra that the pen is mightier than the sword.[99]

But Salisbury was quick to abandon or at least minimize his belief in the influence of the media when confronted by more aggressive writers. When a reader accused Salisbury of "naively" reporting Hanoi's line, Salisbury responded that his reports had little consequence on the nation because "we are a great country and we have enough stamina and fortitude to face any facts that may be presented to us fair and square." In this context, Salisbury tried to diminish his own influence. Unlike when looking at the pacifying effects the articles could have, Salisbury never gave a similar extension of events that could unfold in a negative direction. He did not discuss the possibility that the new information could spark a substantial policy shift or a collapse of morale, instead only saying that the country could "face any facts" without elaborating any further on what such a confrontation might lead to. In a separate series of correspondence, Salisbury tried to shift the controversy's burden to the government by saying that "the reason why there was any shock value in my reports that houses had been destroyed was the dismal policy initiated by the Pentagon saying that we were hitting nothing but 'steel and concrete' and taking no human lives." In such instances, Salisbury never brought up the zenith of

[99] All quotations in this sections taken from letters found in Box 455 Folder 7 of the Salisbury Collection at Columbia University unless otherwise specified

power he articulated to other readers but rather attributed any harmful effects to the Pentagon's public relations policies and not his findings. Such instances fall into a pattern in which his writings did not carry the same weight when acting as the catalyst for negative outcomes as they did for positive outcomes. His argument line was simple: he asked the public to withhold blame from the press if things went poorly and lavish it with praise if things went well.

There is no greater demonstration of Salisbury's misunderstanding of power than a series of letters he exchanged with retired United States Air Force Lt. General Eaker. Eaker had written an article in the *San Antonio Express* asking Salisbury to answer seven questions concerning his trip to Vietnam, one of which was whether there was a possibility that the reports would "encourage the enemy to prolong his aggression." Salisbury's response diminished such a possibility saying "I would doubt this very much. (The North Vietnamese) are very tough, stubborn, unyielding people and they don't need me to deepen these tendencies. They already exist." Eaker replied that Salisbury was "too modest in assuming that (his) articles (would) not affect the Vietnam War" and brought up the likelihood that Salisbury's articles reduced the viable targets American military pilots felt comfortable attacking for fear of public backlash thus prolonging the war. Salisbury sent back a curious and trite retort saying "My own view is that the present period is a very favorable one for a negotiated end to the conflict in Vietnam, but I must say I don't see much sign that we are proceeding along these lines."[100] In this exchange, it is confounding that when Eaker confronted Salisbury with a potentially negative effect of his writing, Salisbury refused to address the issue fully. Salisbury argued first that the North Vietnamese were outside his control and would continue fighting regardless of what he wrote. But when Eaker countered by bringing up the possibility that American pilots would suffer decreased effectiveness, Salisbury simply ignored the comment and shifted the debate to the

[100] United States Air Force Lt. General Eaker Ret. *San Antonio Express* January 23, 1967.

positive effects his writings could have. In all, Salisbury again only spoke of the beneficial change his writing could produce, focusing on the opportunity for peace, and wanted no part of the responsibility for any detrimental consequences. He was all too willing to accept that he could bring peace and far too unwilling to accept that he could also bring difficulties to Americans.

In truth, it is likely that Salisbury felt that his reports were more influential than he would publicly admit. Later in 1967, after the controversy had subsided, Salisbury wrote to Kim Il Sung, the Premier of North Korea, asking for permission to enter the country. The letter introduced Salisbury as a "correspondent of the leading American newspaper" seeking to present "to the United States and the world in general an extended report on the developments – economic, social, political, cultural – which the country has achieved in recent years." Salisbury felt compelled to visit North Korea because there had been "little mention in the West generally of the remarkable strides which have been taken by your country since the end of hostilities." In order to persuade the Premier that it would be beneficial for him to allow an American journalist access to his country, Salisbury presented evidence that his reports from Vietnam that "gained a great deal of attention throughout the world and in the United States." Salisbury's letter was remarkable in two ways. First, Salisbury openly stated that the North Koreans would receive a propaganda boost if they allowed an American reporter to enter the country. Salisbury's mind was already made up; he wanted to write on the progress in North Korea. Because he worked for the country's leading newspaper, he could use his position to better the image of an unfriendly communist nation. Second, whatever he wrote would be influential. The articles would go out "to the United States and the world in general" in a similar manner as his reports from Vietnam. Salisbury was essentially stating that his articles were not merely another piece of information in

the great melting pot of ideas. They were powerful, authoritative, and capable of dramatically swaying world opinion. Salisbury wanted to correct the mistake made by western media that have given "little mention" of the "remarkable strides" taken by North Korea. He could be the mouthpiece through which wrongs could be righted. Salisbury believed himself to be a major player, a teacher, and an influencer in the arena of public opinion. For him to claim anything less in his letters to readers was simply hypocritical.

As he received numerous critical letters, Salisbury soon let his frustration show in his responses to readers through a series of sarcastic and demeaning comments.[101] *Times* subscribers sent him General Lane's article prompting Salisbury to remark that the General displayed "total ignorance of the facts and the published record of the *New York Times*." To readers who accused Salisbury of bias, he frequently ended his responses with "Have you by chance read my articles?" and "I wonder if you are familiar with the *New York Times*." To those who wished for Salisbury to refrain from giving voice to the North Vietnamese, Salisbury commented that "We regret that you seem to think that American newspapers should report only one side of the issues of the day. Thank you for acquainting us with this view." Readers who really irked Salisbury often were advised to "consult a lawyer on the basic principles on the law of libel." In some letters, Salisbury characterized critical reporting from other newspapers as "hasty criticism that was rushed into print" and accused readers of not holding any interest in facts at all. Perhaps most biting, Salisbury frequently told readers "I have a feeling that my own knowledge is somewhat more extensive and precise" than articles or opinions he received. Even to other reporters, Salisbury's response to criticism carried an air of arrogance. When Richard Fryklund of *The Evening Star* chastised Salisbury for traveling to North Vietnam and questioned the

[101] Salisbury and his editor claimed that the ratio of positive to negative letters was 2:1 in favor of the letters praising Salisbury

wisdom and accuracy of his reports, Salisbury responded with a caustic letter. The short letter contained only a few lines and ignored almost everything serious thing Fryklund had said. Fryklund had written that "Salisbury couldn't buy a ticket" and instead "hitched a ride with a International Control Commission plane from Cambodia" a minor factual error given that Salisbury did in fact pay for his flight. In Salisbury's response he only mentioned that the International Control Commission (ICC) did not have free flights and finished the letter by saying "I mention this because if you should chance to get out that way anticipating that you could get a free lift from the ICC, you'd be quite disappointed. Yours for accuracy and objective reporting, Harrison Salisbury."[102]

His response to Fryklund as well as his other responses to readers offers an insight into Salisbury's mind. Salisbury saw himself as a teacher of foreign policy, not a student. Unlike any of his critics, he had traveled to North Vietnam and seen what conditions were like on the ground. In his mind, his experience gave him crucial information that no one else had access to. The information was infallible and all-powerful against criticism. It was a badge of expertise that he exclusively possessed, and until someone else traveled to North Vietnam, he had sole claim to the truth. This possession of superior knowledge allowed Salisbury in his responses to readers and other writers to never fully address his opponent's arguments. Salisbury stuck to deliberate and repeatable lines – "Full news coverage", "The *Times* has correspondents in South Vietnam" – to duck away from accusations of bias or ignorance. Readers sometimes wrote twice to Salisbury, asking him why he did not respond to any of their complaints but Salisbury left no record of any further correspondence with such readers. When a mother of a recently deceased soldier chastised Salisbury for abusing the freedom of the press, Salisbury responded by saying that he believed her "terrible loss might have stirred within (her) an even greater need and desire

[102] Richard Fryklund, *The Washington Evening Star.*

to know the nature the enemy which robbed (her) of (her) son. It was my mission in going to North Vietnam to contribute to our pool of national knowledge." In this instance, instead of simply saying he grieved for her loss, Salisbury took the chance to justify his trip. He showed little empathy or understanding of how the woman felt, completely missing the point of her letter. It is a poignant and powerful example of Salisbury's misunderstanding of the public's belief that Salisbury's writings contained the possibility of a positive *and negative* effect. He would not admit that many believed his writing to have aided the enemy and not his fellow Americans.

Conclusion

It is natural for any public figure to believe that his opinions are correct. For every stance taken, there is always an opposing side and it makes little sense to criticize a person for holding one belief over another. Harrison Salisbury in fact fell into this category by believing that his articles could help end the war. He took a strong stance on an issue but he went further than just taking a stance. Though he publicly told the nation that his articles were powerful, he reserved the sole right to determine the extent of their power. He showed a savvy ability to choose details in such a way to emphasize his positive impact. He accomplished this by publicizing the idea that his articles could be a critical step in the peace process but he never acknowledged that the same articles could prolong the war. Their power and influence only worked in one direction and when journalists or citizens tried to tell him differently, Salisbury either ignored or berated his detractors. Such was the paradox that Salisbury fell into – a belief that his power only traveled in one direction. It was a one-way street that could only lead to good; a misunderstanding between himself and many in the public.

Conclusion: Salisbury's Place in the Historiography of the Vietnam War and Journalism

It is difficult to assess Salisbury's effect on the United States and the war. For one, he presented a strong indictment of the bombing in North Vietnam yet policymakers largely ignored his suggestions. Nor were his recommendations to negotiate taken seriously either, as talks to end the war would continue well into the 1970s. But Salisbury was not the only journalist to have exaggerated as none of the predictions Salisbury's critics made came true either - the United States military failed to see a strong drop in morale or effectiveness in the coming years because of the bombing. Perhaps Salisbury's greatest accomplishment was setting himself as the embodiment of anti-war criticism during 1966-1967. His decorated career as well as his position at the *Times* signified a growth in the movement's popularity among moderates. His reports gave credence to three of the movement's talking points during this period of the war by presenting on site evidence to counter government claims. First, Salisbury's demonstration of widespread damage showed that the bombing was ineffective and inaccurate. Second, Salisbury's interview with the Prime Minister advanced the idea that the Vietnam War was a civil, not interstate war. As such, the United States should not meddle in the process of a people's self-determination. And third, Salisbury's proof that the bombing was making the North Vietnamese stronger suggested that negotiations were the best way to move forward. But, his findings were not beyond refute and it is likely then that Salisbury's reports reinforced the beliefs of those for and against the war helping enlarge a growing ideological chasm. Even if those in power ignored his prescriptions, Salisbury's congruence of thought with the anti-war demands an explanation. On one hand, there is the personal explanation, in which Salisbury, a known liberal who felt strongly against the war, was blinded by his own biases. In this model of thought, Salisbury saw his surroundings through an ideological lens that tainted him from seeing the complete truth. On the

other hand, there is a geopolitical explanation. Salisbury was not the only actor involved in this episode and Hanoi was just as aware of the anti-war movement as Salisbury. Knowing that Salisbury's reports could benefit the war effort, North Vietnamese officials could have sculpted the reporter's trip to see exactly what the anti-war movement predicted by saying that they held no connection to the NLF nor did they intend to implement nationwide communism through force. Both explanations are plausible, though, without access to Vietnamese sources, it is impossible to come to a conclusion on the matter other than that the truth most likely falls somewhere in between the two.

Still, it is interesting that Salisbury fell into the same mistake that he accused the United States government of committing; underestimating the North Vietnamese. Salisbury's argument was simple: Americans did not understand their opponent. The North Vietnamese were stronger and possessed more ingenuity than the Johnson Administration gave them credit for. As Salisbury demonstrated, the enemy was not crumbling under the bombing; he was thriving. He was not losing morale; rather gaining strength as each bomb that exploded drew the citizenry closer to each other and their government. It is a powerful argument that Salisbury presented well, but unfortunately, he fell into the same mistake while presenting it. Salisbury believed that the North Vietnamese were separate from the NLF and that they had no plans to conquer the South; that they possessed a weak air defense network that they never placed anti-aircraft batteries near civilians; and that they treated American POWs humanely. But time would prove these ideas wrong and show that the reporter misunderstood the enemy's character also. The North Vietnamese were fighting a war on two fronts – one in combat, the other in public relations. Winston Churchill said that the truth must be surrounded by a bodyguard of lies. In this instance, the Vietnamese surrounded the truth of ineffective bombing with a web of political and

societal lies. Salisbury's story then offers another chapter in the historiography of the Vietnam War. It shows that the North Vietnamese recognized that they were actors on an international stage that could wield the sword of public opinion fiercely. The full degree to which the North Vietnamese were able to manipulate media coverage is still to be determined but the Salisbury incident is an enticing part of a much larger story.

Salisbury acts as an excellent case study for the conflict between journalists and the government during wartime. For journalists, the problem relates to source access. As Wyatt noted, in war the American media is tied to the government for legitimate information.[103] The press still holds the option to criticize the government but it must do so on limited grounds because of the lack of sources. What made Salisbury remarkable was his attempt to circumvent the government and present alternative sources as legitimate. He was not the only one to do this but he was the first reporter from the nation's leading newspaper to engage in this practice. To some degree it worked by forcing the Johnson Administration to admit that the bombing was not as accurate as previously implied. But in retrospect it failed. Salisbury was certainly right in some of his assumptions but in others he was painfully wrong. He did not represent North Vietnam's relationship with China or with the NLF accurately nor did he show enough skepticism towards the reports of the treatment of American POWs. The point is not to put Salisbury on trial for reporting errors but rather to show the difficulty of finding legitimate sources in war on either side of the conflict. In the Vietnam War journalism found itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. Journalists could report the North Vietnamese line with a grain of salt for they knew that it contained a biased and blinding agenda. As some of Salisbury's content demonstrates, the Vietnamese had no reservations about lying to advance their cause. But the Salisbury incident also indicts the American government for its misperception of the

[103] Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 154.

bombing in Vietnam. American bombs were not just striking military targets and often inadvertently fell onto civilian areas. In both situations, the two governments both held an agenda and hoped to use the media as a tool to advance that message.

Salisbury's experience also sheds light on the duality of patriotism. One on side there are those who believe that loyalty to the causes of one's government constitutes patriotism. Those who recognize that the country gave them so much believe that they are bound to fight for their government whether they agree with the cause or not. They certainly do not believe that the government is infallible but believe that in general it is a force working for the good of all and should be obeyed, especially when the enemy is at the proverbial gates. On the other side are those who hold skepticism towards the government; those who see that the country was founded on a distrust of power and thus observe wars and policies with suspicion. They are not necessarily against wars but are against manipulation and deceit. In their view, the government must meet a burden of legitimacy before they will commit to the cause and if it does not meet that burden then service is not mandatory. Salisbury was certainly cut out of the latter cloth. The so named "first amendment absolutist" made a career out of suspicion towards authority. He was prone to be obstinate and often irritated those in power. But his habits allowed him to find stories that others did not. Because of this trait he certainly considered himself a patriot as he contributed greatly to the national dialogue. But it raises the question, who was more of a patriot? The man who fought the war or the man who fought the government?

It is a debate that has highlighted the gap between ideological liberals and conservatives. There is certainly no established answer as the issue still rears its head in today's debates over American involvement in the Middle East and shows no sign of being resolved soon. Nonetheless, Salisbury's involvement in a nationwide debate clearly delineates the lines between

the two ideologies. As conservatives and liberals lined up on each side, Salisbury's true benefit was adding another chapter to an age-old debate. Whether he was right or wrong, he takes his place among many others who caused society's poles to clash and the nation to rethink loyalty in a democracy.

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