

PRAV
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IMPRESSIONS OF VISIT TO VIETNAM RECORDED

[Excerpts from pamphlet: "Under the Skies of Vietnam";¹ Moscow, Pravda Publishing House, Russian, 1968, 31 pp]

We first felt the Vietnam spring in a small peasant hut in a village not far from Vinh....

President Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Lao Dong Party of Vietnam, spent his childhood years in the city of Vinh, the center of the Nghe An province. We had to stop here.

In the morning we saw Vinh, or rather what remained of this ancient city. This very important industrial center, which had about 60,000 citizens, is in ruins. Yet almost every day the news bulletins report new bombings in Vinh. The bombs now fall on the rocks, and even the ruins do not remain....

A small, modest wooden hut in the village of Kim Lien has become near and dear to the heart of every Vietnamese. Here one may see everything of the childhood of the President. We saw the peasant furniture, wicker baskets, dishes. Near the home on a small hillock sugar cane and many trees, which were planted at one time by Ho Chi Minh's father, grow as before.

At midday we returned to Vinh. We travelled along its empty streets. Quite recently a pedagogical institute had operated here, but today only its ruined buildings remain. A sense of cold and war emanate from the walls of these buildings and their countless shell holes. Among the ruins we discovered some student synopses. Here was the work of Nguyen Xuan Lang on the theory of literature -- on it the instructor's grade, "5". Here was a collection of folksongs and sayings belonging to Nguyen Van Tin, a

¹ See JPRS 46,436, TNV 436, pp 4-8 for translation of interview with POW Edward Allen, which appears on pp 14-18 of source.

student. Here we found a Russian-language textbook, a chapter from the textbook Dynamics of Rotary Motions of Solid Bodies, and the magazine Works and Ideas, published in the Soviet Union in French.

We also visited a thermal power station built by Soviet power engineers in 1957 and bombed by the Americans in 1964. The collective is attempting to restore it. A small turbine is in operation at the power station, but its energy is sufficient only for the most important facilities. Therefore the city remains without light....

At every stop in the city we encountered shelters and trenches, and aircraft guns were set up in the streets. Green branches stuck out of the cork helmets of the soldiers, and banana leaves covered the tops of the camouflaged trucks. The young men go into the army and the girls into the People's Home Guard. The cause of protecting the motherland forces them to bear arms.

Life has created a new movement among the youth, the three "waits" or the three "laters". Do not fall in love--wait. If you love--wait, don't get married. When you get married--wait, don't have children.

Spring is usually the time for student examinations. Today the students of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam are taking two examinations. The first is in the subjects they have studied, but the second and most important test gives them the right to be called patriots of the motherland--it is a test of citizenship and heroism.

At the Hanoi Polytechnic Institute we saw on the roof of the Mechanics Department building a group of youths, under the leadership of fourth-year student Phan Trong Tam, practicing at an automatic gun, acquiring the knowledge needed for antiaircraft gunners. Next to them, by their guns, we saw their lecture notebooks and textbooks on resistance of materials, the particular subject for which they were preparing. On the roof of another building students of the Biochemical Department were practicing at another gun.

About 8,000 students are studying, and a large core of instructors work at this institute. All of them are members of the Home Guard.

The students of the institute have three obligations which regiment their lives. The first is to study well in order to become good specialists. The second is to be ready to defend the motherland at any moment. The third is to be ready to travel anywhere the party sends them.

Life for the women working at the Nam Dinh Textile Combine has also become a military one. The Americans have bombed some of its buildings. Combing machines, now covered with rust, stand under the open sky. Hard pieces of concrete roofing lie scattered about. The ground is covered with shell holes. But people need clothing, and brightly colored fabric was

being produced on the remaining machines standing under the open sky. In the amazing national patterns can be felt the expertness and distinctive talent of these Vietnamese craftswomen. The workers stood at their machines with identical soldier-belts around their waists. Cartridge pouches hung from the belts and rifles stood against the machines.

The combine operates day and night. Both day and night the workers stand on guard after work on the combine roof. A young girl, Bui Thi Cha, stood at her post. She carefully scanned the skies. Nguyen Thi Kam came up to replace her. The Home Guard volunteers do not leave their post for a single hour.

The combine workers have their own patriotic movement: three "readies" or, more precisely, three obligations. The first--keep order in the home and take care of the children's education. The second--be ready to take the job of a husband, brother or friend going into the army. The third--be ready with weapon in hand to defend the motherland....

Travelling through the Thanh Hoa province we saw peasants plowing their crops with water buffalo, as the women standing in water up to their waists planted rice shoots in fresh furrows. Their rifles were stacked near them.

Spring in Vietnam is cruel--a wartime spring.

"Everyone rise to the defense of the Republic," is the call of the people's regime.

The workers as one have entered the military ranks of their motherland. Maturity and military expertise have come to them in their battles with the enemy. They meet the air pirates with heavy fire from all kinds of weapons. American pilots are now more and more frequently forced to drop their death-dealing cargo wherever they can. The cemetery of enemy planes is growing, the number of prisoners is multiplying....

The trip from Hanoi to Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, and Vinh was the most difficult part of our trip. It is only 400 kilometers from Hanoi to Vinh, but it took us two days and nights to cover them with two sleepless nights on the road. Of course, the first trip to Haiphong, Ha Long, and Cam Pha to the shores of the bay of Tonkin was also difficult. American aviation frequently would conduct bombing runs over Haiphong, the largest port city in Vietnam, and over Cam Pha, the Vietnamese Donbass.

Travelling along the roads, we saw destroyed bridges and homes. Hundreds of American bombs have been dropped on a single railroad bridge near Haiphong. This bridge connects Haiphong with Hanoi. The bridge was riddled with bomb fragments, and metal structures hung over the river. Soldiers used steel bolts to hold the structures together, and electric welders placed steel connectors in them. The bridge was operating. Trains moved along it slowly, but they moved.

Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, and Vinh--we had learned the names of these cities back in Moscow. The brief and simple reports from Vietnam rather frequently spoke of attacks on these cities and air raids. Now we were travelling to these cities. We travelled the road of war south.

We left Hanoi in the evening. All auto transport in a southerly direction is forbidden in daylight hours. As evening comes on, movement along the roads picks up. On the highway there appeared detachments of Home Guard volunteers, units of anti-aircraft gunners transferring their base of operations, prime movers, and cross country vehicles covered with special camouflage nets.

Not far from Nam Dinh our vehicle stopped for a documents check. We also had such control points during the war in the front line zone. Before coming into Nam Dinh, we saw a large throng of thousands of people on the road. Grownups and children were in it. They lined the sides of the road waiting patiently. Some were sleeping. Before my eyes arose the vision of Smolensk: the throngs of people who filled the roads moving to the east.

"Who are these people?" We asked poet Nguyen Xuan Tranh, who was travelling with us to Thanh Hoa and Vinh.

"Nam Dinh is a major railroad center. These people are awaiting trains to Hanoi," Nguyen Xuan Tranh explained to us. Then he added, "The Americans have put Nam Dinh under terrible bombardment. They have bombed the textile combine, schools, hospitals, nursery schools, and totally destroyed the railroad station. The local authorities, fearing new raids and casualties, have moved the train station out here, beyond the city...."

On the way from Nam Dinh to Thanh Hoa, there are many rivers and streams. The Americans have left hardly a single bridge in one piece, neither railroad nor highway bridge.

The highway on which we were travelling was the only road connecting the southern provinces of democratic Vietnam with Hanoi. American aviation had long since knocked out the railroad to the south. It is true, however, that motor vehicles set on rails travel along certain sectors of the railroad. They carry on their flatcars raw materials, agricultural products, medicine, machines, and equipment for the industrial enterprises, construction materials for restoration, rebuilding, and a great deal of other things needed for life in these provinces....

We looked about Thanh Hoa in the daytime, visited with the anti-aircraft gunners protecting the Dragon's Mouth Bridge and also the unit where the battery commissar Dung Ba Cuong is. This is a heroic battery. It has accounted for dozens of American aircraft shot down. Its crew are youngsters--19- and 20-year-old soldiers. When they learned that we were from the Soviet Union, they told us about the performance put on at their battery by the Siberian Song and Dance Ensemble....

We also visited the Nghi Son agricultural cooperative. The residents of this cooperative help their defenders, the antiaircraft gunners, during heavy battles. In the cooperative there are Home Guard volunteer units, one of which is headed by Hien, an 18-year-old girl.

In this village, as everywhere, each peasant man and woman considers himself a soldier.

The traces of war and the barbarous air attacks could be seen at every step. If I started to count how many homes and buildings have been destroyed by the Americans, it would take an enormous list of several pages. One of the bombs landed right on a cliff and tore off an enormous section of granite, weighing several hundred tons. It had to be blown apart since it blocked a bridge entrance.

In Thanh Hoa we met with the famous heroine of the August battles, Nguyen Thi Hang, commander of a Home Guard volunteer zone, who in the heat of battle along with her young girl volunteers provided a continuous supply of shells. In this battle the antiaircraft gunners knocked down 17 enemy aircraft, and a great deal of credit in this belongs to the young girl volunteers from Nguyen Thi Hang's unit.

Nguyen Thi Hang does not like to talk about herself. She would much rather speak about her friends--about their lives and causes. She also speaks with a great deal of pleasure about her recent visit to the Soviet Union.

"I now have many friends in the Soviet Union. I knew that the Soviet people were friendly to our people and to our struggle, but only in Moscow did I really understand what Russian love is like. Believe me, I was kissed wherever I went. In Moscow I probably received enough kisses to last for my whole life," Nguyen Thi Hang said smilingly....

The leaders of the southern provinces told me about their struggle with American aggression and gave many examples of the bravery and heroism of workers, peasants, and youth, and of their participation in rebuilding industrial enterprises and in normalizing life. But no matter of what they spoke, we always felt that the southern provinces were now experiencing tremendous difficulty: there is not enough construction materials or power and there are breakdowns in supplying food products. All of this was due to the roads: the bridges and crossings held shipments up.

In Thanh Hoa we spoke with repairmen working on a bridge. One of these men, a welder, said, "The Hanoi-Thanh Hoa road is our lifeline."

And this is so! It is no accident that the American war machine bombs it day and night. On one bridge across a small stream we counted over 60 American bomb-craters. The Americans do not spare any bombs....

Behind us in Hanoi we left the palace of the President, Ho Chi Minh, and the Polytechnic Institute, the gift of the Soviet people. Its bright and light buildings constitute a unified architectural ensemble. This institute somehow reminded us of a modern resort village. We left behind us the Temple of Literature and Art. Performances in peacetime were given here by poets reading their verses, actors, and composers.

When in early morning we travelled along the streets of Hanoi, decorated for the New Year's holiday, we had the impression that there was peace and calm in the nation. Only the antiaircraft gunners protecting the bridge over the Red River returned us to cruel reality.

We travelled to the Hung Yen province....

What is the province of Hung Yen like?

We visited the cooperatives on the Ho Chi Minh canal, which was built by the province peasants. This was the first people's construction project. Thousands of people participated in building this canal, over 23 kilometers in length. The canal irrigates over 3,000 hectares of land. The waters of the Red River itself now come to the villages nearby, and this means that thousands and thousands of peasants are freed from the need to water their rice fields by hand. Now there is water from the canal for other economic needs of the peasants....

The construction of the canal was only the first step. One canal, of course, could not solve the main problem, which was to change the province from one importing rice to one exporting rice.

This was a pressing and critical problem since the Hung Yen province is very heavily populated. The fact that here as in other provinces two rice crops a year are harvested had not solved the principal problem. Other more basic measures had to be taken. One of these was the organization of an irrigation system in the province. Before the revolution of 2 September 1945 it was only 3 kilometers in length. It was owned by one major landowner. But in approximately the last 10 years the province has been covered by a thick irrigation network and now it is over 10,000 kilometers long. This has enabled the agricultural cooperative in the province not only to produce enough rice for itself but to sell thousands of tons to the state.

"And this is not the end," said Quynh [First Secretary of the Province Party Committee]. "We have the definite potential to considerably increase rice productivity."

This potential he sees in the effective utilization of chemical fertilizers, which, as he said, are still being poorly employed.

"Solving the grain problem has permitted us," Quynh continued, "to

give much more attention to livestock breeding, particularly swine breeding. Now every cooperative has its own pig farm. Pigs are also grown by peasants in their own private sectors...."

In this province every year one sees more and more fruit trees. We must say that there is not a home or a family which does not have its own fruit trees. Dragon eyes--they bear fruit over 300 years. And 600 to 700 hundred kilograms of fruit are sometimes harvested from one tree. There are families which make 1,500 dongs profit from the sale of fruits alone. And if we consider that the average worker's salary is 70 to 90 dongs per month, then we see that this is quite a significant amount....

Today an important portion of income for province coopeatives is in bee keeping. Here every hive provides an average of 35 to 40 liters of honey. Moreover, there are no expenditures for nutriments since it is warm here all year around....

Before the revolution there was not a single 7-year school in this province. Those who had enough money sent their children to Hanoi. And there were only three primary schools for the entire province. Now there are 160 7-year schools and 10 10-year schools in the province. In Hung Yen there are two technical schools--one pedagogical and one agricultural.

Until recently a bicycle was a rarity in the province. True, they are still rather expensive, but now every family has one. And in some families there are two or three bicycles.

In the peasant homes we visited we did not see any luxurious furniture, rugs, or paintings, but in almost every one we saw a book, a newspaper, and a radio....

We travelled to Hoa Binh province where the Vietnamese jungle begins and stretches up to the very border of Laos....

We travelled to Hoa Binh along a road which leads to Dien Bien Phu--the same Dien Bien Phu where in the spring of 1954 the troops of the People's Army created the Vietnamese Stalingrad for the troops of the French colonists
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At the Hanoi Museum of the People's Army we had learned how the fortress fell, and how the military operations were conducted, which became one of the brilliant pages in the history of the struggle of the Vietnamese people....

Now we are in Hoa Binh. Here again we met with the people, again heard warm words for the Soviet people, whose assistance and support they feel daily. We were met by Bui Nach Am, a member of the permanent province committee, deputy chairman of the executive committee of the province....

Bui Nach Am characterized his province in this manner: "There are 300,000 residents in our province. Eight nationalities reside on its territory. Before the establishment of the People's Regime only 5 percent could read and write. Not a single nationality had a written alphabet. Tuberculosis, tropical plague, trachoma and simple exhaustion were typical phenomena. There wasn't a single hospital in the entire province. But the colonists exported every last drop of rice, tea, peanuts, tobacco, coffee, lotus, valuable trees, silver and gold."

We visited one of the cooperatives in this province.

This cooperative is called Tin Lang and one of the villages in this cooperative has the same name. It neighbors with the city of Hoa Binh. They are separated by the Black River. All you have to do is get into a boat, cross the river, and you are on the Tin Lang cooperative.

The residents of three villages which make up the cooperative are Myongs.

This cooperative was established relatively recently--only 6 or 7 years ago. The peasant's main occupation is growing rice. But he also has coffee and tea plantations as well....

Rice is the principal food of the Vietnamese. It is for this reason that every mound of earth in Vietnam is important. At one time the French built an airfield on the territory of this cooperative. But as soon as the cooperative was established, the peasants plowed it up. Now on this same place a hardy strain of rice is grown. Through their own efforts the peasants have run an irrigation canal to the area of this former airfield.

When we arrived at the cooperative, its leaders considered it their first task to show us their threshing area where they were threshing rice. There were two motors on the threshing farm, one was Czechoslovakian, the other Hungarian. The motors were hooked into automatic threshers.

The chairman of the cooperative, Nguyen Van Hung, with a touch of pride said: "This is how we operate today. We no longer thresh with our feet."

This cooperative is considered a rich one. Fine crops are harvested here. Therefore the cooperative members not only supply their own needs but also sell hundreds of tons of grain to the state. And frequently in the village they remember that rather recently, about 10 years ago, they lived half starved 6 months of the year.

The state provides a great deal of assistance to cooperative farms. In 1966 alone the state allocated to the cooperative 20,000 dong for the construction of a new irrigation station.

In the past 5 years illiteracy has completely been eliminated among the cooperative residents. The cooperative has its own 7 year school. And in neighboring villages where the Myao and Thai nationalities live, the children now study in their native languages.

Among the students at Hanoi University and at the Polytechnic Institute one can also meet the residents of the Hoa Binh province and representatives of all national minorities.

The cooperative also has a medical center, so that first aid can be provided on the spot.

Motion picture theaters, newspapers, sports--these have all become available to the peasant. The village of Tin Lang also has its own stadium

The friendship between our peoples was born a long time ago. It has its own history and traditions. Today, during the struggle of the Vietnamese people for their freedom and independence against American aggression, our friendship has become particularly strong and stable. The echo of war in Vietnam is clearly heard by the Soviet man. Each raid, each bomb dropped on Vietnamese soil, brings pain to the hearts of the Soviet people. Therefore, in these difficult days for the Vietnamese people, we want to do everything so that peace and victory come as quickly as possible to the people.

Friendship is a very powerful word. Our friendship does not merely consist of polite greetings. It is reflected not only in the protest meetings and demonstrations, whose significance I certainly do not wish to downgrade. But if we were to count the meetings we have had in our country, the speeches presented at them, the articles written in our newspapers and journals, the figure would be astronomical. And if we added to this the meetings which take place in the homes, among families, it would be an ocean of passion.

Friendship to a Soviet is primarily a clear understanding of a friend's need, a selfless participation in the development of the economy and culture of his friends.

Cam Pha is a major coal center of Vietnam. Here the mines extract ore using open-pit methods. When we came to the pits, we saw an enormous crater. It reminded me in some ways of Nizhny Tagil, the pit at the Vysokaya mountain. Dump trucks travel down it to the pit along a spiral road. Loaded with coal they travel along the same road to the conveyors.

Young Vietnamese sat behind the wheels of the Soviet 4-cubic-meter dump trucks. These same Vietnamese youths drove the Yaroslavl' and Minsk "Maz" trucks.

Nguyen Tinh Lok spoke extremely highly of the Soviet equipment--of its endurance, solidness, and dependability.

"Soviet specialists," the director said, "are frequent guests at the Cam Pha mines. They assisted us in technically redesigning the mine. This has enabled us to double the coal production up to 1 million tons. Using plans of Soviet engineers, we are building a tunnel in the mountains in order to deliver the coal directly to the seaport." The dramatist Toktobolot Abdumomunov, a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet, representing the Kirgiz miners, asked with particular interest about the miners' work, about the labor conditions, and the relationships between the mine and our country's scientific centers.

"We have the firmest possible ties," Nguyen Tinh Lok stated, "with the Leningrad Scientific Research Institute."

We visited the power engineers at the thermal power station in the city of Vinh. Once again we heard words of thanks for the Soviet people. Here they particularly remember the names of the Soviet specialists Chernyakov and Troyskiy.

In Haiphong harbor we met our countrymen, the crew of the ship "Ussuriysk," which was delivering to Vietnam machines, equipment, construction materials, medicines, industrial equipment, and food stuffs for the population.

Since there is a war going on in Vietnam, our assistance is naturally not limited to peaceful goods. We are obligated to provide our Vietnamese friends with weapons, since when a friend comes to you in trouble and grief, you are not friend if you refuse him--if you do not extend your helping hand.

One could, I suppose, write a large book about the scientific and cultural cooperation between the USSR and Vietnam. But I will cite only a few examples which bear witness to the fact that our friendship has developed very successfully in all fields.

There are 800 instructors at the Polytechnic Institute, and the majority of these, as the rector said, received their higher education in the Soviet Union....

Among the directors and actors in Vietnamese theaters and film studios there are also many former students of the Moscow Theater Institute imeni A.V. Lunacharskiy and the All-Union Institute of Cinematography. Friendship among our literary writers is also proof of the friendship between our peoples....

The Soviet man in Vietnam is a dear and welcome guest. All a Soviet citizen has to do is appear on the street of any city and a crowd

immediately forms about him. They ask him about everything: about the cosmonauts, films, and new books! The Russian words for "Comrade," "Hello," "Greetings" are known by every Vietnamese. "Len so"--these words mean the Soviet Union, and they are now on the lips of children and adults....

In my opinion, the most important feature of these notes is to point out the sincere feelings which our Vietnamese friends have today for the Soviet Union and the Soviet people. They have unlimited faith in the friendship of our peoples, in a friendship which has no boundaries. Our people have but one road--one goal for the present and the future. This is well understood today in fraternal Vietnam. This is the conclusion which we drew from our trip to Vietnam at war.

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