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SOVIET SPECIALIST ON U. S. NORTH VIETNAM BOMBING

[Article by V. Kuplevakhskiy: "Planes Above Us..."; Moscow, Znamya, Russian, March 1969, pp 150-180]

From the Notes of a Soviet Military Specialist in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

February. A slight rain is falling on our bungalow. It falls ceaselessly, fine and tedious. The bedding dampens, even the faces dampen: they are covered with moisture and we have to wipe them off with a handkerchief all the time. Seeing how the noses and the chins of the "lien so" (Soviets) are turning blue, the Vietnamese have issued us regulation warm field jackets.

This is the coldest and most unpleasant time of the year. The temperature has dropped to plus 10 and the humidity has risen to 90 percent. A persistent fine rain is falling ceaselessly and there is no protection against it. The reed-woven roof of the bungalow is no protection from the rain either.

Everything has turned grey -- the skies, the river and the rice paddies from which the water has been drained. The habitually dirty grey Catholic cathedral around the road to Ha Dong has turned black. The black sockets of the cathedral are gloomily watching us.

"Yes, yes," says Mei. "The French built a cathedral here because it offered a good vantage point and controlled the road. They found this very convenient..."

"But this is a cathedral and not a pillbox," I say.

"But do you know how many stores of weapons have been found in Catholic churches: Not a pillbox? This is better than a pillbox."

Many pillboxes have remained from the French. They are found by the roads, the crossroads, the high and the low banks, the hills and the valleys.

We found pillboxes everywhere, heavy, gloomy, with narrow embrasures all around them.

I spent an entire day in one such vault. The pillbox was located on a high sloping hill. It housed observers from the air defense missile regiment. They had knocked together trestle-beds, spread mats on them and hung up a portrait of President Ho Chi Minh.

That day the Americans were not bombing so that we, the Soviet military specialists, were calmly squatting with the Vietnamese, eating manioc, boiled in salted water, which tasted very much like our potatoes boiled in their jackets. A pale plain was stretching below us. Two empty village roads meandered along it. We could see vaguely green little islands. I could imagine the way the French soldiers lived here, how at night they locked themselves tightly in this crypt, losing their minds from the rustle and the fear, afraid of the partisans and dreaming of home.

We saw pillboxes inhabited by bombed-out families. The words "Kat tok" -- barber shop -- had been handwritten on one of them.

The majority of pillboxes, however, were empty. They were along the roads, thousands probably, throughout Vietnam, like a herd of dangerous animals turned into stone. These were the monuments the French left after them, the monuments of helplessness and shame.

...February. Even if the rain is not falling, the air is so saturated with moisture that my suitcase under the bed and my slippers which I have not worn for a week have become covered with a loose layer of bright green mold.

We are going to Haiphong.

"Are you taking your helmet?"

"In this weather?"

Yes, in this weather a helmet would hardly be suitable. No planes are flying today and the roof of the "gazik" will protect us from the rain. The Vietnamese, however, whether on foot or riding bicycles, wear helmets not only when bombed but against the rain as well. The helmets are useful when the heat is strong as well. The paint on top of our helmets has peeled off: we frequently sit on them.

How many different helmets one finds in Vietnam! Soviet and Polish, German and French. On several occasions we came across the old German helmets with the small spikes. How did they end up here? Helmets come in different shapes, every country has its own. The silliest is the French, from this war. It resembles a fireman's helmet and is fragile like a tin-foil Christmas tree decoration. The helmets from the GDR have a somewhat unusual form. They remind of the palm of a hand, of a small boat.

Our trip from Hanoi to Haiphong is short: with a good road, in a car, it takes no more than four hours. The main thing is to reach the crossing on time. The bridge is now destroyed.

Somehow, seven men have found a place in the "gazik," and probably 500 kilograms of luggage. In addition to our simple belongings, we are carrying several films for our boys who live near Haiphong.

"One more," requests the interpreter. "Father Vinya is going to Haiphong for a holiday with his wife. Could we find a place for him?"

An elderly man with a bag is standing by the vehicle, smiling embarrassedly.

"Tet," says he, "Tet!"

Tet -- the lunar new year -- is the day after tomorrow. Branches of the peach tree, blossoming with most tender rose petals, have already appeared in the courtyards and the homes. Bigger branches, like small trees, stand in sand-filled tubs. "Tet, Tet..." Everyone speaks only of the Tet. Relatives come from afar to gather for the new year, to drink tea and share the news.

We will welcome the lunar new year in Haiphong. We already welcomed the European new year.

With our films, we move along the benches with difficulty. "Pham oi," we say. "Crossing ko? Is there? Rat tot. Very good. Let us hurry for the crossing. We must succeed. Biet? Do you understand? Full speed ahead!"

Such is the general gibberish which the Russians begin speaking a month after their arrival in Vietnam. The driver is familiar with a few Russian words, we know a few Vietnamese words and almost always we manage to understand one another.

Circling around Hanoi some ten minutes, we leap toward the crossing. Pham, the driver, rushes to the controller's booth, displays the traveling pass, talks him into giving us priority in crossing. Apparently, he is successful: he comes back to the truck and his broad face is shining.

We go to the crossing. The truck is rocking, the planks under the wheels are knocking, the pontoons are squelching. In the middle of the crossing the column stops. What has happened? We abandon or, rather, we tumble out of the crowded truck. We walk under the soaking rain along the narrow decking, past heavy ammunition-loaded "ZIL" trucks. Brown and green spots cover the sides of the trucks. The tarpaulin roof is covered with palm and reed branches and woven mats cover the roofs of the cabs -- the Americans would not find it so simple to make out the truck. We slide on the wet planks of the decking, careful not to fall into the river. The current of the red river is fast. Now it is easy to pierce the secret of

the red color of the water: the high waters have passed and over huge areas the bottom is visible, red like the skies at sunset.

Here is the culprit of our delay -- a heavy truck.

The truck is unable to surmount the muddy bank, it is skidding. A traffic controller is rushing about, desperately shouting and gesticulating. The driver's face is red from tension. He is hanging out of the cab and is also shouting. Finally, coming from the top, like peas, soldiers rushed down, glued themselves to the truck, pushed it upwards and freed the way.

We are rolling again... Here we are on the left bank of the Hong Ha (Red River), ragged with craters. Several little houses on the dike have been wrecked by bombs. Judging by the dimensions of the holes, one-ton bombs were used. Below, under the dike stands an abandoned village, drowned in green bananas. Another crater is located in the very center of the square-shaped rice paddy. The bombs were aimed at the bridge.

How many bombs had to be dropped before two of them could hit the pier? Dozens, hundreds? Maliciously, desperately, day after day, several times a day, foursomes of "Thunderchiefs" came to the bridge, flying over the very center of Hanoi. The Americans were in a hurry for the weather was soon to turn bad. They had to succeed, at all costs, to destroy the bridge, to destroy the railroad tracks. Every day, pillars of water rose over the river. Every day columns of fire and silt rose over the banks and clouds of brown dust hung for hours over the suburbs of Hanoi. For entire days the powerful speakers did not remain silent: "Dong bao, chuy, Dong bao, chuy!" -- Attention, compatriots! Attention!" Daily diving from an altitude of 3 to 4 kilometers, foursomes of F-105 "Thunderchief" planes hurled two 1,000 kilogram bombs each on the bridge. The nerves of the Americans were cracking up: under the anti-aircraft fire they were unable to engage in precise bombing. During the raids the thunder of the anti-aircraft guns and machine guns was such that it seemed that the sky would split and that the walls of the weaker houses would crack...

In the din of the anti-aircraft guns and machine guns an anti-aircraft missile thundered.

A missile is flying at the foursome. A second launching... Well, well... Why is everything standing still, why is time flowing so slowly? The feeling resembles that of looking on the screen at a flight in slow motion or slowly flying in a dream. The light of the first missile approaches the group flying in a wedge. It is a hit! The white cloud of the explosion is in the center of the foursome. There is another explosion, another white puff in the sky... Seconds later, the planes are flying as before, in tight formation. Yet, one of the F-105 bolts. The plane bursts out like an oil-soaked rag. It is clearly visible the way the pilot is trying to extinguish the flames by hurling the plane from one side to another. The altitude is low and soon the plane disappears. However, the flames will not be extinguished and the pilot will not reach the sea where he could be rescued by

helicopters. Should he bail out, he would fall into the hands of the peasant militia; should he fail to do so his grave will be a rice paddy.

He will not be mourned.

No one will mourn him, looking at the ruins along the roads. Everything that had been built has now been destroyed, wrecked, warped. Heaps of bricks and tiles lie everywhere. The road ribbon is intact (it is immediately repaired by youth brigades) but the houses are destroyed.

What do the Americans want? Stop the traffic on the roads? It is absurd, they themselves are well aware of this.

They want to demoralize the country. Their objective is mass murder. So they bomb houses, they drop bombs on places where only a sick imagination could conceive of any troop concentrations.

That is why they use fragmentation bombs.

A fragmentation bomb is, in military parlance, a means for the suppression of manpower in trenches, at the anti-aircraft artillery positions and the missile installations. This type bomb is small. It has a blasting charge and its round body crowds some 300 striking steel elements -- bearings. In 540 or 600 pieces, such bombs are put in containers and hung under the wings or the fuselage of the plane. A time mechanism is turned on when the containers separate from the plane. At a certain height the bombs drop out of the container and, exploding in contact with the soil, create a thick striking area.

The main objective of such fragmentation bombs is to cause casualties. However, the personnel of the missile launching installations is reliably protected in booths and shelters. The anti-aircraft artillerymen have also found a way to protect themselves against fragmentation bombs. There is no trench warfare in Vietnam. What is left? The civilian population! That is why the children in Vietnam wear heavy and uncomfortable woven hats, two inches thick. That is why all of Vietnam is covered with small cement holes -- individual shelters which offer no protection from demolition bombs.

Children do not attend school at launching sites. Women and old people do not launch missiles or fire anti-aircraft guns.

However, the Americans were not satisfied with the effect of the simple fragmentation bombs. In January 1967 delayed action fragmentation bombs were dropped on Vietnam.

On one occasion, several containers with such bombs were hurled on Hanoi, on the most crowded place -- the people's market. After the raid, when the Americans had finished their fighting and returned to their bases in Thailand, the explosions went on.

"A third..."

"Another one..."

"Skunks..."

The Americans hurl on the Red River delayed action high explosive bombs at places where ferry boats are transporting peasants hastening to the market, and young girls in traditional Vietnamese cone-shaped straw hats...

We reach another crossing in the dark.

"Haiphong is near by," says Volodya, one of our specialists who works here. "In half an hour we will be home."

Electric lights are shining on this bank. Lights are not dimmed in Vietnam. They are turned off only when the alarm sounds.

At the crossing we have to wait: a column with freight is coming from the other shore. Field mountings, perhaps, or ammunition for the anti-aircraft guns. We gather by the house of the traffic controller and Volodya engages her in conversation in, what he describes as "pure Vietnamese language."

The traffic controller, a very young girl wearing the Komsomol badge, is hiding from the rain under the shed smiling embarrassed:

"Khong hieu. I do not understand!"

"Not understand?" says Volodya disturbed. "Ti ten la gi? What is your name?"

"Khong hieu," the girl laughs. "Toi khong hieu anh. I do not understand you."

The cigarettes become wet under the rain and cannot be dragged on. After three puffs the cheeks begin to hurt.

The girl runs toward the dark crossing and shouts something in the night.

"We are about to start," says Volodya convincingly.

"Yes, after your courting," we laugh.

...One final stretch of the road and we are in the town, in the bungalow where the Soviet boys live. They make accommodations for us. Wrapped in blankets and jackets, we go to sleep under the dull light of a small kerosene lamp, under the rustle of the rain. The pillow is moist and cold and it takes a long time to warm it up with one's breath.

"Well, how are things with you?" we ask in the morning our specialists who are assisting one of the Vietnamese anti-aircraft missile regiments.

"Generally speaking, things are quiet now. You can see for yourselves. The weather..."

It is another grey, sunless, morning. Probably the Americans will not fly over.

"Are you quite busy? Do you visit the batteries frequently?"

"There is work enough."

Here, over Haiphong, the U. S. Navy Air Force, based on aircraft carriers operates. The aircraft carriers are in the Bay of Tonkin, in pairs, rotating every month.

"[Salagi]," say the boys, watching the crude work of the navy fliers in the air, the first days following the arrival of a new pair of aircraft carriers. They will become "aces" after their first flight, after feeling the anti-aircraft missiles... Naturally, if they manage to get back to the aircraft carrier."

Generally speaking, the aircraft carrier based flyers are distinct from those of the Air Force, based in Thailand, by virtue of their more refined work. Here they are known as the "intellectuals." The Air Force does not come but rumbles over like a herd of pigs, swarming on Hanoi or Phu Ly, stupidly tearing through the air defense system, paying no attention to losses. The "pig" flies on, relying on radio interference, a reliance which, by the way, is entirely vain. Naked force... The Vietnamese know that the sailors operate in a variety of ways: they create interference and engage in anti-missile maneuvers and try, at all costs, to destroy the missile installations on their way.

An anti-missile maneuver calls for enviable self-control. Noticing the launching of a missile, the pilot must let it come to a minimal distance from himself and then sharply dive under it. It sometimes happens that the pilot is able to avoid his encounter with the missile. From the ground this looks spectacular but, judging by statistics, insufficiently effective. The Soviet rockets, as everyone now knows, are successfully bringing down even the latest models of American aircraft. That is done with the most powerful enemy counteraction to the efforts of the air defense.

In the skies over Vietnam missiles have brought down F-105 D and F-105 F "Thunderchief" fighter-bombers, the F modification being the latest one of this type aircraft, specially designed to fight anti-aircraft-missile systems. This is a two-seat aircraft with special detection instruments and armed with anti-radar "Shrike" missiles.

Fighter-bombers, reconnaissance front-line aircraft and carrier based bombers of the F-4 C, RF-4 C and F-4 B "Phantom" type have been brought down

over Vietnam. A-4 "Sky Hawk," and A-6 "Sky Warrior" dive bombers and F-8 "Crusader" fighters have met their death on the rice paddies.

During the time that we were in North Vietnam the Vietnamese missile forces destroyed six heavy B-52 "Stratofortress" strategic bombers, aircraft carrying a crew of six and a tremendous bomb load. With its eight engines, such aircraft weigh as much as six or seven steam locomotives.

The Americans considered the B-52 invulnerable.

"It collapsed in the air like a house of cards," said later a Vietnamese missile-forces officer.

The Americans sent to Vietnam six of their most recent planes -- the flexible wing F-111 fighter bombers to test their flight qualities. Three of them did not return from their assignment.

"Unmanned reconnaissance planes?" our wonderful Captain Tam, commander of one of the batteries calmly said. "Well, what about it? These are not aircraft..."

A great deal of unmanned high and low altitude 147-J and 147-G reconnaissance planes have been brought down over Vietnam. This means that during such days the air bases and aircraft carriers remained without reconnaissance information which the reconnaissance planes, automatically covering a specific route over the territory of North Vietnam, were to bring in cases with photographs.

There is not one type of aircraft used in Vietnam which has not been intercepted in the air by a Soviet missile guided by the skillful and experienced hands of the Vietnamese operators.

When the first Soviet missiles appeared the sky literally swarmed with radio reconnaissance aircraft: the Americans were trying to find out the radio wave frequency on which the missile stations operated and discover their location. Missile systems kept arriving and the Americans suffered their first heavy losses...

Then, they went down, they dived to a minimal altitude. Here again, however, they were met by missiles and anti-aircraft fire whose density by then increased greatly. It became dangerous to fly low. Furthermore, finding themselves all the time in the middle of exploding shells, the fliers lost their confidence and bombed at random.

Once again the Americans began flying higher (higher is a relative term since in Vietnam they do not go any higher than 6 to 7 kilometers with the exception, naturally, of the reconnaissance planes: the famous U-2 "Lockheed," the 147-G unmanned planes, the latest "Lockheed" SR-71, which rises to an altitude of over 20 kilometers and the heavy B-52 bombers which drop their bombs on areas adjacent to the demilitarized zone from an altitude in the order of 10 kilometers). To avoid the missiles, they installed radar

obstruction devices on specially equipped EB-66 airplanes. Such planes shield the striking groups. Yet the number of airplanes brought down grows and grows...

The Yankees have already installed containers with obstruction equipment on their strike planes, thus reducing the bomb load yet the number of planes brought down keeps growing... Unsuccessfully the Americans dive under the missiles and try to avoid them.

The target now became to destroy the missile systems, to wipe them off the face of the Vietnamese soil! Of course, the Americans see what they get in the air... They have assigned special groups for the destruction of the missile systems and organized special raids, hurling flights of sixteen bombers to destroy the missile launching sites. They cover the launching sites with high explosive bombs and "Shrike" and "Bullpup" guided missiles, fire rockets, try to destroy the crews, dropping fragmentation bombs and strafing them...

For an entire week our boys went to the missile battery. The combat commander -- the "wonderful Tam" -- shared his experience with us. This was during the month of October, the most active month in the history of the war in the air. At that time the sky literally split. The boys -- Dong Chi Zhenya (the best liked Dong Chi -- comrade -- of the battery -- Zhenya) and Dong Chi Vitya and the big sober-minded Dong Chi Sasha -- did not leave the battery, risking their heads ("Dong Chi, Dong Chi, this is dangerous..." "What about you?"). That day, they were unable to go there: other matters prevented them... Zhenya hurried into the room. "What are we doing?" he almost shrieked. "We must... Tam has been hit!" Everyone felt as though we had offended Tam. Of course, when everything was normal, we were in the battery from morning till night yet when trouble came, we were not there. Tam was hit...

We reached the position which was being hit.

Tam's soldiers were walking within the defense earth works.

"Chao, Dong Chi! Suc khoe cua anh co tot? Greetings! How is your health?"

"I am well, thank God. How are you?"

"The battery is in operation again. We have moved to our reserve positions and brought down one more F-105. The site is untouched. We have only replaced the installations which were hit."

"Here is where the first 'Shrike' hit; here, the second."

"Where did the bom bi fall?" ("Bom bi" is Vietnamese for fragmentation bomb.)

"Everywhere," said the operator Vinh, an old acquaintance of ours. "Nhieu! Many! Sau." He raised six fingers. The Americans dropped six containers with fragmentation bombs on the position.

We sit down on one of the containers and light up. The members of the crew light up our "Novost."

"They dropped bombs. They fell there," they point out at the village. "Only two fell by the launching devices."

"Any casualties?"

"Two are slightly wounded."

Later on, already at the new position concealed among the palm trees, thoroughly camouflaged (so much so that it was difficult to find the site even though it was some 50 steps away from us), we sat down in the small bungalow of the commanding officer, drank lukewarm tea from microscopic cups and asked how everything had happened.

"This is the first time that I overworked," said Tam distressed. "You understand, he launched it from the side..."

"Was there the usual strike interference?"

"Yes, yes," Tam says. "As usual."

He smiles kindly, like a pediatrician smiling at small children. This is his habit: he speaks quietly and warmly (I noticed that he talks the same way to his soldiers). On the surface he reminds of a doctor or of a good teacher.

"Everything was as usual," says he. "However, the other group came from the side... I did not think that they would strike at us... Suddenly, bang... Yes, yes, 'Shrike.' 'Shrike,'" he repeats, smiling. "Then they dropped, yes, yes, bombs... Yes, 500 kilogram bombs... They probably launched unguided missiles as well."

"All in all, they hit..."

"Yes," says he. "So what? Look for yourselves, the very next day we were in combat readiness. We are already in operation. The second battery was hit three times yet it is still standing."

"Did you try what I had told you last time?" Zhenya asks. "Did the operators understand?"

"Yes, yes," says Tam happily. "Quite well. Very good results were achieved."

We go back to the strike at the positions.

"You understand," Tam says. "Their efforts are wasted. Well, they strike once, then again, yet the battery remains and fires. The equipment is durable. It is repaired and then installed again, again it is combat ready."

Tam's battery is one of the leading batteries in Vietnam. His score is almost 50 enemy aircraft destroyed. The battery itself, despite the fierce attacks from the air, is intact and, one would assume, will remain so until victory.

The Americans are totally unable to neutralize Vietnamese air defense-missile troops. They are achieving nothing. The number of destroyed airplanes is growing and growing.

...It is morning now, it is bright and we can see the house in which we spent the night.

It is a bungalow, the usual Vietnamese rural home, covered by a thick layer of rice straw. The walls consist of wide planks.

"Here," says Volodya, handing to me a nail and a dumb-bell instead of a hammer. "Drive this into the wall, to hang up the mirror. We will shave."

He laughs watching my attempts at driving the nail into the wall.

"This is sasswood," says he, happy with his joke. "You cannot drive anything into it."

"Erythrophloeum Fordii, Family Leguminosae," says the doctor coming toward us.

"Green beans!" smirks Volodya.

Our boys have settled in two bungalows, within the village, with two peasant families. The trestle-beds, covered by mosquito nets, are side by side. It is dark and cool inside, even when the weather is hot. A small brick-covered yard stretches in front of the bungalow, bordered by a low brick fence. To the right is the hog pen in which we see the black mass of the black Vietnamese hogs with their heavy bellies touching the ground. Near it a black thick-skinned thin-haired buffalo is phlegmatically chewing its cud. Its moist nostrils have been pierced by a metal ring. The buffalo has huge eyes, questioning and somehow madly unhappy.

The village is drowned in green low trees and shrubs. The banana trees are standing motionless, like huge green fans. The banana leaves have split and the blossoms hang under them, like big violet tears. The time will come when the blossoms will open (petals the size of fig leaves!) and pale fingers with small yellow flowers will appear; these will turn into curved

(literally like tusks) fruit, smelling of honey... Rising over all this are thin palm trees with a crown way up at the top. The yellow colored clusters of fruit hang from the stem of the bread tree. Mangyok grows on the small clumps of land between the bungalow and the bread trees: bare stems, like thin hands while under them, under the ground grow the brown tubers, weighing several kilograms. Cactus plants border the small roads and paths of the village forming, when grown, a low, live dirty-green colored fence.

The village is squeezed between low mountains: a mountain from the left and a mountain from the right. In front lies a strip of land planted in rice. Behind it is a river and beyond the river there are mountains again. They leave the impression as though they are growing, as though returning here after a few years you will find them higher. A junk is sailing on the river (like in the tales, with web-footed sails... What does it look like? Like a butterfly sitting on the water). The junk is slowly gliding, its image reflected in the calm mirror of the water.

Work is being done now in the fields: a few women and two old men are breaking the clumps of brown earth with wooden round hammers with long handles, preparing the field for the planting of the rice. Almost all the work that we witnessed on the rice paddies is done by hand. The plowing is done with the buffalo and water is shifted from one field to another in woven reed trays; the rice is harvested by women and young girls with sickles and it is threshed on the stone floor of the same type of yard we have in front of our bungalows... There is fog on the fields and the faces of the workers are wet from the moisture and the sweat. The long-handled hammers go up and down...

The Vietnamese are quite hard working. Now, when there is a war on, when the young people are in the army and when essentially only women, children and old people have remained on the fields one must admire the working stamina of the peasants. The year around, their trousers rolled above the knees, in the cold water, behind the plow they slice the black mud of the rice fields. The women are planting the rice seedlings in ideally straight rows. One walks along a road among the fields and the pale-green rice stems fall to the side, like green fans. The Vietnamese peasants start work in childhood. On the side of the road, almost running, bent under the weight of two big baskets on a yoke, girls are walking barefoot along the moist black asphalt. Their hair is wet and sticking to their face, the long strand held in one corner of the mouth. It is hard... Yet, if you smile they smile back so that for an instant, as the car drives by, the sun shines on the glass of the "gazik." One can also see a girl watering cabbage plants with a scoop: it is a big field, the girl is alone.

The people work a great deal. They must work because North Vietnam has always been rice poor (the rice granary of Vietnam is the South); now, in war time, they must work even more...

...Finally, the car is ready and we can go to the command post of the missile forces regiment.

"Look," says Nikolay Arsen'yevich, our senior specialist in this area. "Here they are ready to give us the military salute..."

Pantless chubby little children raise their hands to their temples with an entirely serious expression. A little girl is saluting with both hands, perhaps on behalf of her brother as well who is so little that he cannot walk and is sitting on the grass, looking at us with amazement. Just as seriously Arsen'yevich returns their greetings.

In the next village we are greeted with the salute of the pioneers.

"Lien so!" shout the children along the road. "Muon nam! Long live the Soviet Union!"

"Vietnam muon nam!" we answer.

Or else:

"Lien so -- Vietnam muon nam!"

The children do not suspect that their life is hard. They have grown up unaware of the fact that it could be better. I remember my own childhood, in 1943 or 44, when Mother asked: What is tastier: chocolate or jam? Until then I had tried neither one nor the other. In Vietnam, the children are children: they kick footballs, skip classes, play... Yet, how serious they are, how adult and independent! They are small adults.

The command post of the regiment is concealed underground, protected by a thick overhead cover.

"It is no longer terrible, is it, Dong Chi?" Arsen'yevich laughs, as we go down into the bunker.

"The local population helped us," answers the regimental commander. "That is why we built the bunker fast."

The local population always comes to the aid of the missile troops. Carrying shovels, hoes or baskets to carry the dirt, the inhabitants of several neighboring villages come to the building site of the new missile installation and, before you know it, the protective earth banks, reinforced with metal, are up and the foundation pits in which the station cabins will be located are ready. By morning banana trees are already growing on the banks, for camouflage. The entire equipment is skillfully concealed with palm branches.

Holding his computation figures, Arsen'yevich is advising Dong Chi on how more reliably to secure the engineering protection of the equipment and the people.

"Yes," the other agrees. "But the people will be tired, they are working very hard."

"Dong Chi," Arsen'yevich insists. "You must understand that it is better to work hard than to be buried before your time. Do it once well and then work calmly, bring down my bay my, American planes, as you wish."

"Yes," says the commanding officer. "This is correct. Only the people will become very tired..."

"Well, when you had a simple bungalow for your command post, how did you work, calmly? Well, Dong Chi? Don't I remember how everything around you shattered? You never took your helmets off."

The commanding officer laughs and puts his arm around Arsen'yevich's shoulder.

"Okay, okay, thank you."

Sasha and I are standing by the operator's plotting board on which operators are "aiming" at targets.

"Who is there today? The Coral Sea again?"

"Yes, yes, an aircraft carrier."

We are looking at the way the red line following the course of the target meanders and loops. This is a familiar operation and the plotters can talk with us and answer questions. One of them is sharpening a bamboo stick: he is making either splinters or toothpicks. The red pencil crawls toward the shore... Will it start toward us? The operator yawns.

"This is a training mission..."

"What type aircraft?"

"A-6."

The Vietnamese reconnaissance is excellent. Furthermore, in the course of the war the missile men have learned to identify planes faultlessly on the basis of most various characteristics: the direction from which they have come, the type of formation, the decoys used, what is the place of the group in the formation, the altitude of the flight, etc.

The red line is nearing the blue edge which marks the Vietnamese shore on the plotting board. The plotter who was shaving the stick put his knife aside. The red line has straightened, it is heading toward Haiphong. Dong Chi and Arsen'yevich have approached the plotting board. The next marking also shows a straight line... Are they playing on our nerves?

The next marking goes sharp to the right.

The regimental commander sits down by the table and lights a cigarette.

The plotter picks up his knife and stick.

The chief of intelligence brings the charts: "Here is how they flew in January. Tomorrow is Tet, there will be a cease-fire in the South but for us...what cease-fire for us? They flew over during the European New Year and Christmas. They will fly over during the Tet as well. Naturally, they will try to fly where no journalists are present, to appear like lambs to the world... We must be ready for anything. This is a mean enemy."

Once again the red line streaks toward us.

Once again at the shore the airplanes sharply turn to the right.

One spiral after another is recorded on the plotting board.

Orders are issued from the command post: "Ready!," "All clear!," "Ready!," "All clear!"

...When we returned to the village, the final preparations for the Tet were underway. The owner of our bungalow was binding, crisscross fashion, the banh hung, in palm leaves, the inevitable banh hung for the Tet holiday, made of sticky rice and peas. Wrapped in a palm leaf, it is well protected and is sent to relatives living afar. Tet is inconceivable without banh hung.

In the kitchen, under the open skies, our driver Pham was operating. I approached, attracted by a wild squeal. A pig was being cut up.

Tomorrow we will welcome the Tet among our Haiphong boys, in a Vietnamese village, among areca and banana palm trees, under Vietnamese skies plied by Yankees from the "Coral Sea" aircraft carrier...

"Admit," Sasha tells me. "Life can sometimes be simply amazing. Could we presume, just one year ago, that we will be in the tropics, in this village here and we will furthermore celebrate such a strange holiday -- the Lunar New Year..."

He and I are walking along the shore. Ahead of us lies a destroyed bridge or, rather, a little bridge, a "strategic target" across which, recently, rolled buffalo-driven carts, and bicycle-driven rickshaws carrying old people and which was used by children who caught fish with huge "parachute nets."

Not far we distinguish a "lien so" figure (traditional sweater and a saucer-shaped beret!), fishing rod in hand. It is Volodya.

"I have almost nothing to do now. I know my people: by now they can work with their eyes closed. They find irregularity as rapidly as I do. One could already go home."

The Vietnamese crews master the equipment well. There are less and less Soviet specialists with the air defense-missile troops. The presence of "lien so" is required only for the very complex problems.

Our people work mostly at night. "We are night eagle-owls," the boys joke. They have even made a song about it: "At night, when all dogs are asleep and even the small beasts are silent, the boys come out of the bungalows, screwdrivers sticking out of their pants."

"You plunge into the night," Volodya says, "and by morning you do not give a damn, you jump in the bus, snooze along the way and go to sleep where-as here those skunks...you run out of your bed, put your helmet on and into the pit...while they come once or twice over the village, then fling themselves somewhere and fly away. The moment you lie down, the moment you doze off, they come again... And in the evening they come again. I will catch up on my sleep at home!"

Yes, somewhere there, beyond China, is our home. Russia, Slavs, children, familiar details, Russian songs, buckwheat porridge, books, "I will trade two one-room apartments for a single two-room apartment," or vice versa...

"When did they destroy this bridge?" Sasha asks.

"Quite some time ago..."

"Do you know why it is not being rebuilt?"

"I personally would not restore it," Volodya says. "Why? You see the ferry-boat there? Anyone who needs it takes it to come to this shore. Freight? What freight! How much freight is there to be hauled in this area! I spent almost all of my free time here, fishing. I can see who crosses the river. The ferry-boat is entirely sufficient."

One could think that it was not worth it for the Americans to bomb this bridge! Apparently it was not so!

"Well, here they tried a long time..." Volodya says replacing his bait. "On that particular occasion we were in the mountain, when they bombed it..."

The navy men dived toward the bridge, flew up, made a new pass. Several foursomes took part in the bombing.

"The third battery was firing at them. Yes, two launchings. They brought down an F-3. Well, they dragged it along, went after it, they all

wanted to reach the sea, to crash into the sea... They say that their rescue service in the sea is well organized. The helicopter pilots are paid a great deal to rescue the pilots. Why? Well, it is cheaper than to pay aid to the families, all sorts of insurances, what-not... The plane caught fire, however, and then probably something happened to the controls. Then the pilot ejected with a parachute, even though he was over Vietnam. Naturally, he lost his head. He fell straight into the village. Immediately we jumped into the car and came...

"As I say," Volodya goes on, "well, they bombed the bridge. It would be very easy to repair it. It is not worth it, however, the traffic here being rather light. On this operation they dropped a pile of bombs and lost a plane and a pilot... What did they achieve? Did they interrupt the traffic? I would not say so. Did they demoralize the population? Do you think the population fears them? The children and the old women go hide. All the rest pour into the street and fire at the skies with their 'Winchesters.'"

The name Winchester is, naturally, a joke. We find here our anti-aircraft machine guns and British manual "Brens," old "Lebels," [trekhlineyki]... The militia has everything conceivable! The old men aim at the planes with old flint-lock rifles! A man holding a weapon, even though ineffective against such buffaloes as the modern airplane, no longer fears them. Man feels himself armed, he does not lose his self-control, in a word, he is not demoralized. But the senseless barbarism of the Americans builds up hatred in the people. Hatred is growing in Vietnam not directly proportional to the cruelty of the Americans but, clearly, in a square or even cubic proportion."

As we walked toward the bridge, Sasha resumes the conversation.

"Yes, they will never win in Vietnam," says he, kicking as he walks stones and empty shells. "To say the least, it is illogical to fight a war which is totally without a future. What are they trying to do in the North? Destroy its industry? Which one, the war industry? Do the Vietnamese produce their own missiles or anti-aircraft guns?... So, it is not the war industry... Do they wish to disrupt rail, highway, dirt road or maritime communications? Do they wish to destroy the crossings?..."

This is a useless occupation, it is Yankee stupidity and idiocy. Internal communications in Vietnam will never be destroyed because the organization of road operations is unusual and the Americans do not have enough forces to hang over the roads 24 hours a day.

The question is frequently asked: are the Americans fighting this "local," as they describe it, war (actually, it has other descriptions: dirty, without a future, barbaric) with full effort or is this a simple war, a training war in which they are developing the tactics of their aviation, and testing new equipment and apparatus?

The fact that they are using Vietnam as their training ground is undoubted. What else, for example, would explain the presence of the latest F-111 type planes in Vietnam?

Yet, this war is also difficult for the Americans, involving major losses in equipment and manpower. The number of destroyed "Thunderchiefs," "Phantoms," "Skyhawks," "Sky Raiders," "Crusaders" and other aircraft is eloquent confirmation of the cost of their combat operations over North Vietnam. As I am writing these lines their number has exceeded 3,000. Those are 3,000 planes whose tails have been found on the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and whose identification numbers have been recorded. Many planes fall on Laotian territory or into the sea. Somehow a report reached the Japanese claiming that the official Vietnamese figure of destroyed aircraft is lowered by at least one-half. The point was, they claimed, that many planes come back from bombing missions seriously damaged (the control system enables the pilot to reach the airfield but the airplane has been torn up by shells and God only knows how it landed), for which reason the pilots aim the plane at the "cemetery" while they themselves eject with a parachute. However, the Vietnamese command is scrupulous in its count of the overall number of Yankees brought down.

The Americans have lost a large number of qualified pilots. Colonels, most experienced fliers, are brought down. A large number of captains are brought down. The largest number of pilots brought down are lieutenants.

Another fact which confirms the efforts of the Americans is that, while flying over Vietnam, they use no more than 20 percent of their raiding forces for bombing targets. The strike groups, i.e., the groups of planes bombing a target, account for no more than 40 to 50 percent of the flying mission. The others are cover groups: against anti-aircraft-missile installations, against fighter aircraft or against air defense artillery. The Americans are forced to act this way for otherwise the losses they are suffering over Vietnam would become even higher. Fearing the air defense missiles, the Americans are forced to use radar obstruction, precisely with the help of the airplanes of the strike groups. This leads to a substantial reduction of the bomb load. The obstruction equipment is locked in containers fitted to the bomb racks. With this equipment, the pilots must leave half their bomb load at the airfield.

The losses suffered by the American Air Force in its raids over North Vietnam are catastrophic.

...A junk-butterfly sails past us. A man, his feet hanging overboard, is sitting on its bow, playing a flute. He plays, thinking his private thoughts. True, the private thoughts of all are the same: the war. It is a sad melody.

The songs of Vietnam are quite beautiful. Strange at first, they become so captivating that from morning till night you will be singing any one of them. One of them is the very beautiful song entitled "My Village."

It is a wonderful waltz whose melody touches the heart and makes the soul sweetly sad. It reminds one of Zolushka.

The Vietnamese are musical people. Music lovers are encountered at every step in Hanoi which lives under the roar of American planes: there goes a man riding a bicycle, with an accordion on his back; here you see a soldier looking at the window of a big bookstore. From his belt hangs a bag with his rice ration. Slung over his shoulder is a kit bag with his chopsticks sticking out. In his hands he holds a guitar. Everyday, under our window, a young boy plays "Golubka" on the trumpet. A Chopin melody comes out of the windows of the music school on Dien Bien Phu Street...

In a little store displaying the photograph of President Ho conducting a symphony orchestra I looked at Vietnamese folk musical instruments. An elderly Vietnamese was discussing something with the clerk, holding a strange looking instrument in his hand. God, what was this? Could I be wrong? On a single buffalo string the elderly Vietnamese was playing "Podmoskovnyye vechera" smiling slyly at me.

How many times we heard "Katyusha"!...

They sang for us "Shiroka strana moya rodnaya"...

We were asked to sing "Utki vse parami, kak s volnoy volna..."

I watched how, in the evening, gathering in a circle, soldiers near Hanoi, in a just bombed village, sang accompanied by guitars and whistled.

It is rare to find in Vietnam a driver who neither sings nor plays along the road. Whenever there is a stop he takes his flute, sao, and starts playing something very very sad.

...We are approaching the bridge. Why did these idiots demolish it?

"Let us go back to the village," Sasha says. "Today all of us are invited by the municipality. In honor of Tet."

The table is laid under a shed of palm leaves. Around the table are all the Russians living in the village and the representatives of the municipality: the president, the secretary of the party cell and young girls -- production leaders. The banquet is simple: ruou cam, orange liquor, and pastry.

There are speeches. Taking the floor in turn are the president, Arsen'yevich, the secretary, our chief engineer...

The Vietnamese speak well and write beautifully. They can speak long and interestingly without notes. Notes are used only by officials in official circumstances on formal occasions.

The Vietnamese write even better than they speak. They cover the white sheet of paper with minute pearls, even and neat so that a letter resembles a bit of lace or fine coinage. Their handwriting is wonderful and the small pearls are the result of the shortage of paper in the country. The shortage of paper also explains the birth of the wall poster. The white walls of the homes are like white sheets. There are writings and drawings on the white walls throughout the country.

They draw using colors and colored chalk, they draw Americans in coffins, crushed brought-down airplanes, anti-aircraft guns, militiamen, girls taking airmen prisoners, nurses, healthy and smiling babies, pioneers and soldiers with automatic weapons and missiles. They draw entire stories about unlucky Yankee pilots. They draw serials on subjects dealing with hygiene. They draw huge portraits of Nguyen Van Troi on house walls. A poster frequently drawn is the following: a heart symbolizing Vietnam -- one country from Lang Son to Camau, as is written in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam ("From North to South the territory of Vietnam is a single and indivisible whole").

Long slogans are written on the long stone fences and short slogans are written on the short ones. "Voi mien Bac nhac mien Nam" -- Living In The North, Remember The South. "Ho chu tich muon nam!" -- Long Live President Ho! Every section of the wall suitable for a drawing or a slogan is covered with colored designs. Mandatorily on any more or less important crossroads you will come across a whitewashed brick wall describing the successes of the province in the struggle against American aviation and achievements in agriculture.

The wall newspapers which report on the development of the combat operations are particularly numerous. They inform of the successes of fliers, air defense forces, missile forces and militiamen. Huge figures written in chalk remain engraved in your memory forever.

25 August -- Three Planes Brought Down
Two in Hanoi
One in Habak Province

One finds such screens throughout the country. Everyday the old figure is erased and the new one is inscribed.

The number of planes brought down is the most popular type of statistics in Vietnam. It is published even in the notebooks, side by side with the three-year calendar (three years because the Vietnamese is neat and his notebook will last a long time), along with the dates of birth of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, October Revolution Day, Paris Commune Day and the anniversary dates of the socialist countries. The number of airplanes brought down over a province are an object of pride...

"We thank the Soviet Union for its help in the struggle against American imperialism... We are on the very front line of the struggle against

American imperialism," says the president of the municipality. "We are happy to celebrate our holiday with those Russians whose party and government have assigned the honorable task -- the fulfillment of their international duty..."

After the reception, after all the speeches were made, after we were photographed with huge bouquets of gladiolus and with a branch of the peach tree, after Volodya had been photographed with all the girls, after all the Vietnamese songs and our "Katyusha" were sung and after we were given a huge woven plate with bananas, tomatoes and grapefruit and went to the bungalows to celebrate the Tet Russian fashion, a car showed up and minstrels began singing somewhere in the little garden on Tverskaya Yamskaya. Only the Russian words were mixed with the Vietnamese and the words "Intruders" and "Phantoms" replaced the old "messires."

We are roaming the swamps of Vietnam,
Fog is covering the wet jungles.
There is an open wound in the Russian heart:
Your ache is in my heart, Vietnam.

Russian fashion, we cursed the American fliers over Hanoi. We wished their death because they brought death to the Vietnamese and they sowed death here and every bomb had the seal "Made in USA."

"They are drunk and are flying again," we said when planes appeared over the city on a Sunday.

The Americans do not wish to die on a Sunday, it is considered more offensive than during the week. That is why pilots are paid more for Sunday raids over Vietnam. Then, it is either the hoarders or the drunks who fly. The Americans have no shortage of either. Killing the Vietnamese on Sundays, they are saving for a ranch or for a drinking about in the Japanese brothels.

In what sea is Tonkin Bay?
In what land is Haiphong?
In rain and in heat, at high and low tide
Look at the skies, Chuyen mon.

"Chuyen mon" is the Vietnamese for "specialist." Indeed, one must always look at the sky: would any reptile show up? Those who do not live in the cities, those whose alarm system is their eyes must look upward all the time. The airplanes appear unexpectedly and no one knows what will come into the pilot's head. It is easier for those who are facing the radar screen. Operators and battery commanders, always at the station, see the planes on the screens. If the planes are at a distance operators and technicians go on about their business or practice following targets.

It must be said that the Vietnamese operators are superb. Whenever a group of planes enters the zone of combat operations of a missile battery, nothing in the world exists for the commander and the operators except the

bright spots on the screens. The operators nestle against the screens, their hands are carefully lying on the controls. A great deal depends on their skill. An operator must be like a jeweler. He must have the most delicate hands. All his movements must be regulated and balanced. The Vietnamese have mastered the equipment so well that in their tests of the quality of their target following does not show any noticeable difference between automatic and manual target following. The Vietnamese operators have acquired tremendous experience. Despite this fact, however, they practice for 24 hours a day, except for a short sleep. They literally become part of our missile equipment. Those are talented people: they switched from riding the back of a buffalo to the seat of an operator of a most complex system which they operate so knowledgeably!

Here, where the most complex weapon of our time is used in combat operations -- anti-aircraft missile equipment (in military affairs this equipment is indeed the most complex), the most amazing thing, in my view, is the "compatibility," if one may say so, between man and machine. The people make themselves at home in the station, they blend with it, it becomes their home. Without man the station is dead; without the station and the missiles man is unarmed. Perhaps, indeed, the time will come when automation will totally replace man. For the time being, however, the very "compatibility" between man and machine is the decisive factor.

In Vietnam hens and ducks roam around the missile launching site and flowers have been planted around the commander's bungalow.

The sky is torn asunder by the explosion of missiles,
High explosive bombs are blasting holes in the earth,
And the central press will tell you
How dangerous events are, --

We sing, under the accompaniment of a guitar, thinking of our wives. Today is Tet and during Tet every Vietnamese wants to be home. Is Tet not our holiday as well? We received New Year greetings from the Vietnamese commander and regimental commissar: "Dear Comrade, Happy New Year! We wish you and your family good health and happiness in life and good successes in your work and in combat." Yes, like most Vietnamese men, the "Lien so" will not be able to see their wives during the holiday.

"My wife writes me," told us the commissar of one of the batteries, "that this New Year they will rebuild roads and dig shelters. The entire country will go to work during the holiday."

The day goes by. It is dark in the bungalow. The boys have taken a projector to the school where now the peasants of all surrounding villages will gather. They will watch a motion picture we have brought. We go down, using our flashlight: there may be snakes on the road. The countryside is dark and nothing is visible in the sky -- as before, it is covered with clouds. On the square in front of the school there is a sea of heads, the people are sitting straight on the ground. Naturally, most of the pub-

lic is kiddies. An amateur concert is underway and, unfortunately, we do not understand a thing since all interpreters are on the stage. However, we can guess the content of the song by the eyes of the public and by their reactions. And when Volodya starts singing Russian songs, they keep him on the stage for a long time, demanding several repeats.

So, we, the Russians, have acquired one more holiday -- Tet.

Outside frogs are competing. We lie down to sleep, to wake up the next morning with the new lunar year. Tomorrow will be 13 January. What will this year bring? The night is dark and the frogs are croaking...

We spend the first day of the new year in Haiphong. This is Haiphong. A port. Long flat barges. Our Nizhneudinsk and Argus, a Polish and British ship from Singapore or Hong Kong are moored at the dock. The British merchantman has a big shield aboard, with the national flag, flying the red Vietnamese flag with a gold star in the middle on the mast. The Vietnamese flag is in honor of the country in whose port you are moored while the shield with your own flag on board is for the Americans who are in the air. This is a precautionary measure. Big national flags are also spread on deck, as a precautionary measure. The small British merchantmen Starford has been loaded. While we were in Haiphong Starford left and an absolutely identical Cratford, with the same shield on board, appeared. The merchantmen are bringing coal.

Our vessels are bigger and the freight they bring is more substantial. The unloading is in full swing. This is quite clearly visible from the ferryboat.

All sorts of automotive vehicles are crowded on the ferryboat: a Soviet "GAZ," a Czech heavy truck, a Rumanian "gazik," and even a small German "Garant," which looks like a ladybug with camouflage paint.

Our Hanoi driver Chyong Truong (a rather interesting individual whom I will describe later) prefers the "gazik" to all other cars. He always looked enviously at the "Volgas," saying "yyyyyyaaa," a sound we rather liked, revealing extreme indignation or happiness.

Automobiles in Vietnam are a way of life unto itself, the basic means for the transportation of freight. On the roads "YaAZ" roar like buffalo, "ZIL" and "GAZ" and snub-nosed Czech trucks are carrying ammunition. I took one of our wonderful L'vov buses which, for some reason, had not been painted in brown-green: the trip was like a holiday. Mainly, Hanoi is full of Soviet and Rumanian "gaziks," "Pobedas" and Polish "Warshavas." The Chinese diplomats ride in West German "Mercedes." As to the "Garant,"...the "Garant" are simply touching. This ladybug is crawling along the road with such a low clearance that it looks as though the car is indeed crawling and not rolling.

"Look there... There -- the cement plant..."

The destroyed plant looks dead. Its walls have crumbled down.

"Over there, you see, residential houses... They too were wrecked."

There are ruins in the very center of Haiphong. An old woman is sitting on the sidewalk by the ruins, selling brassieres.

Haiphong is smaller than Hanoi and there are less people on its streets. It does not have such big buildings as the capital. The main thing of Hanoi are the port and the cement plant.

Here and there, along the streets we see huge cases with machine tools. "Poland," "USSR,"...their inscriptions read.

In the port our ships are taking turns. In addition to the rescue ship Argus, permanently stationed here, one or several Soviet vessels are always present.

"This is the most unpleasant place to be when there is a raid," Arsen'yevich says. "The planes literally fall on the ships -- such is the impression they create. Yet, every ship has a flag spread on the deck, well visible from above. Nevertheless, they dropped bombs on the Pereslavl Zaleskiy..."

Today the sky has cleared up since the morning. Only a few white clouds are sailing over the Bay of Tonkin.

The sky over Vietnam is amazing. It is such a sky that one begins to doubt that it is simply air and that the white rivers and valleys, incredibly beautiful and odd are nothing but clouds.

In the evening the Vietnamese sky is like a holiday. To the east the sky is blue: the clouds are reddish on one side and on the other colored in green, as though coming from within them, the color of nephrite. Or else the clouds will be blue underneath and shining white on top. The sky and the clouds change their colors rapidly but not sharply. Every combination is unique. These are tranquil flowers. Add sound to them and the melody would be soft and harmonious, incredibly complex and without any rhythm.

Dawn in the mountains is unprepossessing, they are in shrouds. Fog covers the mountains. Rise at around 4 A. M. The sky is grey but one should look at this grey color. It is not simple. It is the color of Pissarro, with pale blue and rose hues; one must look closely, however, then, as the sun rises through the shrouds the rose and the blue become clearer and clearer...

The colors of Vietnam are so complex, so varied in the various places and during the various times that the Vietnamese painters may be accused of imagining things. You are looking at a lacquered Vietnamese painting: red skies, raspberry colored river, orange-colored sails, cadmium-colored palms. Fantastic? What about a fantastic evening on the Red River? The river is

showing its raspberry colored bottom, the sky is flooded with the crimson of the setting sun. What other colors could one use to paint this?

A heavy downpour has just passed. It is as though the clouds have been sliced off and the sky has become blindingly pure. It is good to look at such a pure pale blue color. Somewhat lower, almost on the horizon, rich white clouds are piling up. And it is from such a sky that pour bombs, that American planes fall, smoking and breaking up in the air and that pilots jump with parachutes, in the belief that they have been simply unlucky. With their planes, they crash into the rice paddies.

...F-105's were bombing a road. When the foursome turned into the zone of action of the missile site two missiles were launched at it. The foursome scattered to different sides. One was unlucky: the missile exploded right near it. Captured American pilots who say that they fear the Soviet missiles most of all say that, at the moment of the explosion, they feel an extremely strong impact and that many lose their orientation in space. Obviously, that pilot too lost his orientation because his plane crashed some three to four kilometers from the point of impact with the missile. The engine crashed into the rice field directly behind the houses of Yen Bay Village. The 18-ton airplane together with its pilot fully disappeared into the ground. For about 10 minutes the place where the "Thunderchief" drove itself into the ground burned. However, the rice paddy is in water and the fire went out.

When we arrived there, the peasants were working in the crater. They were instructed by an elderly woman -- the president of the municipality. Passing from hand to hand baskets with oozing clay, the people were disinterring the plane. Not a single piece, even if no bigger than the hand, was discarded: everything was laid aside. An entire pile had already grown from something which previously was 90 meters with a span of 12 meters and which carried $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 tons of bombs. The fragments will be used: there are excellent tubes, there is plenty of aluminum which will be turned into a mass of useful objects and many transistors which will be used for the radio receivers so necessary in the remote villages. At the very bottom of the crater a boy was collecting fuel with a pot, pouring it into a bucket which he handed upwards. No more than a couple of barrels of fuel could be rescued but even this would be useful.

I was standing by a long plywood case with ancient Vietnamese ideographs on the side, talking to Mei, our interpreter. We lit up and I sat down on the case.

"You should not," Mei said, "stand up."

"Why?"

"You are sitting on the coffin in which the flier will be laid..."

I remember the A-6 who had gone on 89 bombing missions and had been brought down on its 90th. The pilot, a lieutenant colonel, thought that he would soon be back in the United States of America. He too was laid in a coffin by Vietnamese peasants and buried. For a while his grave stood out, until the new grass grew up.

The American pilots whose planes are brought down over Vietnam behave differently. Some raise their hands immediately; others show the militiamen or the peasants their silk kerchief -- an object which a flier going on a mission must carry with him. This is a fine silk kerchief, hardly bigger than a handkerchief. The American flag and a text in several languages, English, Vietnamese, Russian, Cambodian and Chinese, are printed on it. The request in all languages is the same: "I am an American citizen. I need assistance...You will be rewarded...Report about me..." The downed pilot is reported rapidly -- to Hanoi. Assistance is always given. If the pilot is wounded he is given medical aid. If he is hungry, he will be given food even though the people themselves want to eat more and always. If he cannot walk he will be carried in a cart or in a car. Some pilots, however, are idiots: making a jump, they begin to fire at the peasants. In that case they are rounded up like wild animals and disarmed.

The pilots' behavior is governed by instructions. They are frightened by the barbarism of the "communists," and instilled with the hope that, in all cases, they will be rescued. According to the instructions, the fliers are supplied with an emergency food ration. They are issued a small transmitter and armed with a revolver and a colored manual which tells them what is edible in the jungles and what should not be touched. The instruction describes how to use the parachute -- as a hammock, as a tent, as a cloak and as a...bludgeon. All this is drawn up in an American spirit, as comics, in which a man in the uniform of a Soviet soldier is presented as the rival of the white-toothed grinning Yankee superman. The white-toothed grin of the superman is found also on the leaflets aimed at the Vietnamese.

Naturally, the American command realizes that the graphic instructions and other rubbish will not make the fate of the pilot any easier. All this is being done for the sole purpose of convincing the flier before the flight of his total safety, psychologically to prepare him for bombing in cold blood. It would be very interesting to find out who of the pilots brought down over North Vietnam had been able to use the small transmitters and the manual on tropical plants? Those whose strength gave out before they reached the sea and who parachuted over Vietnam fell in the hands of the militia. The most common wall poster is that of a small militia girl with rifle atilt capturing a huge Yankee.

During the days of the October raids, when the Yankees were dealt a crushing blow in the air, the special articles in the newspapers Nhan Dan ("The People") and Quan Doi Nhan Dan ("People's Army") were full of arrangements of the identifications of pilots brought down. Young faces stared from the photographs: stern, commanding, arrogant, entirely unlike the faces of the Americans taken prisoners. The expression of the latter was different: inconsolable or dully-indifferent.

...It is a clear day in Haiphong. Furthermore, it is a holiday. However, there are few people on the street: indeed, everyone is engaged in defense work. The old women trading in brassieres have moved across the street from the ruins, since the movie theater is not open during the day: the motion picture theaters in Vietnam open late in the evening, the shows end at 11 or 12. The movies are showing Vietnamese films on Nguyen Van Troi, documentaries, Korean films (something about a circus) and a Cuban sports film. Most of the motion pictures shown are Soviet. Here is Pet'ka pressing himself against the machine gun. On the poster he looks the same as he would anywhere at home, in Moscow's "Rodina." The name of the film is "Cha-pa-ep." Or else we see from the wall a big shaven head wearing a peak cap, with leather straps across the chest. The name of the film: "Ko-top-ski." The people look with a tremendous deal of pleasure at the old Soviet films from the Civil and the Patriotic Wars. The public shrieks with delight when our side charges with naked swords.

Quite close to the port is a museum in whose yard pieces of an airplane have been piled up. The local museums do not collect all planes but, essentially, the anniversary ones. Every hundredth plane is an anniversary plane. The 500th and the thousandth go to Hanoi, to the People's Army Museum. It is precisely here that lies this airplane, also an anniversary one, about which I would like to speak. To us, the Russians, it brings particular memories. It is the most valuable of all of those brought down with Soviet missiles in Vietnam.

The date was 6 November 1967. Despite the war Hanoi was decorated with transparencies and slogans; at every corner, at every crossroads, a color panel reminded the people of the 50th anniversary of our revolution. A big exhibit was inaugurated in the central exhibit hall of Hanoi. The flags of our republics were flying over the exhibition house and Soviet songs never ceased. The exhibition premises were crowded. All the comrades who worked with us greeted us on the occasion of the forthcoming holiday. We could feel that this was as much a holiday for the Vietnamese as it was for us. As to the exhibition, this was a corner of our country. We went there whenever we had a free evening.

On the 6th we decided to ride to the battery and greet our friends on the occasion of the common holiday. The people were always in a state of battle readiness and firing was going on daily. It was either that the Yankees thought that in October, when airplanes were literally pouring from the sky, a mistake had been made or, regardless of losses, they had decided to use the last days remaining before the winter set in. Basically, winter is the non-flying time of year. Overcast -- total cloudiness -- as the Americans say. In November, however, they flew over Hanoi and over Haiphong... In the days preceding our holiday the raids became particularly frequent. Perhaps they wished to spoil it?

We went to see Tam, drank tea, spoke about our victory in the Patriotic War and that we will soon end up with victory in Vietnam.

"Come after the victory. Visit Samson and look at Hue. What a city! A wonderful clear river flows there. And the girls have hair reaching down to their heels. It is a very old city, beautiful. It is our ancient capital."

Those from Saigon praise Saigon and say that the girls in Saigon are more beautiful than in Hue. "Come to Saigon after the victory," they invite us.

Then Tam called in the best operators and technicians to whom we gave anniversary badges on the occasion of the holiday.

The alarm signal stopped us on our way to San, Tam's neighbor. Missiles flew over our heads. No planes were visible. We stopped for a few minutes and decided to go on: no one knew how long this could last; furthermore, we had already come to know the self-defense troops and they were not so strict with us.

Ten minutes later, we were with San. His bare skull with patches of hair hanging from his temples glistened happily. He had had a strike. This was obvious immediately.

"I hit it!" he shouted, raising little clouds of dust with his "dep" (sandals).

The two missiles which had streaked over us had hit their target.

"After the launch he turned and wanted to leave the zone. But we got it," said San laughing.

In honor of the holiday, the Hanoi post office canceled envelopes with two seals: in honor of our 50th anniversary and in honor of the destruction of the 2,500th plane. Stamped on the envelope was a picture of the Kremlin. The stamp depicted the 2,500th plane brought down. The stamp had been issued earlier and depicted an American plane brought down by a MIG. In fact, the 2,500th plane was brought down by San's missiles.

At that time San did not know as yet that he had destroyed the "anniversary" plane. Neither did we.

We were informed of this on the next day, on 7 November 1967.

The Vietnamese command dedicated the 2,500th plane brought down by Soviet missiles to our holiday.

The two missiles launched by San must be remembered. They must be remembered for the history of the revolution. On the 50th anniversary of its socialist revolution, the country can give such aid to another country building socialism and repelling imperialist aggression. For the first time in the world such a powerful weapon is used precisely for the defense of socialism.

Then, we went to the site where the plane had hit the ground.

The rain was pouring and soaking our pith helmets. We were sitting on the wreckage of the fin of the "Thunderchief." Fragmentation bombs were piled by our feet. The pilot had been unable to carry out his assignment, the containers had not separated from the wing and the plane had crashed in the field carrying them. Children had not died.

The plane had been mainly hit in its deck part which revealed gaping burned out areas. The plane had caught fire in the air and, falling, it had burned the rice with its fiery tail. Now, a wide yellow strip crossed the green rice field.

We went to the agronomer's house, to warm up.

"May bay my bi ban roi!" said he. "The American is kaput. 'Lien so' missile. Rat tot. Very good."

Soviet booklets on agronomy stood on his shelves. The agronomer had quite recently graduated from a Soviet agricultural institute.

"Mac-tu-khoa-rat," and the regret of the traveler was in his eyes. Moc-tu-khoa is the Vietnamese name of our capital.

The agronomer's wife, a sweet woman, brought water and we washed off the greasy soot. I took a book from the shelf. It was describing something about chickens but its pages were crowded with our "y," "iy," and "shch." It was pleasant to be sitting in a bungalow when the rain was falling outside, reading a book on chickens in Russian, next to a copper teapot with an astringent drink and a pleasant man who loves Moscow.

The pile of wreckage of the 2,500th plane was taken to the People's Army Museum and placed in its courtyard. It will now remain there, a reminder of the brotherhood between two revolutions. I will never forget this firing and this plane...

The yard of the Haiphong Museum contains A-6 planes, unmanned reconnaissance planes and a "Phantom" bomb suspension. Volodya has had a picture taken of himself hugging a 127 millimeter unguided missile.

"They buried the second battery under such unguided missiles," says he.

I have photographs of Tam's crews. The first was made on 6 November. The second, on 23 February. In both photographs the boys are smiling. Only, on the second one, a few are missing. I look at those young, smiling boys... Tam is among them, like a father or a teacher. It is simply a graduation class whose boys have decided to take a picture with their favorite teacher, as a souvenir. The boys are smiling, just like students. Here is the tender Vinh, looking like a girl...and My, the bad poet... I look at the two photographs and I count the missing familiar faces.

How many friends have we left behind in Vietnam! What is happening to them now?

Throughout practically our entire stay, the driver Truong drove us in his "dickey." His full name was Pham Than Truong. The corporal -- he had two stars on his lapels -- was 20 years old. He was an entertaining boy.

Without Truong we would not have gotten anywhere: he was quick to take a hint. During alarms and raids, he tried to shove about the boys in the various foxholes, finding foxholes where it was simply impossible to find some. Watching over us, he greatly took to heart when we failed to ask him a favor. Truong felt bad about it. "Valeri, Truong khong tot?" he kept soliciting us. "Bad?" "Forget it, Truong," I insisted. "Valeri, Truong khong tot?" from him we learned to say "yyyyyyaaa," while from us he learned "oy zoy oy," something similar to our "Oh my God." From morning till late at night Truong sat behind the steering wheel, snatching some sleep when we stopped. Sometimes, because of work he missed lunch. Then, we shared our lunch with him. The next morning we would hear "Valeri! Valeri!" under our windows. It was Truong who had brought either bananas or a pair of huge grapefruit.

In Hanoi he drove, conservatively speaking, dashingly. For him the police did not exist. Once we were traveling along the streetcar tracks, down Kim Lien Street. A gasoline truck was standing on the side of the road. Truong decided to bypass it from the left but almost crashed into a streetcar. Our car and the streetcar stopped nose to nose. "Yyyyyyaaa," Truong said and stepped down from the car. The streetcar conductor was threatening him with his fist. "Quiet," he was probably told by Truong. "Where are you going? Move back!" since the streetcar suddenly crawled back, letting Truong pass. The conductor cursed but rode in reverse.

Rushing into the night, when other cars unexpectedly came across at the turns, I felt dizzy. Truong only lamented: "Truong khong tot!" Quite recently he had had an accident, had spent some time in a hospital but had not slowed down. Now, however, he used the horn ceaselessly. His hand was always on the horn. His beeping could make one ill. Truong's arrival could be predicted several blocks in advance.

Our driver knew half the population of Hanoi. We could not cross a street without his meeting a "ban," a friend... All that one of us had to murmur, when still inexperienced, about wanting some bananas and nothing but those damned bananas existed for Truong. To find them he went far out of Hanoi because in Hanoi "chuoai khong ngon va dat," the bananas were poor and expensive. He rushed in his car bringing bananas which melted in the mouth and whose honeyed taste long remained on you... When the house in which he lived was wrecked, Truong settled with some relatives and took us to see his new house. A trestle bed was standing in a small closet. "Not here," Truong said. The closet was made of empty cigarette cases. "There," said he, pointing below the roof. Now, he slept between the cases and the roof...

We considered Truong a younger brother whom we loved but who should be watched all the time to prevent him from springing a surprise.

Mei, our interpreter, was an entirely different man.

"Now the leaves are falling in the jungles," he would say, for example. "This is a melancholy time of year."

Mei seemed to know the names of all the trees in the jungles and of all flowers. He spent a month looking for a huge swallow-tail butterfly he wanted to amaze us with and was quite disturbed when he failed to find one.

In the morning, when we went along the valley, he pointed out to me an extremely fine cobweb on which the dew had fallen. It was splendid: diamond-like drops which reflected the variety of colors of the sky and a most skillfully woven cobweb.

Once we were roaming around the Jungle-covered mountains. Mei was with us. This was the first time that we had seen a jungle and at every step Mei presented us with a surprise: a thick grove of fine-stemmed bamboo, raspberry canes covered with strawberries or a growth of wild sugarcane... It was after that trip in the jungles that we became friends.

...The car could go no further: the road was torn up. Prior to that, driving in loops and climbing toward the top all the time, for several hours we had gone West, toward Laos. We had crossed rice paddies and settlements and, entering the jungles, came across a plant. Small shops were located directly under the reed curtains. Under some, bright red from fire, hammer-smiths were banging their hammers on the anvils. Under others lay the finished products: bodies or wheels for bicycle rickshaws. A teensy plant... Yet, how many of them (considerably larger at that) are found in the jungles of Vietnam!

Making a detour around the trench dug by the highway workers, we reached impassable bushes, abandoned the car and, after a hasty snack with Mei and the guide, went on. We had to cover a distance of 10 to 12 kilometers.

We left behind the valley and crossed a village glued to the foothills of a fairy tale limestone rock which seemed covered with tiers of stone. The white rock led high up, entwined by lianas. The path led us across the village which consisted of some ten bungalows. We saw no one, neither in the village nor on the huge rice field which stretched endlessly ahead... The forest began. We penetrated it, welcomed by the sweet and intoxicating smell of rotten vegetation.

Either the Vietnamese kilometers are not like ours or else we had not understood one another well, but the road seemed to us endless. Word came from ahead that the first ford was about to be reached...

"Well, how is it?" Mei asked. "Jungles..."

"Mei, I have never seen anything like it before... It is so interesting..."

We were climbing upwards, holding on to bamboo stems. On our right, down below, the river was rushing. Occasionally, our feet slipped. Brief stop. The guide warned us that this area was full of leeches.

"One must be very careful," said also Mei. "Look, one of them has already stuck to me."

A brown leech, small and thin, looking like a common worm or a small caterpillar was crawling up Mei's leg.

"It is clever," Mei said. "It will not begin sucking on the leg. It will crawl higher. There the skin is more tender," he laughed. "That is precisely what it wants. Now it is in bad shape. Full of blood, it will look like a centipede."

I pulled up my trousers. I too had a leech on my leg.

"They live in the ground, in the trees and in the water. Even I do not know where they are not. One must be very careful."

We approached the ford, split and crossed the fast mountain stream.

"There will be several more fords," the guide said, a neat boy in neat "dep," and freshly laundered trousers. Forestalling the end of my story, let me say that we came out of the jungles sweating, dirty, covered in clay, our shoes covered with dirt while our guide was as neat as on the start...

I stopped counting the fords. I stopped asking Mei for the names of the trees we saw along the way (actually, it is impossible to remember all the names the first time since there are dozens of different types in the jungles. I honestly admit that penetrating the jungle, the only thing I could recognize was the bamboo. Coming out of the jungle I could recognize with certainty that same bamboo.) Sometimes we came across huge trees with trunks several arm-lengths wide. We saw trees with hanging roots, roots like beards which sucked the moisture straight from the air. Wood goblins or gnomes must be living among those bearded monsters, little old men wearing long brown robes, bamboo crutches in their hands and brown faces crossed by thousands of wrinkles. Naturally, they do live somewhere here, in the forest. Otherwise, who would leave on the path a bamboo water pipe?

"The local residents leave them for the travelers," immediately explained Mei. "You must carry the tobacco with you but you will always find a pipe on the path."

The usual pipes, simply known as dieu, are not popular in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese smoke dieu cay. It is made of a bamboo chock, thick as a human hand. A metal or wooden cut bowl is driven into it from the side. Water is poured into the pipe. The finely cut tobacco is rolled tight, placed in the bowl and lit with a fine dry bamboo splinter. The entire pleasure will be gone if the dieu cay is lit with a match! The smoker draws only one puff but so deep that, at first, I thought that my head will split: even though weak, it had a narcotic effect. In the cities one comes across dieu bat pipes of a more complex make, made of copper, covered with designs and placed in a small pot with water, to cool off the smoke better...

Turning sharply, the path leads us to another ford. A stark naked boy, some 10 years old, was standing on the other side. Seeing us, he opened spellbound eyes: was he to capture so many Americans all at once?

"Well, is it far?" we asked.

"The guide says that there will be a halt soon," Mei reassured us and laughs. "That is how one walks in the jungle!"

We covered the last few kilometers staring at our feet. For us nothing existed anymore except this red earth under our feet, the gravel and the fallen leaves...

"Halt," Mei said. "The resting tree."

A huge wide tree was growing on the bank of the small river. Mei lead me to it and pointed at the top: strange fruit was hanging among the leaves, something between big walnuts and green tomatoes. With a long stick we brought down a couple, peeled off the skin and, ignoring the doctor's warnings, ate them. They tasted like sour quince.

"This is the resting tree. The moment you sit down fatigue disappears," said Mei.

We stretched out, taking off our boots and undoing foot-cloths, in the more than waist-high grass. Here the trees are like people with damaged hypophyse: thin stems with a few leaves on the top. Such trees would not withstand even the strength of an average wind. Our young guide went somewhere and soon brought to us an elderly man.

"This comrade," Mei interpreted, "was head of the militia when the fliers were captured. One American jumped with his parachute right here, where we sit and immediately raised his hands. The second one fell on the mountain, up there... he decided to shoot it out. No, he did not wound anyone. When he finished his ammunition he was captured barehandedly..."

In these areas reconnaissance "Phantoms" come to sniff out plants hidden in the jungles. It must be said that piloted reconnaissance planes behave in the air somewhat differently from the strike aircraft bombing

targets. Their flight is like a dance. On the plotting board the course of such a reconnaissance plane resembles an intricate labyrinth. The reconnaissance planes circle in the air defense zone like looping kites. The missile troops must have a great deal of restraint and experience not to launch the missile ahead of time. The battery which brought this "Phantom" down had both experience and skill: the plane crashed in the mountains.

"The one who fell in the mountain hoped to escape...but where could he go? In any case, he would not have reached Thailand," said Mei, stuffing a reed pipe.

...The next day I came across Mei. The first thing he asked was, "Well, how are the jungles?..."

Mei was always making something: either a mug from a piece from a plane or a ruler from a steel paling. He played the guitar well but was shy: "I have no pitch." All one had to do was to ask him just once to sing anything to begin to whisper a wonderful song. The next day he would bring both the words and the music...

"Mei, it is time for you to get married," we kept telling him.

He would become distressed and, raising a finger (many Vietnamese help their speech with gestures, as though conducting a very complex musical speech), told us at length how, after the war, he will marry a girl from Hue.

Where is Staff Sergeant Mei now? How are Tam, San, Truong and many others with whom we became friends in the war?

After seeing the museum, we were driven to see the Hoa Binh Mountains and again we came across the wreckage of two brought-down planes. One of them, a "Thunderchief," broken into smithereens, was in a swamp. The quagmire had already sucked in its engine halfway under. The second one had crashed into a mountain on which, with a tremendous deal of work, cultivating the soil, the peasants had planted manioc. No more than a trace remains of this plane. We were told, however, that this was a decked "F-8 Crusader." The plane had dived into the mountain at a high speed and had disintegrated into dust. A 500-pound live bomb rolled in the old bed of the stream. We took turns kicking its shark-like snout.

Next to us stood a young boy carrying an old French automatic. For a long time the automatic had remained unused and had become rusty. When the Americans started dropping bombs over Hoa Binh, the boy joined the militia, cleaned the automatic and is now catching diversionists from the South, parachuted by American pilots. It was he who had captured the flier from the "Crusader." The boy showed us a souvenir -- a bent half-dollar coin. He had never thought that it would be precisely here that he would see his first half-dollar coin, furthermore, once having belonged to an American pilot!...

Several peasants were standing by, shaking their heads: the manioc plantings had been entirely sliced off.

Coming down from the mountain, we came across buffaloes. We seemed to have frightened them and they raced away from us, as though they were not domestic pack animals but a herd of rhinoceroses.

To the countryside the buffaloes are like the automobiles for the cities. One cannot do without them. They pull carts along the rural roads and drag huge volumes of freight. I saw a buffalo pulling a pontoon on a cart, a metal pontoon 50 times longer than the buffalo. This was an ant dragging a caterpillar. The buffalo is the main draft power in agriculture. To the Vietnamese he means more than the cow and the horse together meant, in the past, to our peasant. That is why it is treated almost like a human: it is well taken care of and each animal is individually herded by a child (one of the most common rural pictures is a child sitting on a buffalo, playing a little pipe); when the weather turns cold, it is covered with a mat so that, God forbid, it would not catch cold.

In addition to the standard black buffaloes, we frequently encountered pink ones. Were they, perhaps, albino? Their eyes were also pink, like those of a cow. In case of a sharp cold wave, the alarming news is carried around the countryside: "Rescue the buffaloes!"

We are walking in the village whose bungalows are built high on stilts. This village belongs to one of the national Vietnamese minorities -- the Muong tribe.

The bungalows are the same as in the rest of Vietnam: a roof made of branches of livistona palms, with walls made of reed mats tied to the frame with strings.

In such bungalows it is always cool in summer.

The heat of the summer months is unbearable. True, in the shade the temperature rarely exceeds 35 degrees Centigrade. But the humidity... At any time of the day the relative humidity does not drop below 80 percent and frequently, particularly in the mornings, it comes quite close to 100 percent. It is difficult to withstand the humidity together with the heat. However, without this combination the miracles which nature creates in the moist tropics would be impossible! Is this not a wonderful country in which the roots of the trees do not have to go into the earth to draw life? Is this not a wonderful country in which the people harvest three rice crops per year and where there never is a bare forest?

In such a climate, with peace and machinery, the country would be a blessed one... It was not in vain that the Chinese feudals, the Japanese and the French have wanted to enslave Vietnam. Even the Mongols tried, on three separate occasions, to reach Vietnam. However, here, among the water and the jungle, they could do nothing with their horses.

Nor do the Americans achieve anything with their planes.

Throughout Vietnam there are monuments of victories over the Chinese in pagodas erected in honor of Vietnamese heroes. In the 13th Century Tran Hung Dao defeated the Chinese and the Mongols. In the 15th Century Chau Cuu Hoang and the legendary Le Loi rose against the Chinese. In the 18th Century, in five days Nguyen Hue destroyed the 200,000-strong army of the Chin Dynasty. The victory of the Vietnamese over the aggressors dates back to the 10th Century when Mai Thuc Loan, the leader of the people's rebellion fought against the Chinese.

The French pillboxes stand throughout Vietnam as monuments to shame.

Throughout the country the wreckage of "Thunderchiefs," "Strato-fortresses," "Intruders" and "Phantoms" stand as American monuments of shame...

It is noon, and it is hot. We have been given water to wash with but, once again, we are covered with sweat even though the sun is invisible behind the clouds. The head hurts in this moist air, as though squeezed in a clamp. One tires rapidly and sharp movements are exhausting. Is this why the Vietnamese move rather smoothly and are patient and calm?

Looking at the wonderful mountains and taking a little rest in the house of the president of the municipality, we intended to depart from the village. However, they did not let us go. We are the first Russians coming here and the Muong municipality cannot let us depart without displaying its hospitality. In the home of the president, a solid bungalow with its inner little stone courtyard, the portrait of President Ho Chi Minh is hanging surrounded by beautiful flowers and lemon and coffee trees. Next to it is a small altar for sacrifices. The noises coming from the courtyard reveal that a small pig and a hen are being caught. Feeling that something is wrong, the pig has managed to get out of the yard but the poor hen has failed. While the preparations are underway, the president, a thin strong old man, talks of the successes achieved by the recently organized cooperative. The cooperative has its tractor.

"What kind?" we ask.

"Soviet."

Our talk continues at the table around which the guests and the hosts are sitting.

The cooperative is among the leading ones and is fulfilling its plan.

"We are proud," the president says, "that with your fraternal aid we are successfully repelling the aggression of American imperialism..."

The hosts are very hospitable. They offer us to try this and that... We pour the inevitable spicy fish gravy on the rice and use the wooden chop-

sticks which we learned to handle soon after arriving in Vietnam. A cup of rice with meat and vegetables in the left hand and the long chopsticks in the right. You dip the bits of meat in the gravy...

"We are infinitely happy to have seen in our distant and remote area envoys of the great Soviet people," the president says. "The Russian Revolution was also a Vietnamese revolution because it opened the path to happiness and blossoming for the entire Vietnamese people and for our small Muong nationality..."

It would be an error to think that Vietnam is a very small country. Even though in the Trung Bo area (Central Vietnam) it narrows down to 60 kilometers, squeezed between Laos on one hand and the ocean on the other, it is almost 1,700 kilometers long. The country has 34 million people! Its history and culture date back to very ancient times when hordes wearing animal skins were roaming Europe. Vietnamese civilization is old and distinct...

Warmly thanking the host and having our pictures taken with them, we sit in the car and drive back to Haiphong. After a short stretch we see one of our tractors raising clouds of brown dust over a small field.

"We do not hear any alarms today," say the boys puzzled. "This is rather strange for Haiphong."

While there are no raids, despite the holiday, the Haiphong population is reinforcing the old shelters and building new ones.

The cement wells are being modernized on the streets close to the most dangerous section of the city: domes are being placed on the covers, the slanted sections will be placed on the side of the presumed bombing target.

Haiphong is always on the alert for raids: the aircraft carriers are quite near by at sea. The American Seventh Fleet is 80 kilometers off shore. Huge rectangular decks from which the attack planes are launched are always facing the shoreline. The Navy fliers sit in the planes, awaiting orders, wearing their overalls embroidered with garish emblems.

I saw these coveralls worn by captured Americans. What was there not on them! An entire set for a musical: a heart, an ace of spades, a dagger and an eagle. One emblem was stitched on the pocket. Another, on the shoulder. A third, somewhere else.

Yet, when these parrots with their daggers, eagle heads and clubs fall in the hands of modestly clothed small-sized militiamen, what happens to their superman arrogance!

How many times have the Vietnamese boys in the missile and air defense batteries been given awards... I met in Vietnam many people on whom awards had been bestowed during the first, the French war and during this

war, the American. However, I never saw them wear their medals. The Vietnamese are modest people...

In the course of the war Haiphong has become a deserted city. Its population has been evacuated, beginning with the children and the citizens not engaged in production work. That is why the streets are so empty. The city is tense. The sirens may begin to wail any minute. The planes are near by. On the Coral Sea alone there are about 120 of them.

Today, however, the sirens are not wailing.

They did not wail the following day either.

For several days after Tet no planes flew over us.

We were sitting in our house, recalling the trip to Haiphong and the wonderful skippers of the Argus and Nizhneudinsk whom we met at the "Katabi" Hotel, where our cosmonaut German Titov had stayed. Yet, something had happened in the village. The people were running from bungalow to bungalow, speaking loudly. A transistor radio was turned on in the neighboring house where one of the interpreters lived. The radio was turned on full. We are puzzled. We switched on our "VEF." Through the static we heard a symphony orchestra from Australia. Peking was smashing reactionaries of all hues. A familiar broadcast was coming from the Union -- a radio essay on production leaders.

"Find Saigon," Arsen'yevich said.

The Saigon radio station was silent.

"Hanoi..."

We heard the end of a solemn sentence. After the announcer's words whose meaning escaped us, a march thundered on.

"Turn to Saigon again."

But Saigon was silent. At this time of day it should have been broadcasting an entertainment program in English.

The interpreter ran out of the next door bungalow.

"Victory!" he shouted. "Victory! America is staggering..."

He had forgotten half his Russian words.

"What is the matter, what happened?"

"Our people in the South... Fifty cities... Saigon... Hue..."

They penetrated into the American Embassy... The Ambassador... An American General... They have destroyed planes..."

In his hands the radio was trembling and his face was pale with emotion.

This was the beginning of the February battles which thundered the world over, when units of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam simultaneously attacked almost all cities and towns held by the Americans and the puppet forces, when they attacked American bases, airfields and garrisons. With their mortars and rockets they destroyed many planes in their hangars or standing on the take-off strips. Those were the combats which showed the new strength of the National Liberation Front. This was precisely the time when the aggressors, having proclaimed the weakness of the Front, received a slap in the face such as they had not received since Dien Bien Phu.

I saw how the people exulted that day. Immediately after the Tet they were celebrating one more holiday.

The Americans were stunned. They did not know what to do. The days of the February battles in the South brought calm in the North. During the time we spent near Haiphong not once did a single plane fly over us.

Not once, during those days, did the siren wail.

America may not have staggered but it received such a kick the pain of which will remain for a long time.

Later on, we closely followed the battle in Hue where fighters ensconced themselves in the fortress, raised the red and blue flag and held out to death, despite the fact that they were literally buried in bombs.

Everyday we down Nhan Dan inside out seeking the map of Saigon with the arrows showing the strikes, the main crossroads and rayons. Here was the "su quan my" -- the building of the American Embassy, on whose grounds a fierce battle developed. The arrow marking the attack was stuck there. Here was the airfield, to the Northwest of the South Vietnamese capital. It also had been attacked by the forces of the National Liberation Front...

During the time that I spent in Vietnam I happened to be a witness of the strongest October raids of the American aviation on Hanoi and the most powerful strike at the American and puppet forces in the South. In both cases it was the Vietnamese who won decisive victories.

I have already mentioned that during the days of the heaviest (as much as 300 planes in a single operation) raids the streets of Hanoi were literally covered with the splinters of anti-aircraft shells and the surroundings of the capital with the wreckage of American planes brought down. It was perhaps in the course of those raids that the Yankees realized that

they will achieve nothing. At that time, had they even launched the B-52's, they would have simply lost a considerable percentage of their strategic air force yet, all the same, they would not have achieved any success. Despite the daily air raid alarms sounding from morning till night, the faces of the people of Hanoi showed the unconcealed joy of the victory: in front of their own eyes the silvery aircraft with their black-green backs, without recognition signs broke up in the air, burned and smoked. (The Yankees decided that it was easier to aim from the ground at the blue stars on the wings and the fuselage. That is why they had removed them.) It was then that the Americans received their first amazingly strong kick, still in the North.

Then, there was the strike in South Vietnam.

In those days of hope and close attention to the events in the South we returned to Hanoi. We had been away for no more than a week yet we felt as though we were going home after a long absence.

The streets of Hanoi are displaying their usual bustle.

The barbershops are crowded with customers. Having one's hair cut in an extremely pleasant experience. The barbers are wonderful: they do not cut, they practice magic. The taverns with their green "Bia" signs are full. In Vietnam beer is drunk with syrup.

The car stops at a railroad barrier: a train is passing. Ahead of us is a truck with Chinese. The people are looking at one another and more and more Chinese boys are looking at us, their faces sharply curious: who are we? Some of them smile cautiously, and we smile in return.

When the barrier is rolled away (it is on wheels and also moves on tracks), we wave our hands after them and the Chinese wave their palms against their stomachs so that their neighbor will not see them.

Once, however, the following happened: noticing a car carrying our people, one of the Chinese produced a booklet with a scarlet-red cover and, looking toward the sky, began to read loudly. As though on order, the other Chinese did the same. Suddenly, all this took the aspect of a prayer meeting...

I look out of the car: behind us is a dense sea of cyclists. The working day is over and the people are hurrying home. Or, perhaps, they are not coming from work? Perhaps there was a meeting on the events in the South? We notice that big chalk-drawn maps of South Vietnam have appeared on house walls, with arrows indicating strikes and rings showing encirclements. Arrows have been drawn in almost all cities and towns.

Here is the familiar railroad station -- one of the most beautiful buildings of Hanoi. Truong always drove several blocks around the railroad station. Not once were we able to make Truong shorten the way and pass by the station ever since the Americans drew a circle around it on their maps.

Pham is not from Hanoi and does not know this. Truong, however, sacredly believes that the safety of the lien so is his most vital concern. He bypasses the railroad station not because he fears for himself, as we have had the occasion to notice repeatedly.

The railroad station is one of the most beautiful buildings of Hanoi. However, it has a kind of twisted, colonial beauty: in the style of the French villas built in the center of the city. The French wanted a bit of Paris here, in Indochina, far from Europe.

Hanoi consists mainly of two-story houses. The higher buildings are only those of the bank, the Nhan Dan printing press, the Thong Nhat ("Unity") Hotel and the building of the Control and Observation Commission on which the Polish, Canadian and Indian flags are flying. These are administrative buildings. Entirely aside is the complex of the polytechnical institute, a wonderful modern complex on the shore of Unification Lake. The four-story-high buildings of the Kim Lien Hotel are also among the modern ones.

The real Hanoi, however, is the Hanoi of two-story houses, a labyrinth of little streets, small shops and workshops... The houses are tightly pressed against each other, without spaces between them, forming a kind of high stone fence behind which there are all sorts of entrances, small inner courtyards, garrets and extensions. The lettering of old advertising signs shows up under the peeling plaster: "Liqueur Pimprennelle"... There is a war on, now, and it is not a time for repairs. The house walls are grey from the alternating sunshine and rain. The ground floors of the houses are usually taken by little shops and tailor shops. The most popular objects for sale are filter sunglasses, fountain pens and flashlights.

We turn around the square in front of the Bol'shoy Theater, by the Franciscan Church and stop in front of our refuge -- the hotel. The amiable Kyn is standing by the door, so small that one suspects that a butterfly could take him away. The boys are playing Chinese billiards with Pepino, the Cuban; Dong Chi Zhenya and Dong Chi Vitya, helmets in hand, are going to work.

"Where to?" we ask.

"To see Tam" they answer.

Seeing us, Truong blows the horn and waves his hand.

"Come on, come on," he laughs. He likes this "come on," and uses it frequently. I saw him once, driving the car in a line, shrieking "come on, come on!" at the Vietnamese drivers, oblivious of the fact that he was speaking Russian.

Having washed and changed, we go to the bar where bottles with rice alcohol stand in rows -- luoc moi and dong thap liqueur.

"Chao, Tanya," we greet our angel Thanh, engaged, as usual, in her calculations.

Even the most minor purchase in the Vietnamese stores and the other trading establishments is recorded. All sales clerks, wearing red numbers on white smocks, are equipped with little pens. Before selling you a bottle of lua moi they will record the value of this 750-gram container -- some four dong, something like $2\frac{1}{2}$ rubles, in a neatly lined entry book.

Tanya laughs: the menu is again "konbasa," "vetchila" and "bo boli" soup. "Konbasa" and "vetchila" are, naturally, kolbasa [sausage] and vetchina [ham]. As to what "bo boli" is, God have mercy on us, no one has ever been able to guess. Kyn too does not know what it is. Beans perhaps? Peas, perhaps?

Having chewed the "fried ham" and swallowed it with trac bach beer, as "chuk bat" (truc bach) is jocularly known among our people, Sasha and I go for a walk in Hanoi.

Looking into the Thong Nhat (the old "Metropole") about which every journalist writes that it was behind that table that Graham Greene always sat as he wrote The Quiet American, we walk along dark, rarely lit, little streets. The air raid alarm catches us in one of them.

We stop and wait out the alarm standing by the iron fence of a former private residential house. We can see women carrying children in their arms running out of the houses and going into the well-shelters.

The all-clear is given -- three howling whistles -- and, on the radio, a woman's voice says "Da va sa" (they have flown away) -- "dva boytsa" [two soldiers], as the Russians have converted it into.

"Let us go toward the lake, I suggest, and we turn toward the most animated part of Hanoi at night.

The Lake of the Returned Sword is as much a symbol of Hanoi as is the one-legged Mot Cot Pagoda. The lake is located in the center of the city but it has so many fish that it is caught with nets. Two ancient turtles live in the lake, sometimes coming out on the small island. They are indeed ancient but opinions as to their age diverge. A pagoda is standing on the island, built in honor of the turtles and of Le Loi. The lake with the pagoda, like our Vasilii Blazhenny are frequently seen in drawings and photographs.

Le Loi was the leader of the uprising of the Vietnamese people against the Ming Chinese Dynasty. A legend exists about the turtles and about Le Loi according to which, sailing the lake, the military leader was given a magic sword by the turtles to fight the Chinese aggressors. Having defeated the enemy, Le Loi returned to the lake and the sword slid out of his hand. It is said that the turtle promised to return the sword should the country face as dangerous a time as it did during the fight with the Chinese.

There is always a crowd not far from the building of the Control Commission, on the lake shore. Here the people are looking at big display windows with photographs showing the life of the socialist countries. The Cuban stand has a big picture of Fidel with an automatic weapon. The stand of the Korean People's Democratic Republic shows a military parade, girls in long skirts marching, rifles in hand. Our stand is exhibiting quite beautiful photographs taken during the Air Force holiday in Tushino. The stand of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam shows captured pilots. The stand of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam shows troops in soft hats, automatic weapons in hand, and the corpses of the Yankees who have met their death in a land alien and strange to them.

Two windows are hanging on Tran Phu Street in Hanoi. Several houses stand between them, separating the Soviet from the Chinese Embassies. The two photograph exhibits are quite dissimilar. Ours always describes the life of the country and of its people. We see here fishermen, children in a garden, workers coming home from work... The Chinese window, like the embassy building and its yard, begins and ends with citations. Two big photographs -- Mao and Lin Biao, photographs showing the meeting between Mao and Enver Hoxha, the mushroom of a hydrogen bomb and a scene showing the study of the works of the Chairman in a school for handicapped children...

We skirt the lake and pass by the big bomb shelter where the city residents usually wait out the alarm.

A policeman with a megaphone is regulating traffic at the main crossroads on the corners of which are the Revolutionary museum and a big general store. The museum remains open until late at night.

Now, people are crowding around maps showing the battles in the South. Many of them are of South Vietnamese extraction. Many of them have left relatives behind. After the signing of the Geneva Agreements, in 1954, on the basis of which a demarcation line was drawn temporarily between the North and the South, the people awaited the referendum and the unification of the country. The people were full of hope. The Americans and their puppets wrecked the referendum.

Since then the entire country is closely following the actions of the patriotic forces in the South.

Old women selling tea are sitting on the streets, in the dark doorways. A small wick lamp is placed on a case, like an orange colored firefly in the night, along with small cups and peeled dried salted dragon eyes.

"Tea, tea," say the old women nodding their heads. "Drink tea."

Dragon eyes, naturally, are not brought by hunters from the jungles. They are exotic fruit, spherical, the diameter of a five-kopek coin. Within the sphere is a sweet pineapple flesh through which shows the "eye" itself, a black lustrous grain. Indeed, it looks like an eye covered by a turbid film.

A walk around Hanoi always offers surprises. A bunch of reed pipes is lying on a window sill. Fifty steps further, in a small workshop, yellow leather is being strung on red drums. Next to them a woman is sitting, selling lacquered hats. Looking through an always open gate we see a skilled craftsman, squatting, making a chessboard with mother-of-pearl. Many skilled craftsmen live in Hanoi and, more frequently, in its suburbs. Their work is unique. We went to a store where I bought a wooden carved head, a striking work. My comrades wanted to buy another such head.

"There is no other," the saleswoman said. "This was done by an old man. He died a few days ago. No one else can exactly duplicate this work."

Sasha and I walked until it was quite late, until the center became deserted and the women merchants removed their case-trays. Bicycles are parked only in front of the movie theater: the last show of the picture about Nguyen Van Troi is on.

Hanoi is falling asleep...

Then we hear the lonesome wail: yyyyyyYYYYYyyyyyy. The desire to sleep is incredible. Damn those planes. The rare lights are turned off with the alarm. Everything becomes pitch black. Opening my eyes with an effort, I see the way the sky is beginning to redden from below. Da Lam, I think. They are probably bombing in the Da Lam area. The siren is wailing ceaselessly. From below I hear the rustle of bare feet: the residents of the house next door with their children are going into the foxholes.

We put on our helmets, slip into our sandals and, holding to the walls, go down to the yard.

Someone is sleeping, leaning against the house. Someone else is smoking a cigarette damp from the night air.

"Put out that cigarette!"

Sasha and I sit on our helmets and, half asleep, wait for the three whistles of the all-clear.

After the all-clear, we are able to sleep no more than an hour and a half. Through my sleep I hear a tremendous thunder over me, the sky is lit blindingly once, a second time... I am lying by the window and I can see the tracer bursts in the dark. A few seconds later the anti-aircraft guns and the machineguns open fire. The sky is bursting from the explosions. Suddenly, an all-deafening wail is heard over us. One of the planes has broken through.

The planes remained over us the entire night, throughout the month of March, until our very departure.

What did they achieve? What will they achieve? MacNamara came to

us, whom the Vietnamese have always depicted in their caricatures along with Johnson. They said of him that he killed soberly, that he cannot fight without figures. MacNamara waged the war in Vietnam with the help of a slide rule and electronic computers. How could he make such a big error as to be forced to ask to resign?

Westmoreland came to us. It was his official duty to inform MacNamara of the striking successes in the South and the insignificant losses in the North. He, too, erred. Now Abrams [spelled Abrahams] is erring...

We left Vietnam on a foggy grey evening. We departed, knowing that the all-weather A-6's will show up again in the night, sneaking like thieves toward the city.

We left while Tam's battery was on combat duty.

Not once did I see a man crying in Vietnam.

We parted with Tam and there were tears in our eyes.

July, 1968.

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