

DEFENDERS OF HAM RUNG

[Sharapov, V., Pravda, 11 October 1965, Russian]

The life of Vietnamese antiaircraft gunners is difficult and dangerous. It is easier to calculate the quiet hours than the number of times a day when, clinging to their weapons, they have to follow approaching American aircraft and engage them. The alarm signal resounds 10 times a day - and sometimes even 12 times - at their positions. Right now, for example, as battery commander Ma Hyuen Kuang* has just begun telling about the latest skirmishes, word was received from the observation post that a group of American fighters is approaching Thanh Hoa....

* Translator's note: Transliterations of Vietnamese surnames and place names are at best only approximations.

We met the men of this battery in May. At that time they gave us miniature photos of an American "F-101" fighter, taken by soldiers on the remains of an aircraft they shot down in the first engagement at the Ham Rung Bridge. At that time the position of the battery was not far from an electric power station. Now their weapons are emplaced in the rice fields, from which the bridge is clearly visible. *check*

In all of Vietnam you will not find another target on which American aircraft have dumped as many bombs as on the Ham Rung Bridge. It was thrown up between two mountains above the deep Ma River at the city of Thanh Hoa. I was not able to see it in the form in which it was created by man. Only the footage of a documentary film and a photograph revealed its austere beauty.

I visited these places for the first time several months ago. At that time we had heard about the large U.S. air raids on the Ham Rung Bridge, but could not imagine all of the consequences of the barbaric bombings. At the Ma River we were informed that we would cross to the other bank by ferry - the bridge was damaged. The night sky was bristling with stars and the moon. At Ham Rung, all we could see were twisted girders and bridge spans collapsed in the water.....

