

# Fonda Expounds Upon Asian Travels

Jane Fonda, well-known actress, recently returned from a trip to North Vietnam. She is currently working with the Indochina Peace Campaign on a nation-wide program of education about the war and the Vietnamese people.

**NAM SACH, NORTH VIETNAM** — I left my hotel in Hanoi at three o'clock in the morning of July 12th, in a camouflaged car, accompanied by members of the Committee of Solidarity With the American People. We were driving to the district of Nam Sach, 40 miles east of Hanoi in the province of Hai Hung. We traveled at night because of the danger of strafing by US planes.

By the time we arrived in Hai Hung province, the sky had begun to lighten. Many people were already in the fields; a lot of work is done in the dark when there is less danger of planes.

Centuries ago, the peasants of Hai Hung had fought two famous battles against the Chinese feudal lords. Later, the province, with its large coal mines, became the cradle of the Vietnamese working class under French colonialism.

Nguyen Dinh Tri, well-known author of a novel about Nam Sach, told me, "Men from there would go to work in the mines while their wives remained peasants. On weekends the men would come back home," he laughed, "that way we cemented the worker-peasant alliance."

Today, Nam Sach has a population of one-hundred thousand. The majority grow rice and raise pigs. They are protected from flood and drought by a complicated system of criss-crossing dikes. The importance of the dikes becomes apparent when you consider that the entire Red River Delta is below sea level. The river beds are raised many yards above the plain due to the accumulated deposits of silt, washed down the mountains over the years. A young boy in Hanoi said, "At the time of high

water I can stand on the street here and see the sails of the boats going down the Red River way above my head."

We walked through the mud on the narrow paths that run between rice paddies. Ahead, I saw my first dike. Like all major dikes it rose gradually about 8 or 10 meters above the fields, and was made entirely of earth. Some people on bicycles and a few water buffalo pulling carts were moving along the top. On the other side was the large Thai Binh River.

This particular point was attacked for the second time the previous morning by F-4's and A-7's. It is a most strategic section, for here the dike must hold back the waters of six converging rivers. These rivers will be raging down the mountains in less than two weeks.

The planes had been here twice so far that week, and they were expected back. Yet all around were the people, knee and elbow deep in the mud; planting their rice, carrying huge baskets of earth to the dike: getting on with their lives.

Someone said I was an American. People smiled. There was no hostility. Not any, and I searched their eyes. That will stay with me long after the war is over.

As I stood on the top of the dike, all I could see were rice paddies and, in the distance, some clusters of hamlets—no industry, no routes, no communication lines, no military targets—just flat rice fields. Then, suddenly, bomb craters lined both sides of the dike; gaping holes, some ten meters in diameter and eight meters deep. The bottoms of the craters were two meters below sea level. The crater from a bomb that had severed the dike was practically filled.

The main worry was the damage done by the bombs which had fallen on the sides. These cause earthquakes which shatter the foundations of the dike and cause deep cracks that zig-zag up the sides. Bombs had also been used that penetrate the dike on a slant, lodging underneath and exploding later. This causes serious internal damage and makes repair work hazardous.

Though difficult to detect, the weakening of the dike base is the real danger. If these cracks aren't repaired in time, the pressure from the water which will soon be 6 or 7 meters above plain level will cause the dikes to give way and endanger the entire Eastern region of the Red River Delta. Since May 10th, Nam Sach has been attacked 8 times; four times against the dikes.

The other major dike I saw in Nam Sach, on the Kinh Thai River, had been completely severed a few days before. The repair work was dangerous because of unexploded bombs.

Filling in the huge craters is a monumental task. The Cuban Ambassador in Hanoi told me that a dozen or more Cubans, accustomed to working in the fields with the Vietnamese, collapsed after three hours of packing the earth into a dike.

Waiting out a heavy down-pour in the district headquarters, I talked with Nguyen Huy Ten, 47 year old Chairman of the District Administrative Committee. He spoke with pride about the improvements made in Nam Sach since the revolution of 1945. He spoke of schools, hospitals, sanitary facilities being built. He told me that illiteracy had been wiped out, and I remembered seeing even small children reading newspapers along the roadside.

He was deeply moved when he spoke about the land that is now in serious danger. He

recalled the days before 1945 when it didn't belong to them, when his parents, like the others, had to sell themselves as "coolies" to the rich French landowners.

"I was 20 at the time of the revolution," he said. "The lands were given back to use, and my family joined an agricultural cooperative. Life has been getting better and better. Since 1968 we have mobilized our people to move 2 million cubic meters of earth and strengthen our dikes. The dikes in our district were very strong, and we were safe in the biggest floods of last year.

"But after the July 9th raids this summer our people have

been very worried because the rainy season has begun and if we cannot mend the dikes in time, the lives of a hundred thousand people and 2,000 hectares of arable land will be in danger."

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