

HANKS

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Engineers of Co A, 70th Engr Bn are engaged in the restoration of five bridges along QL21 near Khanh Duong that have fallen victim to neglect and V.C. sabotage during the last twelve months. Bridge bypasses built by the 70th Engr Bn are scheduled to be abandoned as new bridges are erected.

Although bridge building usually brings to mind the erection of a span across a gap, an equally important and probably more difficult portion of the task is the preparation of the area below the span.

In most cases the enemy's efforts completely demolish the span while inflicting a much lesser degree of damage to the bridge's support; i.e., the abutments, apron and footers, therefore a total bridge reconstruction is unnecessary. At the outset of a bridge restoration assignment officers and NCOs are faced with the job of accurately evaluating the extent of damage and deterioration and of determining what portion of the structure can be salvaged and used in the new bridge. 1LT Harold W Murray, overseeing operations on Bridge 27 and 31, explains the importance of making an accurate appraisal; "We've got to be certain that any portion of the old structure we salvage for later use will support the new bridge as well as a completely new sub-structure."

When the preliminary planning is completed the engineers move in with dozers and other heavy equipment to clear the debris away from the site. Care must be taken not to damage the parts to be reclaimed. The dislodging of twisted beams for removal required the

the skillful use of explosives. In addition to removing broken bridge parts from the area it is necessary to dig out unstable earth to expose solid bedrock or buried piers upon which the entire bridge will rest. Stumbling blocks such as flooding of the site and the presence of mud constantly harass the work crews. Often the men of Co A arrive at the bridge site early in the morning only to find their previous day's work obliterated by Mother Nature. But despite the occasional setbacks steady progress is being made in bridging QL21.

The engineer's plans call for the first of the five bridges to be completed in early June the remainder to be in use by mid-July.

During recent weeks rains have become more frequent signalling the approach of the monsoon season which puts engineering projects all over Vietnam to the ultimate test each year. Co A engineers are racing ^{the} clock and fighting the elements to insure that the coming rains will fall on new bridges along QL21.