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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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INTERDICTION OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION ROUTES IN VIETNAM

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date 26 AUG 1976

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 June 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Interdiction of Communist Supply Routes
Into South Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Viet Cong have shown an increasing willingness over the past two years to rely on Communist-bloc weapons to re-equip their main force units. While this development has the advantage of standardizing the weaponry in the hands of the main fighting unit and of increasing its fire power, it also entails a far greater reliance than ever before on a reliable supply of ammunition from the north. The part played by maritime infiltration operations in ensuring continual supply of munitions to these units in coastal areas is increasingly significant, but its relative importance compared with overland supply is difficult to judge at present.

2. Overland supply is conducted by an extensive system of roads and trails running from North Vietnam into Laos and then on south to points opposite the northern provinces of South Vietnam. The motor capacity of this system is seriously reduced during the rainy season, but some movement takes place, largely by the use of human and animal carriers.

3. US and South Vietnamese interdiction operations against these supply lines have been steadily intensified. In North Vietnam, destruction by air attacks of bridges and armed reconnaissance of roads has made the war in the South more expensive for the DRV, which

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must divert scarce resources from other projects to keep supplies moving. In Laos, where targets are less well-defined, air interdiction has achieved some temporary disruptions, but is not known to have seriously damaged the Communist effort. As a result of several successful actions against sea infiltration attempts early this year, some of these operations have apparently been suspended by Hanoi, but the sea infiltration organization is still being expanded. US and South Vietnamese capabilities against Communist supply by sea are also being sharply strengthened.

4. Section II of this memorandum deals with the related problems of sea infiltration and weapons supply. Section III discusses the road net in Laos and US operations against it. Section IV covers ROLLING THUNDER interdiction operations in North Vietnam itself.

II. MARITIME INFILTRATION INTO SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong are apparently using at least four or five different techniques to infiltrate men, weapons, and supplies into South Vietnam by sea. Maritime infiltration may have been going on to some extent since 1957. We have no way of measuring the total tonnages delivered to South Vietnam, but the increasing size of the effort and the size of some captured arms dumps along the coast indicate that the amounts have been considerable.

2. We have good evidence that maritime infiltration activities were in progress as early as 27 February 1961, |

3. |

4. |

5. On 16 February 1965 a 100-ton steel-hulled cargo ship was sunk in South Vietnamese waters while on an infiltration mission. |

Another boat sunk on 27 February may also have been part of the fleet. Subsequent to these sinkings,

the maritime infiltration fleet was apparently involved in an extensive reorganization and retraining. The fleet is probably subordinate to the DRV navy, and control is apparently now exercised from Bai Chay, a naval port northeast of Haiphong, through two intermediate headquarters in that area which serve two anchorage areas.

6. No infiltration missions by the maritime infiltration fleet have been identified since the sinking of one or two of the ships in February 1965.

the ships have been primarily involved in training and in normal day-to-day activity such as repairs and provisioning. The only time boats can be firmly identified as having left their anchorage and training areas among the islands northeast of Haiphong was early this month, when about five boats went to recover one which had been damaged. It cannot be determined

whether the boats sailed east to the vicinity of Hainan Island or south toward the DMZ, although Hainan Island seems somewhat more likely. There is no evidence that any of the boats entered South Vietnamese waters.

7. This apparent inactivity of the maritime infiltration fleet is puzzling. It is possible that the DRV has suspended operations by these ships following the sinkings in February and the increasing US and SVN security precautions. If so, it is not clear why the DRV should continue a high level of training by these ships and especially continue to add new ships to the fleet.

8. Other infiltration techniques continue to be employed, however. In mid-March the South Vietnamese crew of a junk scuttled when it was approached by a South Vietnamese naval patrol stated that they had been hired by the Viet Cong to sail to the DRV

and pick up a small load of arms. While in the DRV, the crew saw several other South Vietnamese junks apparently on similar missions. Gun running by small sailing junks can probably move a significant amount of cargo at fairly low risk.

9. A Viet Cong captured just south of the DMZ in late May stated that he was a member of the 103rd VC Transportation Battalion stationed in the DRV. According to this prisoner, each of the four companies of the battalion had about 160 men, 10 cargo junks, and two armed escort junks. A typical mission conducted by a fleet of twelve junks involved sailing first to Tiger Island to resupply DRV forces there and then delivering the bulk of the cargo to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

10. Another technique possibly employed is lightering arms cargoes ashore from a Chinese merchant ship, the Nan Hai 155, which sails between Cambodia and China. We have no proof that this ship is making such deliveries, but circumstantial evidence such as its virtual radio silence while en route and a suspiciously long transit time between ports suggest that it could be involved in this type of activity. A Viet Cong supply officer captured recently in Kien Hoa Province has stated that twice a month lighters would go out to an unidentified ship anchored in international waters to transport arms and supplies ashore.

11. This apparently large-scale supply effort is in part necessitated by the increasing percentage of arms from Communist China and the Soviet Bloc. Prior to this development the Viet Cong relied almost exclusively on captured ammunition to supply its units. However, the new arms--mainly small arms--use a caliber of ammunition which cannot be captured from South Vietnamese or US ground forces.

12. The increasing number of such weapons in the hands of the Viet Cong is both fairly recent and fairly impressive. They first began to appear in South Vietnam in late 1962. The percentage of newer bloc weapons captured from the Viet Cong already comprised 8.4 percent of the total weapons

captured in 1963. The proportion has since continued to rise, and by the end of 1964 made up almost 23 percent of the grand total of weapons captured.

13. At the same time, weapons from other sources continue to predominate among those captured from the Viet Cong. The percentage of weapons of French origin--left over from stocks captured during the Indo-Chinese war--dropped to about one-third of the total in 1964 from a 1963 level of about half. The number of US weapons captured remained about the same, near 27 percent. The number of crude Viet Cong-manufactured weapons, however, dropped from about 9 percent in 1963 to almost nothing in 1964.

14. These new bloc-origin weapons--standard issue in both the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist armies--are apparently being used to modernize and standardize the armament of main-force Viet Cong units. The weapons captured from two Viet Cong main-force units in early April were over 90 percent bloc manufactured, almost all of Chinese Communist origin. Over one third of the small arms were of the newer 7.62-mm. family of automatic and semi-automatic weapons. Weapons of this type began to appear in South Vietnam only in December 1964, and their percentage apparently has risen rapidly.

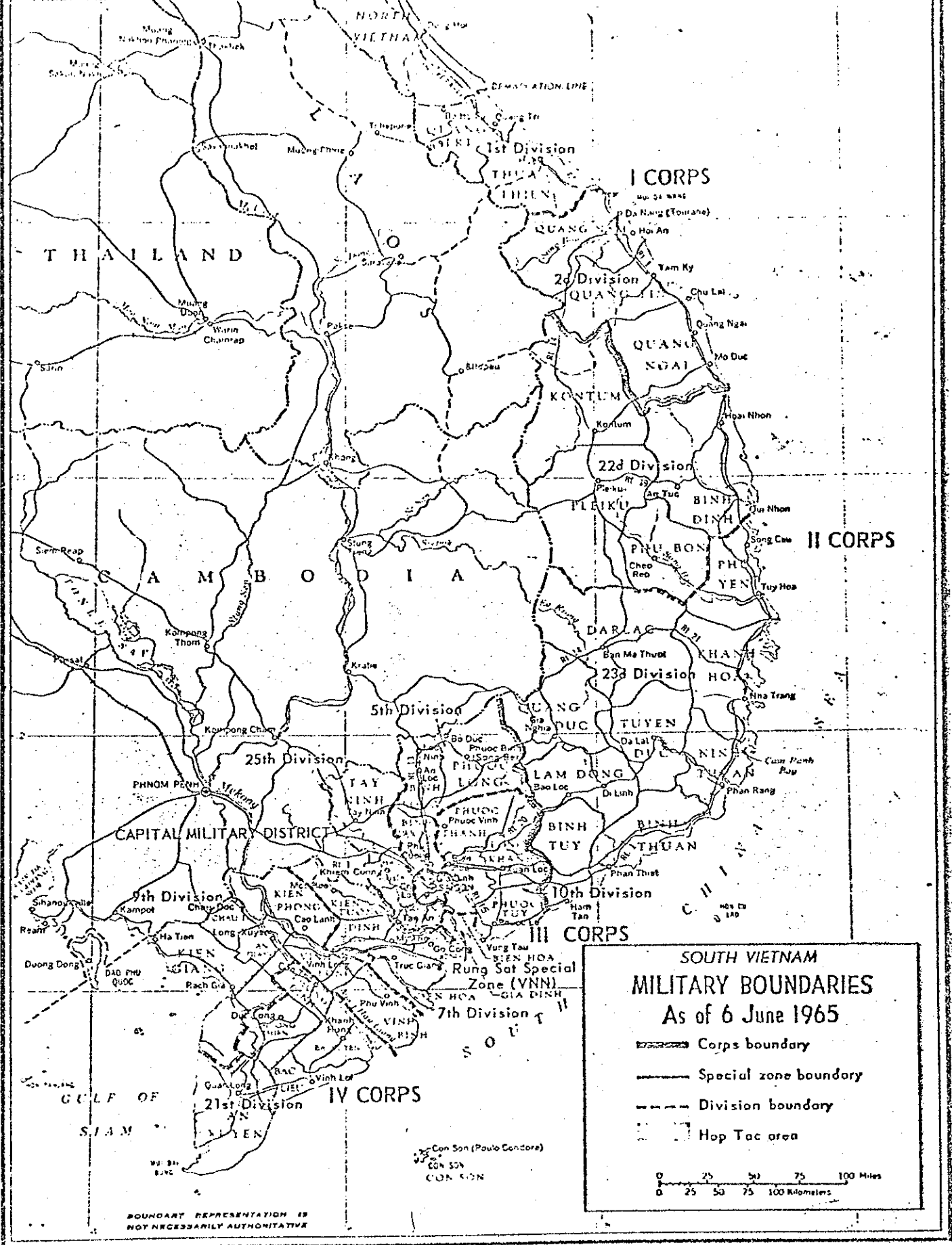
15. The Viet Cong's commitment to the use of these weapons naturally entails a considerable ordnance and supply effort. The new weapons are more sophisticated than those they are replacing, and in some cases probably require more spare parts and a greater degree of technical skill to be repaired in the field. As has been noted, 7.62-mm. ammunition cannot be captured in the South. The introduction of this family of weapons thus reflects a growing confidence in the reliability of supply from the North. It also reflects the confidence with which the Viet Cong view the security of their controlled areas, since ordnance facilities must be maintained there for weapons repair and larger stocks of ammunition and parts must be kept on hand against possible disruptions in the infiltration supply system.

16. The increasing volume of supply from the North and the requirement for increasingly large stockpiles of arms and munitions is indicated by

interdicted arms shipments and captured stocks. The steel-hulled ship which was sunk in shallow waters on the coast of Phu Yen province on 16 February and a nearby arms cache consisted of 4,000-5,000 weapons and five tons of ammunition. A second boat was sunk on 14 March, and divers recovered a number of Mauser rifles from the ship. On 16 March an arms cache was discovered near the site of the 16 February incident, and another 675 weapons were captured. The last major cache captured was that in Kien Hoa on 29 April. No tabulation of the arms captured from this cache has yet been received. A partial inventory includes at least 360 small arms, plus a large amount of 70-mm. Chinese Communist pack artillery ammunition.

17. The problem of interdicting Viet Cong supply vessels is difficult since the South Vietnam coast is over 1,000 miles long. Compounding the difficulty is the fact that there are about 50,000 junks of various descriptions which are engaged in legitimate activities. However, the Vietnamese Navy has 31 patrol ships and over 500 motorized junks which are used in coastal patrol work. About half of these are on patrol on an average day. To illustrate the patrol activities of this force, in 1963 about 136,000 junks were searched, in 1964 almost 200,000. In addition, the Vietnamese Navy is backed up by US Naval forces comprising a number of Task Groups which generally average about 16 ships on station continuously. Task groups of long range aircraft also conduct continuous surveillance of coastal water. Since the commencement of US assistance in boarding and search about mid-May there have been 4,880 wooden hull vessels checked of which about 598 were boarded. Forty-three steel hull vessels were checked and 33 boarded.

18. Seventeen US Coast Guard cutters are being sent to South Vietnamese waters to aid in operations there. They are scheduled to arrive in the first half of July.



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WEAPONS CAPTURED FROM THE VIET CONG IN 1964

Number of Weapons by Country of Origin

TYPE WEAPON	COMM. CHINA	US	FRANCE	VIET CONG	OTHER	TOTAL
90mm Rocket Launchers	1					1
82mm Mortars						0
60mm Mortars	1	2		4		7
75mm Recoilless Rifles						0
57mm Recoilless Rifles	2					2
50 Cal. Machine Guns		4				4
7.5, 7.62, & 7.92 Machine Guns	5					5
Light Machine Guns	16		16			32
Automatic Rifles	5	13			1	19
Submachine Guns	91	104	135	10	25	365
Rifles		241	553	92	55	941
Carbines	302	229		36		567
Pistols	66	16	1	25	50	158
Shotguns		19			35	54
Other	2					2
Total	491	628	705	167	166	2157
% of Total	22.7	29.1	32.6	7.7	7.7	

*Not tabulated separately.

WEAPONS CAPTURED FROM THE VIET CONG IN 1963

Number of Weapons by Country of Origin

TYPE WEAPON	COMM. CHINA	US	FRANCE	VIET CONG	OTHER	TOTAL
90mm Rocket Launchers	1					1
82mm Mortars	2			3		5
60mm Mortars	3					3
75mm Recoilless Rifles	3					3
57mm Recoilless Rifles	3	2				5
50 Cal. Machine Guns		2				2
7.5, 7.62, & 7.92 Machine Guns	6		3		2	11
Light Machine Guns					9	9
Automatic Rifles		35				35
Submachine Guns	49	80	189		5	323
Rifles		98	590	114	66	868
Carbines	67	231		6		304
Pistols	2		24	5	4	35
Shotguns*						
Other				16		16
Total	136	448	806	144	86	1636
% of Total	8.4	27.7	49.8	8.9	5.3	

*Shotguns not reported

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III. COMMUNIST TRUCK TRAFFIC INTO AND THROUGH LAOS

1. During the past six months, the North Vietnamese have moved substantial quantities of supplies into and through Laos in support of their operations there and in South Vietnam. The bulk of these supplies were transported by truck along a network of Communist-controlled roads and trails in eastern Laos.

The Roads

2. The route most commonly used by the Communists begins in North Vietnam where Route 12 moves from the coastal lowlands west into the Annamite Mountains. It then proceeds westward into Laos via the Mu Gia Pass and includes segments of Routes 12, 23, 9, and 92 in its southward progress (see map.) Finally, south and east of Route 92, the route fragments into numerous trails and roads which lace the mountainous South Vietnam-Laos border region.

3. The roads vary in quality from merely improved trails, such as some of the roads and trails in the region south of Route 9, to stretches of limited all-weather road, such as segments of Routes 12 and 9. The route as a whole, however, can only be considered of fair weather trafficability, capable of carrying 350-500 short tons per day during the dry season. Some portions of the route, e.g., routes 12 and 9, are old roads dating from the French colonial period; others, e.g., Route 23 north of Route 9 and the portion of Route 92 south of Route 9, have only recently been upgraded for vehicular traffic. Route 92, indeed, was only opened for truck traffic south of Muong Nong in early March of this year. The network of mountain trails -- some motorable -- leading east from Route 92 probably are capable of carrying about 50 short tons per day during the dry season. As with the key Route 23 portion of the Communist truck route from North Vietnam, these trails are not credited with any truck trafficability during the wet monsoon season.

The Traffic

4. The vehicular traffic along this route is seasonal, being limited to the five or six months of the dry monsoon season when the roads are passable. In 1964, for example, key segments of the route were impassable because of heavy rains between early June and mid-December. Indications are that the route is once again impassable; no truck traffic has been observed on Route 23 south of Mu Gia Pass since late May.

5. The volume of traffic which moves down this route is quite considerable. Approximately 2,000 trucks were spotted moving each way on Route 23 during the December-May period. These trucks could have carried between 6-9,000 short tons of supplies. The ultimate disposition of these supplies is unknown. It is likely that some went for the support of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops located in south Laos, that additional quantities were moved south into South Vietnam in support of the Viet Cong, and that a considerable portion was stockpiled for the coming rainy season.

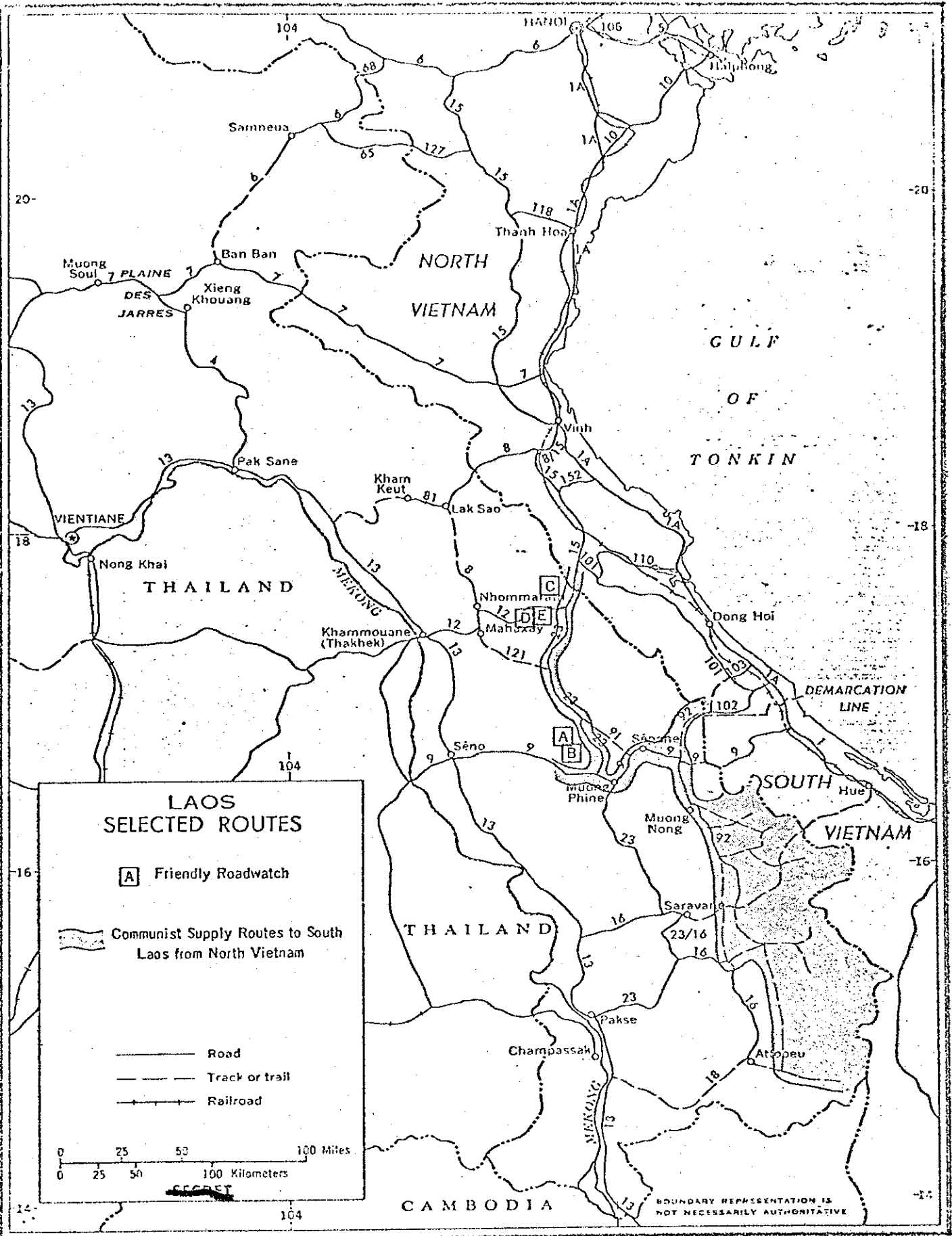
6. An estimate as to what portion of the supplies moved to South Vietnam is very difficult, however. Both General Ma, the Lao Air Force chief, and nearby Lao army officers claim that large convoys have been moving to the Muong Nong area south of Route 9; neither source, however, has come up with any solid figures regarding this convoy traffic. And, unfortunately, CIA has been unable to place its own roadwatch teams at key positions on Route 9 and 92 because of enemy pressure. (See map for current roadwatch team positions.) Aerial photography, limited as it is by cloud cover, darkness, and concealing tree cover, has over the past year proved of little value in assessing traffic volume.

7. Although truck traffic into and through Laos is sharply curtailed during the rainy season, non-vehicular movement, e.g., pack animals and coolie trains, can continue along an abbreviated route during the entire year. The trails used in such movement begin in North Vietnam just north of the Demilitarized Zone, swing into Laos and move south

across Route 9 where they join with Route 92 and the complex of trails leading eastward toward the South Vietnam border. Most of the infiltrators captured in South Vietnam claim to have come into the country via this general route.

Road Vulnerabilities and US Interdiction Efforts

8. The US has made strenuous efforts to curb this flow of traffic by mounting frequent interdiction strikes against vulnerable portions of the Communist truck routes. To date, some 4,000 interdiction sorties have been flown in Laos. Key passes, defiles, and bridges as well as trucks themselves have been targets of daily air strikes launched from carriers or from air force bases in South Vietnam and Thailand. Truck traffic through the Mu Gia Pass, for example, appears to have been brought to a virtual standstill due to recent US air attacks. Supplies may be moving by porter or pack animal around Mu Gia to supply depots in Laos for further trucking south. In other areas, although the roads have been closed off from time to time as a result of these air strikes, the Communists, by massive repair efforts and the use of fords and bypasses, appear to have managed to keep traffic moving, if at a somewhat reduced rate.



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IV. INTERDICTION IN THE NORTH

1. ROLLING THUNDER strikes and armed route reconnaissance missions against the DRV have been specifically tasked with destroying lines of communication and interdicting the supply of men and material to the Viet Cong. Since 3 April US and SVN planes have bombed almost continuously the transport system in the southern part of the DRV, destroying or damaging almost all of the major bridges and many of the secondary ones and attacking trucks, trains, barges, and supply dumps and military camps. No figure for the total number of ROLLING THUNDER sorties is immediately available in Washington.

2. [redacted] photographic interpretation indicate that major disruption has been caused to the transportation system. Movement of supplies and mail in the southern provinces has been severely restricted, and most logistics operations are restricted to the night hours. The DRV, however, has been making a major effort to keep supply lines open by using trucks in place of trains, ferries and pontoon bridges in place of bridges, and repairing as rapidly as possible. First priority has been given to the road system, and high priority cargo--such as military supplies--is apparently continuing to move southward. Large numbers of construction and transportation workers have been sent to the southern provinces from all over the DRV, and trucks, railroad equipment, and oxcarts have also been sent to the area.

3. Nevertheless, [redacted] the US interdiction effort is placing a considerable strain on the DRV. The equipment, repair material, and trained personnel which have been moved southward have been diverted from other high priority tasks in an economy which is perennially short of everything. In sum, support of the war in South Vietnam, while not impossible, has become more expensive for Hanoi.

June 24, 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR

**Honorable Gardner Ackley
Council of Economic Advisers**

The President has seen the attached memorandum from a young business executive in Texas, and would like to have your comments on it by 9 A. M., Monday, June 28.

Harry C. McPherson, Jr.

Enclosure

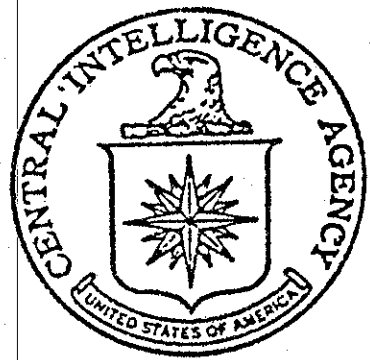
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

INTERDICTION OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION ROUTES IN VIETNAM

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Authority NLI-CBS 2
By ies, NARS, Date 7-5-84

Approved for Release
Date 11 JUN 84

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 June 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Interdiction of Communist Supply Routes
Into South Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

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must divert scarce resources from other projects to keep supplies moving. In Laos, where targets are less well-defined, air interdiction has achieved some temporary disruptions, but is not known to have seriously damaged the Communist effort. As a result of several successful actions against sea infiltration attempts early this year, some of these operations have apparently been suspended by Hanoi, but the sea infiltration organization is still being expanded. US and South Vietnamese capabilities against Communist supply by sea are also being sharply strengthened.

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8. Other infiltration techniques continue to be employed, however. In mid-March the South Vietnamese crew of a junk scuttled when it was approached by a South Vietnamese naval patrol stated that they had been hired by the Viet Cong to sail to the DRV

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and pick up a small load of arms. While in the DRV, the crew saw several other South Vietnamese junks apparently on similar missions. Gun running by small sailing junks can probably move a significant amount of cargo at fairly low risk.

9. A Viet Cong captured just south of the DMZ in late May stated that he was a member of the 103rd VC Transportation Battalion stationed in the DRV. According to this prisoner, each of the four companies of the battalion had about 160 men, 10 cargo junks, and two armed escort junks. A typical mission conducted by a fleet of twelve junks involved sailing first to Tiger Island to resupply DRV forces there and then delivering the bulk of the cargo to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

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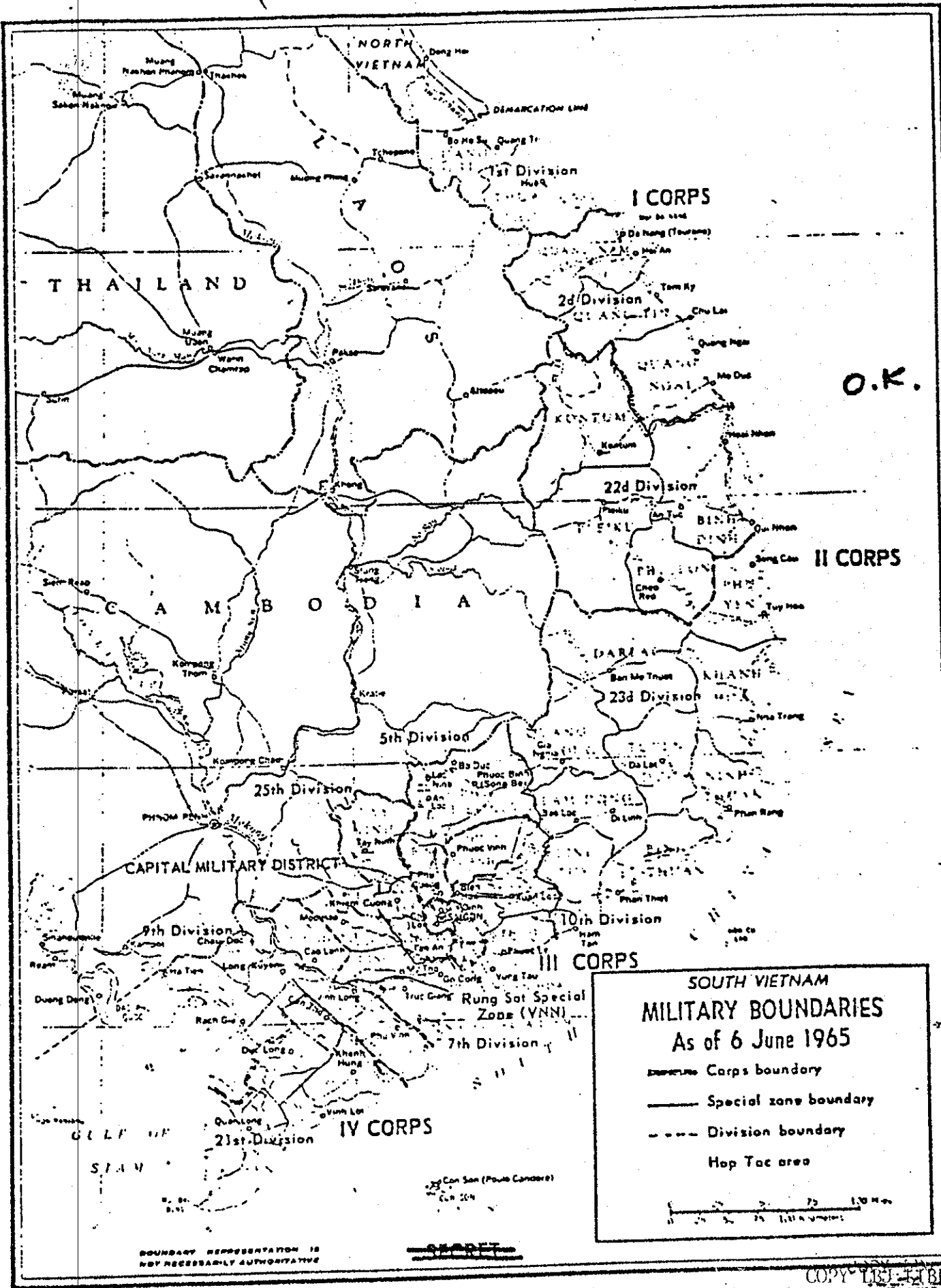
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III. COMMUNIST TRUCK TRAFFIC INTO AND THROUGH LAOS

1. During the past six months, the North Vietnamese have moved substantial quantities of supplies into and through Laos in support of their operations there and in South Vietnam. The bulk of these supplies were transported by truck along a network of Communist-controlled roads and trails in eastern Laos.

The Roads

2. The route most commonly used by the Communists begins in North Vietnam where Route 12 moves from the coastal lowlands west into the Annamite Mountains. It then proceeds westward into Laos via the Mu Gia Pass and includes segments of Routes 12, 23, 9, and 92 in its southward progress (see map.) Finally, south and east of Route 92, the route fragments into numerous trails and roads which lace the mountainous South Vietnam-Laos border region.

3. The roads vary in quality from merely improved trails, such as some of the roads and trails in the region south of Route 9, to stretches of limited all-weather road, such as segments of Routes 12 and 9. The route as a whole, however, can only be considered of fair weather trafficability, capable of carrying 350-500 short tons per day during the dry season. Some portions of the route, e.g., routes 12 and 9, are old roads dating from the French colonial period; others, e.g., Route 23 north of Route 9 and the portion of Route 92 south of Route 9, have only recently been upgraded for vehicular traffic. Route 92, indeed, was only opened for truck traffic south of Muong Nong in early March of this year. The network of mountain trails -- some motorable -- leading east from Route 92 probably are capable of carrying about 50 short tons per day during the dry season. As with the key Route 23 portion of the Communist truck route from North Vietnam, these trails are not credited with any truck trafficability during the wet monsoon season.

The Traffic

4. The vehicular traffic along this route is seasonal, being limited to the five or six months of the dry monsoon season when the roads are passable. In 1964, for example, key segments of the route were impassable because of heavy rains between early June and mid-December. Indications are that the route is once again impassable; no truck traffic has been observed on Route 23 south of Mu Gia Pass since late May.

5. The volume of traffic which moves down this route is quite considerable. Approximately 2,000 trucks were spotted moving each way on Route 23 during the December-May period. These trucks could have carried between 6-9,000 short tons of supplies. The ultimate disposition of these supplies is unknown. It is likely that some went for the support of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops located in south Laos, that additional quantities were moved south into South Vietnam in support of the Viet Cong, and that a considerable portion was stockpiled for the coming rainy season.

6. An estimate as to what portion of the supplies moved to South Vietnam is very difficult, however. Both General Ma, the Lao Air Force chief, and nearby Lao army officers claim that large convoys have been moving to the Muong Nong area south of Route 9; neither source, however, has come up with any solid figures regarding this convoy traffic. And, unfortunately,

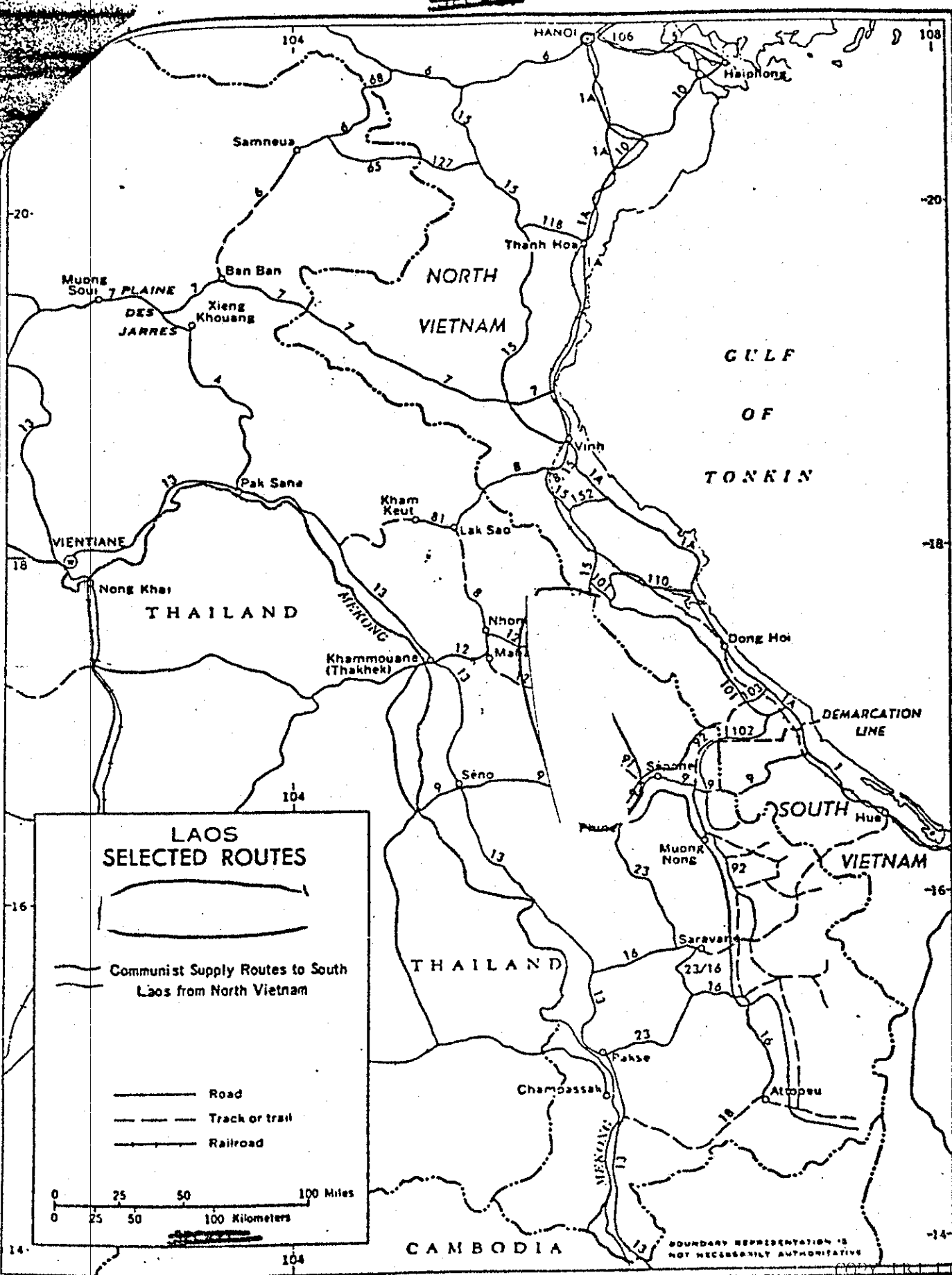
Aerial photography, limited as it is by cloud cover, darkness, and concealing tree cover, has over the past year proved of little value in assessing traffic volume.

7. Although truck traffic into and through Laos is sharply curtailed during the rainy season, non-vehicular movement, e.g., pack animals and coolie trains, can continue along an abbreviated route during the entire year. The trails used in such movement begin in North Vietnam just north of the Demilitarized Zone, swing into Laos and move south

across Route 9 where they join with Route 92 and the complex of trails leading eastward toward the South Vietnam border. Most of the infiltrators captured in South Vietnam claim to have come into the country via this general route.

Road Vulnerabilities and US Interdiction Efforts

8. The US has made strenuous efforts to curb this flow of traffic by mounting frequent interdiction strikes against vulnerable portions of the Communist truck routes. To date, some 4,000 interdiction sorties have been flown in Laos. Key passes, defiles, and bridges as well as trucks themselves have been targets of daily air strikes launched from carriers or from air force bases in South Vietnam and Thailand. Truck traffic through the Mu Gia Pass, for example, appears to have been brought to a virtual standstill due to recent US air attacks. Supplies may be moving by porter or pack animal around Mu Gia to supply depots in Laos for further trucking south. In other areas, although the roads have been closed off from time to time as a result of these air strikes, the Communists, by massive repair efforts and the use of fords and bypasses, appear to have managed to keep traffic moving, if at a somewhat reduced rate.



LAOS SELECTED ROUTES

Communist Supply Routes to South Laos from North Vietnam
 Road
 Track or trail
 Railroad

0 25 50 100 Miles
 0 25 50 100 Kilometers

BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION IS NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITY

IV. INTERDICTION IN THE NORTH

1. ROLLING THUNDER strikes and armed route reconnaissance missions against the DRV have been specifically tasked with destroying lines of communication and interdicting the supply of men and material to the Viet Cong. Since 3 April US and SVN planes have bombed almost continuously the transport system in the southern part of the DRV, destroying or damaging almost all of the major bridges and many of the secondary ones and attacking trucks, trains, barges, and supply dumps and military camps. No figure for the total number of ROLLING THUNDER sorties is immediately available in Washington.

2.

3.