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## Enemy Supply Traffic Increases North of Saigon's Drive in Laos

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 7—The flow of enemy supply trucks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the area of South Vietnamese operations in southern Laos has doubled in the last few days to return to the level it reached before the invasion of Laos on Feb. 8, American military sources here reported today.

In the week ended last Wednesday, the number of trucks dropped to a daily average of about 800, according to the military sources. An on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, they continued, the enemy trucks moved at a rate of about 1,600 a night.

The flow is concentrated in the northern portion of the network of supply lines, above Tchepone, the strategic road junction that was occupied this weekend by South Vietnamese troops. The military sources said that the trucks were shuttling between supply depots in the north and concentrations of enemy troops on the northern flank of the South Vietnamese drive.

The assumption among military officers is that North Vietnam is sending supplies and ammunition to its forces defending the trails so that they can counterattack. It is less likely, the sources said, that the supplies are being moved back north to prevent their destruction by the advancing South Vietnamese.

### Decline a Mystery

The reasons for the decline in traffic in the week ended March 2 remain somewhat of a mystery here. Some officers suggest that North Vietnam may have been trying to assess the possible scope of the invasion before deciding whether to intensify its resistance.

Discussing another measure of enemy supply flow, President Nixon said at his news conference last Thursday that such traffic into South Vietnam had decreased 55 per cent. The President noted that he had studied the statistics regarding the traffic between the area of the South Vietnamese operation and the enemy outlets in South Vietnam.

Sources here said, however, that traffic into South Vietnam before the incursion had already been at a low level. This was attributed to the combination of an intensive American bombing campaign as well as

to the enemy's own timetable, which normally calls for increased traffic in the southern sections of the trail network later in the dry season, which ends in May.

The figures discussed today indicate that the South Vietnamese operations have had effects on enemy operations around the trail in addition to those the President suggested.

The recent increase in traffic along the northern trail segments could indicate a response by the enemy to setbacks caused by the South Vietnamese operation, rather than an intensified effort to get men and supplies past the operation into South Vietnam and Cambodia.

"We think it shows that they are hurting and want to strike back," a military officer said.

The trucks moving in the northern sections of Laos were said to be traveling north and south at about equal rates. Military sources suggested that the enemy was perhaps bringing food and ammunition down to the defending troops and then returning empty to pick up more supplies.

### 'Truck Kill' Put at 8,000

Air Force fighters and bombers, military sources said, are countering with "their most effective truck kills" of the war. The night President Nixon spoke, for example, sources here reported that 230 trucks had been destroyed.

In the last three days, the sources said, more than 600 trucks were destroyed as they tried to move supplies along the northern portions of the trail. Since the beginning of the dry season along the trail in January, they continued the Air Force has destroyed more than 8,000 trucks.

According to the sources, the number of trucks destroyed represented about half the enemy inventory at the start of the dry season. But new trucks are believed to arrive almost daily in North Vietnam, mostly from Communist China and the Soviet Union. Sources estimate that 500 replacements arrive each month.

The South Vietnamese operation has also increased the chances that American pilots have of finding the trucks moving through the jungle-covered trails. Fewer branches of the network are now open, enabling American planes to concentrate on those still passable.