

Hanoi Reporter Describes Trail And Tells of 'Tunnels of Fire'

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HANOI, North Vietnam, March 10 (Agence France-Presse) — Truck drivers don asbestos clothing to drive through "tunnels of fire" created by American bombers along certain sections of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network, a North Vietnamese correspondent reported in the Hanoi press today.

The war correspondent, in an article entitled "The Route of the Front," did not call the Ho Chi Minh Trail by that name, which is never used in North Vietnam. But it was clear that the long, vivid article referred to the supply route for moving men and supplies from North Vietnam through Laos to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The article said the trail was "a system measuring thousands of miles, with traffic moving in several directions on several routes, using various means of transportation."

Huge Command Post

In charge of regulating all of the traffic on the trail was a command post in a huge house at some distance from the trails themselves, the correspondent said. On a wall of the briefing room of the house was a six-yard high map showing the entire supply route system with its many branches.

The commanding officer of the network informed the correspondent that every time United States planes knocked out one of the roads of the trail, a secondary road was built and then a third "so that we can always be one in advance." When all of the branches were cut at the same time, as happened sometimes for short periods, "the supplies are carried on the backs of men to the next station along the trail."

'Naked Countryside'

The correspondent, who accompanied a convoy along the trail, said that at each station en route there was a canteen where drivers and soldiers could buy tobacco and sometimes soup.

He said that traveling entertainment groups performed at the stations for the men moving along the trail.

At certain points United States aircraft had completely destroyed the vegetation and

trucks moved across "completely naked countryside, over which the smoke of bombs still hung," he said. Some of the fires set by the planes "burn for entire months," but traffic on the trail "never halts."

When the trucks are attacked by United States aircraft, the drivers "push the accelerator to the floor and roar ahead," he said. "The tactic pays off, since the convoys have fewer losses than if they halted. But it takes nerve."

On either side of the roads are piles of metal: pieces of destroyed aircraft, fragmentation-bomb containers, empty munitions cases, shells and defused mines.

The reporter wrote: "at certain points, it is impossible to walk on the sides of the roads. You sink up to your knees in dust, the earth having become dust under the impact of bombs and inflammatory products. When the monsoon comes, the dust turns into mud and slides onto the roads. Nothing lives in this dust, not even crickets. Only man resists it."