

KHE SANH AIRSTRIP IS REPORTED IN USE

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U.S. Aides Say Hanoi Flies Courier Planes There in Violation of Truce

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 5 — Highly placed American officials said today that North Vietnamese troops had hurriedly rebuilt the old United States Marine airstrip at Khe Sanh and begun using it for courier flights into South Vietnam in violation of the Paris cease-fire agreement.

The airstrip is protected by three surface-to-air missiles. Last week the American delegates to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission complained that the presence of the missiles violated the Paris accord because they had been installed after the cease-fire began on Jan. 28.

But for reasons that are unclear, neither the Americans nor the South Vietnamese have publicly complained about the airstrip, which was also repaired sometime in the last few weeks after the cease-fire.

United States intelligence analysts report that the airstrip, situated in western Quang Tri Province just below the demilitarized zone, is being used by small North Vietnamese planes, mainly AN-2's, to bring in mail, military pouches and some high-ranking officers. It is believed to be the first time that North Vietnamese planes have flown into the South.

Under the Paris agreement, neither side is permitted to

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bring in military personnel or matériel, except through designated ports of entry that are to be supervised by the International Commission of Control and Supervision. Khe Sanh is not one of the ports selected by the Communists.

The intelligence analysts say that the evidence is still too fragmentary to be certain what broader purpose the North Vietnamese may have in mind.

but add that there are indications that the airstrip is part of a plan to establish a Communist capital for South Vietnam in Quang Tri Province.

Civilian Aides Moved In

During the last two months, these analysts add, Hanoi has moved increasing numbers of administrative personnel, particularly from its Ministries of Health and Education, into Quang Tri Province.

In this interpretation, the Khe Sanh airstrip may be a useful way to bring high-ranking political and diplomatic visitors to a Communist capital in the South. The Communists also now have a small airfield at Loc Ninh, on the Cambodian border, 70 miles north of Saigon, but it is considered more vulnerable to attack by Saigon Government forces.

There have also been some intelligence reports — initially greeted with official skepticism — that North Vietnam might try to annex Quang Tri.

"It makes some sense, though," one analyst commented. "They've got complete control in most of Quang Tri, and they could have a free vote to decide on unification with the North."

American officials refused to discuss how often the North Vietnamese were flying planes in and out of Khe Sanh, but one official said, "We know every time they do it; you can be sure of that."

As far as is known, there

has been no attempt by the South Vietnamese to shoot down any of the Communist flights.

Khe Sanh is the site of an old United States Marine fire base where, in the spring of 1968, one of the most bitter and protracted battles of the war took place. The Communists were unable to capture the base, despite a siege and intense shelling lasting several months. But the Marines pulled out soon

afterward, abandoning Khe Sanh to the Communist forces.

The International Commission of Control and Supervision has twice voted not to investigate the American charge that the North Vietnamese installed missiles and related equipment there since the cease-fire.

Canada and Indonesia voted to investigate, Poland and Hungary against.

The commission can act only on the basis of unanimity.