

# Fewer Troops From Hanoi Reported Starting South

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WASHINGTON, March 20 — The United States intelligence community has reported a significant reduction in the number of North Vietnamese troops and the amount of equipment that have recently entered the infiltration routes toward South Vietnam, well-placed Administration officials said today.

According to these officials, the latest analyses indicate that in the last two to three weeks the North Vietnamese have sharply curtailed the departures of men and matériel from North Vietnam into Laos for eventual entry into South Vietnam.

[In Saigon, it was reported that field teams of the International Commission of Control and Supervision had begun to investigate cease-fire violations, sometimes conducting informal "observations" to skirt the need for unanimous findings. Page 3.]

The Washington officials who

disclosed the latest analyses cautioned that there was no agreement on their significance.

Last week, the Nixon Administration said that several thousand North Vietnamese troops and a considerable amount of heavy military equipment, including tanks, had been infiltrated into South Vietnam since the cease-fire agreement went into effect on Jan. 27.

The new information does not refute the earlier reports but does tend, in the minds of some officials, to relieve some anxiety caused by those reports.

The officials said that North Vietnamese men and equipment already in the pipelines were continuing into South Vietnam. This so-called pipeline known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail network leads from North Vietnam, through Laos, into South Vietnam, and takes from six weeks to three months to tra-

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vel, officials said.

The key question raised by the reported dwindling of men and material into this network, the officials said, was whether it indicated a decision by Hanoi to limit its infiltration to the forces and heavy equipment that presumably were en route to South Vietnam before Jan. 27, the date the Vietnam agreement was signed.

If such a decision was made, the officials said, then the situation caused by the infiltration of recent weeks may not be so serious as some other officials first believed.

On the other hand, the drop may only be a temporary development, the officials said, and therefore they tended to be cautious in their appraisals.

## Warning by Nixon

President Nixon expressed strong concern about the reported infiltration of the men and equipment into South Vietnam at his news conference last week. He said that the United States had informed the North Vietnamese of its concern over what it regarded as "a violation of the cease-fire."

He said, "I would only suggest that based on my actions over the past four years, that the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expression of concern."

This raised the possibility that the United States might resort to some kind of military action — presumably renewed bombing—to counter the infiltration.

According to some estimates made public last week, North Vietnam had moved up to 450 armored vehicles, including tanks, and a considerable number of trucks located with supplies through the Ho Chi Minh Trail network and at least part of this equipment was making its way into South Vietnam.

There have also been reports that North Vietnam had sent several thousand troops down the trail.

## A Sensitive Subject

<sup>INFILTRATION</sup> Infiltration became a very sensitive issue within the Administration, particularly since Mr. Nixon's statement last week. Therefore, the latest intelligence information has been the subject of some lively discussion, the officials said. The sources said, tend to interpret the current situation

in what one called "a rather unalarmed way." According to the optimistic view, North Vietnam intended to live up to the spirit of the cease-fire agreement, but felt that it was entitled to replenish the men and equipment that had been severely depleted as the result of last year's heavy fighting.

Officials holding this view were said to have argued that the infiltration into South Vietnam was of a limited nature and had started before Jan. 27. These officials, many of whom are in the State Department, were said to believe that North

Vietnam was also sending in men and material to deter Saigon from trying to wipe out Vietcong pockets in the countryside.

The officials were also reported to have asserted that North Vietnam would not be in a position to mount a major offensive until next year at the earliest.

Other officials, particularly in the Defense Department, were said to be more concerned about the recent flow and less ready to accept the recent dwindling of supplies as a positive development.