

HANOI BUILDING UP HIGHWAY IN SOUTH

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Thousands of Laborers Said
to Cross Border to Work
on Roads and Airfields
NYTimes

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HUE, South Vietnam, May 4 — Several thousand North Vietnamese laborers have been sent into the northwestern part of South Vietnam to build roads and airfields and to move supplies, according to senior American and South Vietnamese officials.

These activities, the officials say, are greatly enhancing the Communists' military capabilities in the region in violation of the Paris peace agreement and they are taken as clear signs by many that a major attack is in the offing.

The Communists' single most ambitious project, the officials say, is to complete an all-weather road that sweeps in a broad reverse S-shape from the old American marine camp at Khe Sanh near the Laotian border, south through the Ashau Valley and then eastward to the outskirts of Da Nang—the second largest city in South Vietnam.

Heavy Activity Reported

Large stretches of roadway have been in use for some time in the mountains. The workers are resurfacing and widening these sections and hacking their way through the thick forest to forge connecting links, the officials say.

At the same time, the laborers are reportedly constructing several smaller roads pushing eastward toward the Government-held lowlands from the main artery and the vast stores of supplies in the Ashau Valley.

Intelligence specialists say the roads are from 12 to 30 feet

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wide and that many are being topped with gravel to keep them from washing out in the summer monsoon rains.

Khe Sanh itself, which the Marines clung to through nearly three months of unrelenting North Vietnamese shelling in 1968 only to abandon a few weeks later, reportedly is being developed into a major logistical center by the Communists.

The laborers recently finished restoring the 4,800-foot runway that the Marines had used at Khe Sanh and have begun work on a second strip parallel to it, the officials say.

The twin runways could accommodate MIG fighter planes in an emergency, intelligence specialists say, but they add that the strips are too short for regular jet operations.

The runways are ideal, however, for large propeller-driven military transports that carry both troops and supplies.

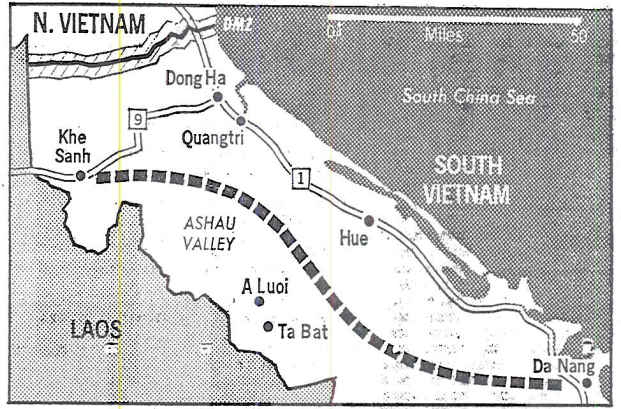
There have been no reports of transports using Khe Sanh yet, but earlier this year some courier planes from North Vietnam were said to have landed there.

The officials say that the North Vietnamese have installed at least a dozen surface-to-air missiles around Khe Sanh as well as heavy-caliber automatic antiaircraft guns.

The United States protested against the presence of four surface-to-air missiles at Khe Sanh in late February and the Communists withdrew them. But a week later, intelligence specialists say, the missiles were returned and their number has been growing. There have been no subsequent protests.

In addition to restoring the facilities at Khe Sanh, the North Vietnamese are also reportedly restoring the old American airfields at Dong Ha just south of the demilitarized zone, at A Luoi and Ta Bat in the Ashau Valley and at Kham Duc west of Da Nang.

Since the Jan. 28 cease-fire in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese have been able to move freely through the regions



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Heavy broken line shows road now under construction

not in Government control—including vast expanses of no man's land—without fear of American bombers or heavy artillery barrages.

Every day last month some 60 to 70 trucks laden with supplies and equipment reportedly moved into South Vietnam from Laos and North Vietnam. The trucks are still arriving at the same rate, officials say, but now most of them are carrying food to supply the Communist troops through the coming wet season.

Most of the trucks are said to be Soviet-made, but some Chinese-made vehicles have also been seen.

The trucks rumble along in view of Government forces during the day, then turn on their headlights and continue through the night.

The other day this correspondent flew to a remote Government outpost northwest of Hue to observe with the aid of field glasses a section of the main road from Khe Sanh. In 90 minutes 14 soldiers trudged past. The only truck seen was a Soviet-made Molatova that the Government soldiers said had been parked alongside the road since the previous evening.

One Government observer said that laborers with picks and shovels had finished working on this section of the road three weeks ago.

The North Vietnamese are

well aware of the approaching rains and are working with all haste. One American official said that there were daily reports of 5 to 10 bulldozers operating in the region.

"In the old days if you saw one bulldozer it was a red-letter day," the American said in dismay. "And now we're not talking about the mountains. They're in the foothills working where we wouldn't have dreamed of them being before."

Intelligence analysts say that since the cease-fire the Communists have shifted a number of trans-shipment points from Laos into South Vietnam, providing more direct routing for supplies. They have also reportedly eliminated some of the way stations because the trucks can cover greater distances now that the threat of attack is rather remote.

The supply specialists and the laborers are said to be members of the 473d Transportation Group, which is still believed to have its headquarters in Laotian territory. Just how many of these men and women are now working in South Vietnam is not known, but there are believed to be well over 5,000 with a large percentage concentrated in the Ashau Valley.

Members of the 473d Group operated in South Vietnam before, but intelligence analysts say the North Vietnamese have never previously placed such emphasis on construction.