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## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY  
IN NORTHWEST NORTH VIETNAM

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

NGA review(s) completed.

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GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
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CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY IN NORTHWEST NORTH VIETNAM\*

Summary

Recent Communist construction in Lai Chau Province of North Vietnam, although extensive, does not suggest an increase in the tempo of developments in this area. Compared with the pace of construction and improvement of some roads in the Laos Panhandle, in China, and elsewhere in North Vietnam, the work in Lai Chau Province seems to indicate steady but not rapid progress in developing a logistic channel of limited capacity from China to Laos. The road construction and improvement in North Vietnam is probably being carried out with the aid of the Chinese. The completion of present work will give the Chinese Communists access to North Vietnam and Laos along an improved road network, contingency storage facilities, and a secure telecommunications system. (See the map, Figure 1).

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\* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Research and Reports and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence and the Office of National Estimates; the estimates and conclusions represent the best judgment of the Directorate of Intelligence as of 21 October 1966.

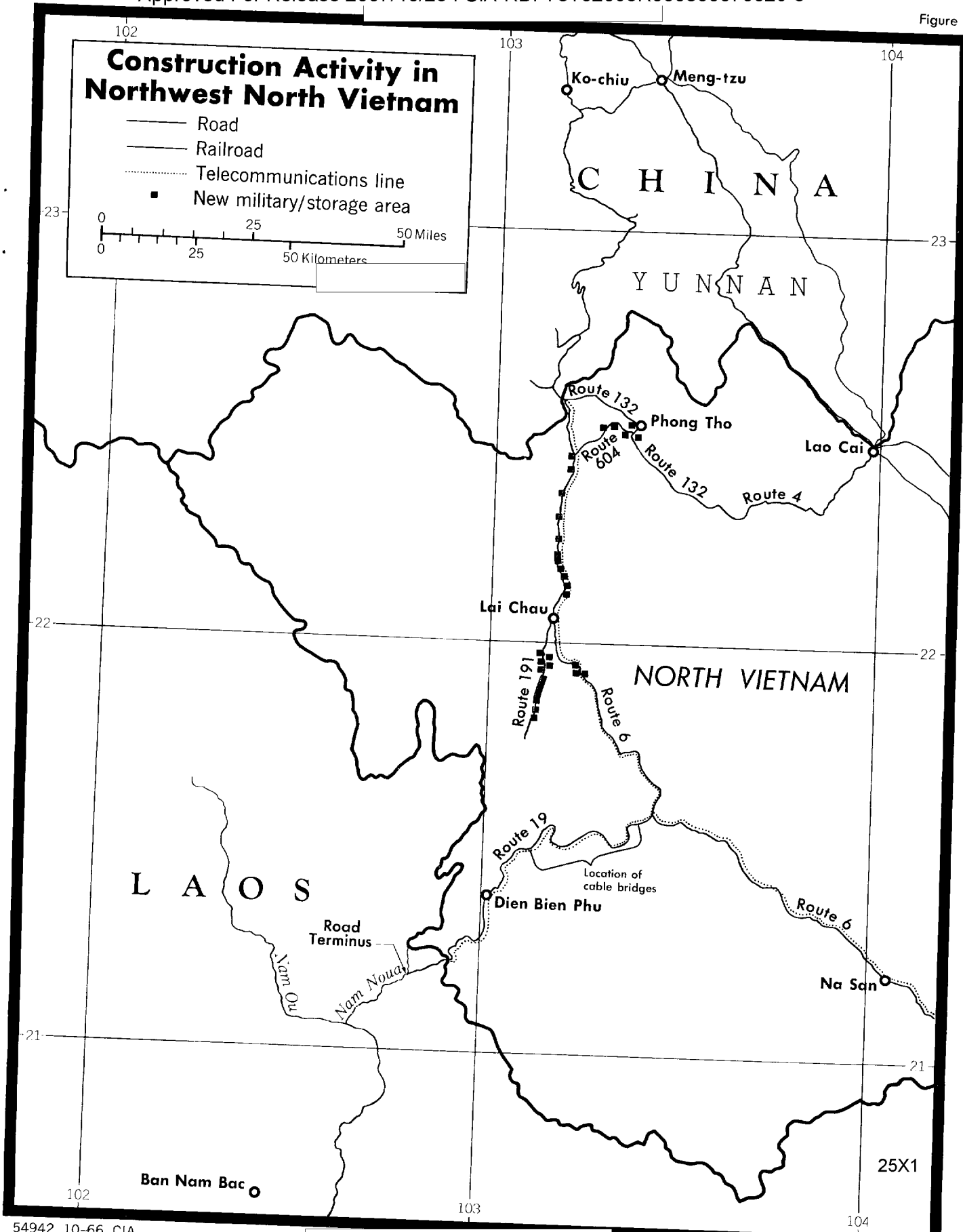
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Figure 1

**Construction Activity in Northwest North Vietnam**

- Road
- Railroad
- ⋯ Telecommunications line
- New military/storage area

0 25 50 Miles  
0 25 50 Kilometers



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1. Road Construction in China and North Vietnam

Lai Chau Province is in the northwesternmost part of North Vietnam having its northern border with Yunnan Province in Communist China and its southwestern border with Communist-held portions of northern Laos. It is considered strategic as a staging area for both current and future Chinese Communist activities in Indochina. A strip 30 miles wide in Lai Chau Province along the China border is a sanctuary zone that was delineated when the Rolling Thunder program for bombing North Vietnam was begun in February 1965. The distance via the present road system (routes 132, 604, 6, 19) from the Chinese border at Ban Nam Coum to the Laotian border by way of Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu is 160 miles (see the map, Figure 1). With the completion of route 191, now under construction between Lai Chau city and Dien Bien Phu, the distance will be reduced to 130 miles.

The road construction observed to date in both southern Yunnan Province and Lai Chau Province consists of roadbed improvements, realignment, and new road development. Improvements to the road from Ko-chiu south via Chin Ping to the North Vietnamese border at Ban Nam Coum, a distance of 75 miles, began during 1965 and were completed in mid-1966. This work consisted of widening the road to 18 feet and surfacing most of it with gravel. Route 6 in North Vietnam was bypassed for the first 11 miles near the China border by the construction of a road for 27 miles through Phong Tho designated as routes 132 and 604. Route 6, which crosses a mountain at this point, has numerous switchbacks; the new bypass has eliminated this vulnerable section. An additional 72 miles of route 6 to its junction with route 19 has been improved. As a result of upgrading this road system, the Chinese Communists now have more direct and rapid access to northwestern North Vietnam than the old routes from Meng-tzu or Lao Cai on the Kun-ming - Hanoi rail line.

Access to Laos from North Vietnam or China via route 6 must, however, continue by way of route 19 through Dien Bien Phu until route 191 from Lai Chau to Dien Bien Phu is completed. Route 19 has been regularly interdicted by US and South Vietnamese airstrikes. Route 6 south of Lai Chau and route 19 continue to be serviceable, however, because of constant repairs to the cratered roadbed and damaged bridges. Five of the recently discovered cable bridges in North Vietnam are located on route 19 between route 6 and Dien Bien Phu. When the decking on these bridges is removed during daylight hours, only the steel cables are exposed, thereby greatly reducing the chance of interdiction from airstrikes. There is also a cable

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bridge on route 6 north of its junction with route 19 which appeared to have been completed for some time when seen in photography of

[redacted]

Construction of route 191 along an alignment which previously had been a trail was started in late March 1966. This road will be 52 miles long, about 18 feet wide, and surfaced in gravel; it will provide more direct access from Lai Chau city on route 6 to Dien Bien Phu and Laos.

About 15 miles (30 percent) of this road had been completed [redacted] (see the photograph, Figure 2). At the present rate of construction, it will not be completed before mid-1967. When completed, it will reduce by 30 miles the road distance from China to the Laos border.

The rate of road construction on route 191 and the time required to complete it indicate that this is not a crash effort. By way of comparison, road improvement work in southern Yunnan and on route 6 north of Lai Chau was in the planning stages in 1964. The work was implemented over an 18-month period beginning in early 1965, or at the rate of about 0.3 mile per day. Route 191 is in an area of rugged terrain, but its alignment is almost entirely through the river valleys. The following tabulation compares the rates of road construction and improvement in Yunnan and Lai Chau Provinces with the crash construction effort which was accomplished during the 1965-66 dry season on routes in the Laos Panhandle that support the movement of supplies into South Vietnam.

<u>Route</u>	<u>Length (Miles)</u>	<u>Construction Time (Months)</u>	<u>Average Rate of Road Construction (Miles Per Day)</u>
191	52 (15 miles completed)	5	0.1
Yunnan Province - North Vietnamese Border and 6 (improvements)	174	18	0.3
912/137 a/	61	4	0.5
911 a/	63	2.5	0.8
110 a/	119	3.5	1.1

a. In the Laos Panhandle.

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The road construction and improvement in North Vietnam probably are being carried out with the aid of the Chinese. The layout of the workcamps along the road and at bridge construction sites is very similar in pattern to the road construction observed in Yunnan Province at the Laos border near Muong Sing. These workcamps are either dismantled or abandoned following the completion of construction. An estimated 500 buildings have been dismantled in 15 road construction camps located on route 6 and areas of Lai Chau city.

The routes in Yunnan and Lai Chau Provinces have a minimum capacity in the monsoon season of 100 short tons per day and a maximum in the dry season of 800 short tons per day. It is probable that supplies from China are shipped to several points in North Vietnam via these routes. The tonnage shipped onward to Dien Bien Phu and Laos is probably considerably less than the capacity of the road but sufficient to support current North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao operations.

## 2. Road Construction in Laos

Photography [redacted] reveals that route 19 south of Dien Bien Phu is being used in conjunction with the river system of Laos as a Communist supply route in Laos to Muong Ngai, 15 miles northeast of Ban Nam Bac, where 23 storage buildings have been discovered. There is no evidence from photography to support recent reports of new road construction extending route 19 west for an additional 15 miles in Laos to Muong Khoua on the Nam Ou River. Route 19 at present has its motorable terminus in Laos on the east bank of Nam Noua River at Houay Houp. This river flows south 13 miles to the Nam Ou. There are two storage buildings located at Houay Houp which have been active since October 1965. Two more buildings are located at the confluence of the Nam Noua and the Nam Ou Rivers, possibly indicating that supplies are transloaded at this point to larger watercraft on the Nam Ou for movement south in Laos. All Laotian villages along the Nam Ou south from Houay Houp to the Nam Noua have been vacated, thus lending support to the belief that the Communists have taken control of this area (see the photograph, Figure 3). The river route south from route 19 has been recognized as the means for moving supplies south in Laos since 1965, but the change in status of villages along the river was not seen until [redacted]

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3. Probable Military Camps and Storage Areas

At least 36 dispersed storage facilities and military camps with a total of 538 buildings have been discovered along the improved road system in northwest North Vietnam. They are located adjacent to the route south from the China border to the present terminus of construction on route 191, all within 60 miles from China (see the map, Figure 1). They are concentrated in four areas: (1) Phong Tho, (2) Lai Chau city, (3) Route 6, and (4) Route 191 (see the photograph, Figure 4). All the sites in the area north of Lai Chau and at Phong Tho are within the sanctuary zone declared for the Rolling Thunder program. There are 310 storage buildings with an estimated total capacity of 10,000 to 20,000 tons. By comparison, the total storage capacity of supply depots in China within 150 miles of the North Vietnam border at Ban Nam Coum is almost 500,000 tons.

There is nothing to indicate whether the installations are Chinese or North Vietnamese. On the one hand, available evidence suggests that the Chinese were involved in the construction of roads and telecommunication lines in this area. On the other hand, frequent airstrikes as far north as Lai Chau city and against the Hanoi - Lao Cai rail line may have forced dispersal of Vietnamese storage installations to points further north within the sanctuary area near the Chinese border. The storage areas south of the sanctuary zone probably serve the same purposes as those north of Lai Chau city, but their position is more vulnerable to airstrikes.

At least three areas have some form of ground defensive positions in place. The installations at the junction of routes 4 and 191 have anti-aircraft positions nearby. The military camp at Phong Tho has personnel trenching, and there are 85 automatic weapons positions near the storage sites on route 191 south of Lai Chau city. There does not appear to be any deliberate attempt to camouflage the buildings or other structures.

Although road construction and improvement has been in evidence for the past 18 months, there was no evidence of the storage sites in photography prior to [redacted] Photography [redacted] did not reveal any activity on route 191, but there were signs of construction [redacted] More recent coverage revealed that all of the sites were in place [redacted] indicating that they have been developed in the past 5 to 7 months.

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4. Telecommunications

The development of telecommunication lines in Lai Chau Province has been observed in photography since early 1966. Comparative photographic coverage indicates that wire lines have been constructed south from China along route 6. Where coverage has been exceptionally good, poles can be seen with six insulators and six wires running along the trace. The line extends east into North Vietnam as far as Hoa Binh. Another line has been developed westward from the junction of routes 6 and 19 and can be traced to the Laos border. It is probable that the line extends into Laos at least to the present motorable terminus of route 19 at Houay Houp. Photography of route 19 at Houay Houp shows a telecommunication trace.

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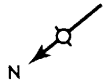
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# ROUTE 191 UNDER CONSTRUCTION NORTH VIETNAM 21-50N 103-07E

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Figure 2



NPIC L-0136 (10/66)



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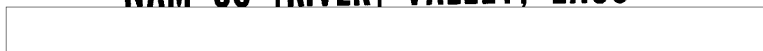
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# NATIVE VILLAGES NAM OU (RIVER) VALLEY, LAOS

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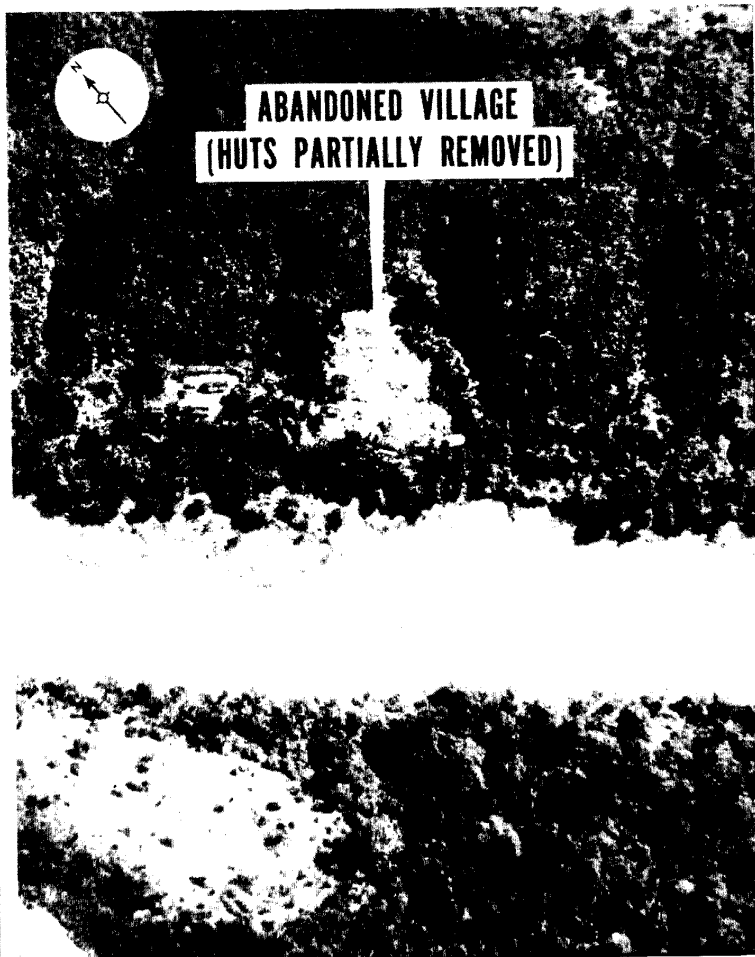
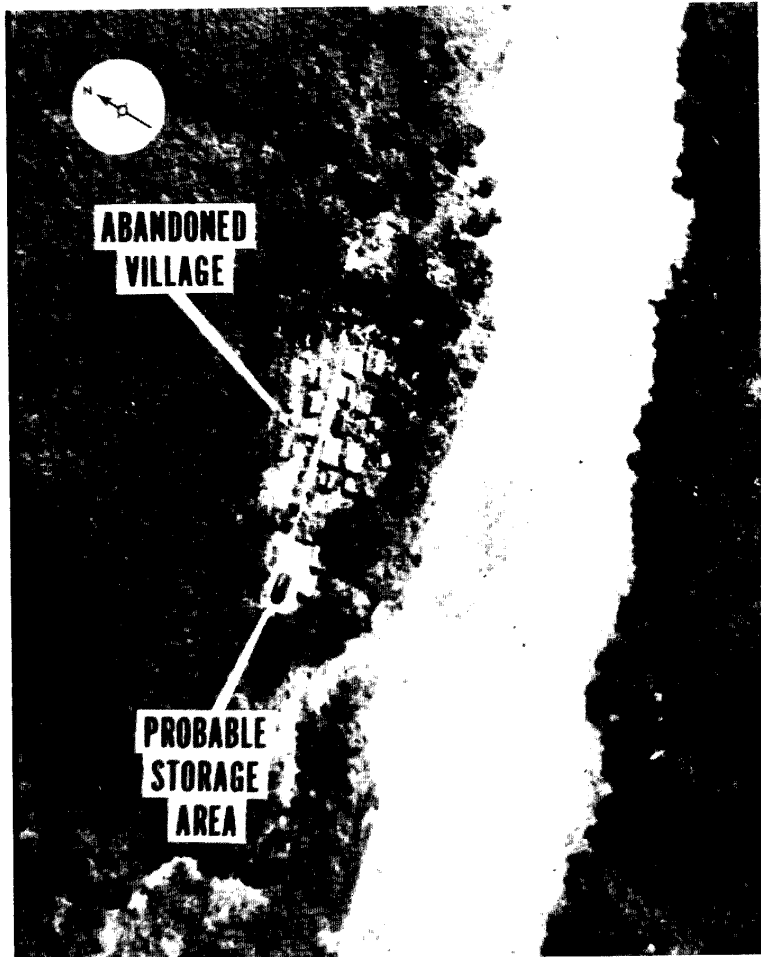
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SOP AT  
21-04N 102-34E

PAK LUONG  
20-56N 102-45E

Figure 3

NPIC L-0130 (10 66)



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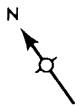


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**PROBABLE  
STORAGE AREAS  
ROUTE 191  
NORTH VIETNAM**

21-56N 103-08E

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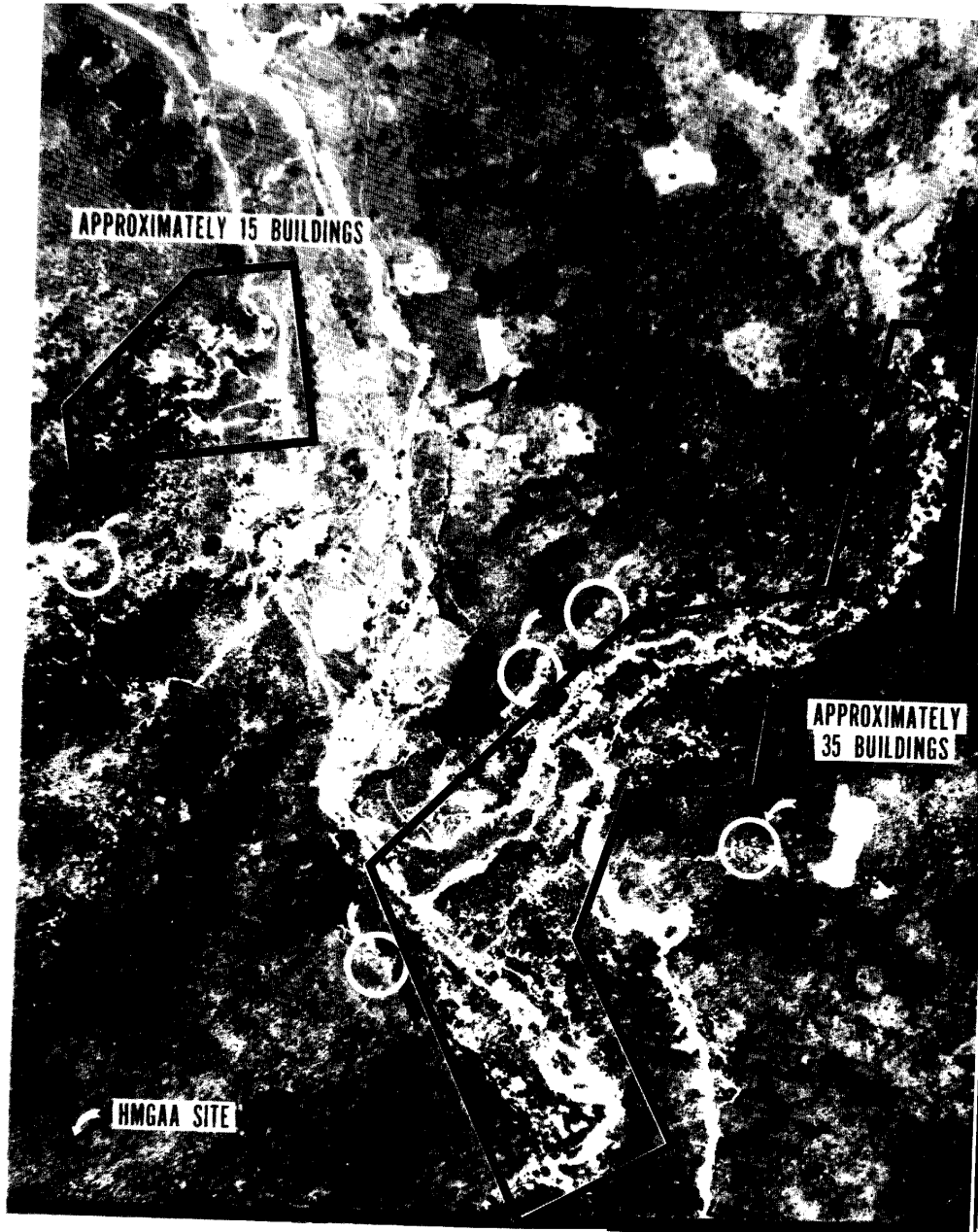


NPIC L-0134 (10 66)

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Figure 4



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