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INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

REOPENING OF RAIL LINE
INCREASES NORTH VIETNAMESE LOGISTIC CAPABILITY

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Research and Reports

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REOPENING OF RAIL LINE
INCREASES NORTH VIETNAMESE LOGISTIC CAPABILITY

Rail service has begun on a rail line south of Vinh in North Vietnam, thereby improving the logistic capability of North Vietnam toward Laos and South Vietnam. The new rail line, which is actually a restoration of part of the former Hanoi-Saigon line, extends from Duc Tho approximately 100 km to the south, or nearly one half of the distance from Vinh to the Demilitarized Zone (see the map). It was known that this line, which has been under observation for some time, was being reconstructed and that some work trains were observed on the line. Recent information indicates, however, that the line is now in operation and that lightweight railroad cars are operating scheduled service on the line. The line is aimed at development of the mountain areas, according to North Vietnamese publications. The costs of reconstructing a rail line for this purpose alone, however, cannot be justified on economic grounds. There is no rail connection between the present terminus of the new line at Duc Tho and the main line to Vinh 18 km to the northeast.* However, the Duc Tho line does offer an alternate route to road transport south from the important supply bases of Vinh and Ben Thuy to a point on a spur line which extends west from a junction at Tan Ap along route 12** within 45 km by road of the Laotian border.

25X1 the spur line from the junction at Tan Ap to route 12 is more heavily used than the main line south of the junction. Route 12 is the key route over which military supplies are shipped to Communist forces in southern Laos and over infiltration trails into the northern part of South Vietnam. Therefore, there is a

* The main obstacles in the way of completion of the line from Vinh to Duc Tho are two rivers that are unbridged at present. Construction on one of these bridges is underway, but it has been estimated that it will be at least 2 years before both are completed. That completion of this line is contemplated, however, is indicated by the announcement that the North Vietnamese will strengthen further the section between Thanh Luyen and Do Vang so that heavier shipments may be brought in "when the 18-km sector of the railroad linking Vinh with the Duc Tho station is finally completed." There is no evidence, however, of new rail construction south of the present operational section.

** When more than one route uses the same road, that part of the road has been assigned both route numbers. For example, routes 8 and 15 using the same section are shown on the map as route 8/15, and routes 15 and 12 using the same section are shown as route 15/12. The text, however, uses only one number, as "route 8" or "route 12".

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good probability that the new line is being used for military purposes. It is possible that reconstruction of the line is part of a contingency plan to support anticipated large-scale Communist military activity in the provinces south of the 17th parallel.

1. Scope and Significance of Construction

The newly reconstructed single-track, meter-gauge rail line extends from Duc Tho, on the Ngan Pho River southwest of Vinh, to a point 100 km to the south. Service apparently is available on the main line to about 20 km south of the Bai Duc Thon staging area and also on a spur line to Thanh Lang, near route 12, 9 km by rail from the junction on the main line at Tan Ap.

25X1 [redacted] the present
line follows the route of the prewar line from Vinh to the south. [redacted]

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25X1 [redacted]

Route 12* is the main supply road for Communist forces in southern Laos and also the route followed by some supplies for ultimate infiltration into South Vietnam. In the last 2 months, military convoys of 30 to 60 trucks have been moving frequently along route 12 into southern Laos carrying men and supplies. Some of these trucks reportedly make the return trip carrying bamboo into North Vietnam.

2. Railroad and Roads South of Vinh

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25X1 [redacted] the railroad from the north to Vinh has been extended to a new railroad station at Ben Thuy and is under construction to the wharf area. Ben Thuy is the most important port in the southern part of North Vietnam. Its warehouse space is much larger than at other ports in the area, and its facilities have been expanded recently, whereas construction at other ports in this area has been insignificant. Ben Thuy and Vinh, therefore, probably are the most important bases in North Vietnam for supplying Communist forces in Laos over routes 7, 8, and 12 and for supplying the large North Vietnamese military force in the area south of Vinh near the Demilitarized Zone. Supplies for land and sea infiltration to South Vietnam also possibly may be moved through Vinh and Ben Thuy.

There is no evidence of rail ferry docking areas at either Ben Thuy or Duc Tho, and no rail ferries were seen between the two towns.

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[redacted]

Moreover, there is no docking area near Duc Tho at which coastal ships could unload, but two new roads have been constructed in the area that would permit goods to be transferred by truck between the two railheads. One of these roads has been built from the new railroad station at Ben Thuy to route 1A, whereas the other has been constructed south of the Ngan Pho River from route 1A to route 8, which in turn meets the rail line a few kilometers south of Duc Tho.* By using these new roads and the new rail line to transport men and supplies destined to be moved down route 12 into Laos instead of trucks all the way from Ben Thuy to Thanh Lang, the trucks would be saved a round trip of about 170 km. The use of the new rail line for this purpose would require only one more loading and one more unloading operation than if trucks were used for the whole distance. Probably there is sufficient manpower available to make these transloading operations relatively inexpensive. Furthermore, if trains carrying goods, such as timber,** from the south to Duc Tho have unused space available for the return trip, it would be economical to use this space to transport men and supplies destined for Laos or possibly South Vietnam down to route 12 because it would save some gasoline and would free some trucks and drivers for operations elsewhere.

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operational to about 17°56' N - 105°59' E but did not seem to be in use south of Tan Ap, although the rail spur to the southwest appeared to be in use. Passing sidings were observed at four places along the line.

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Analyst:

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Coord:

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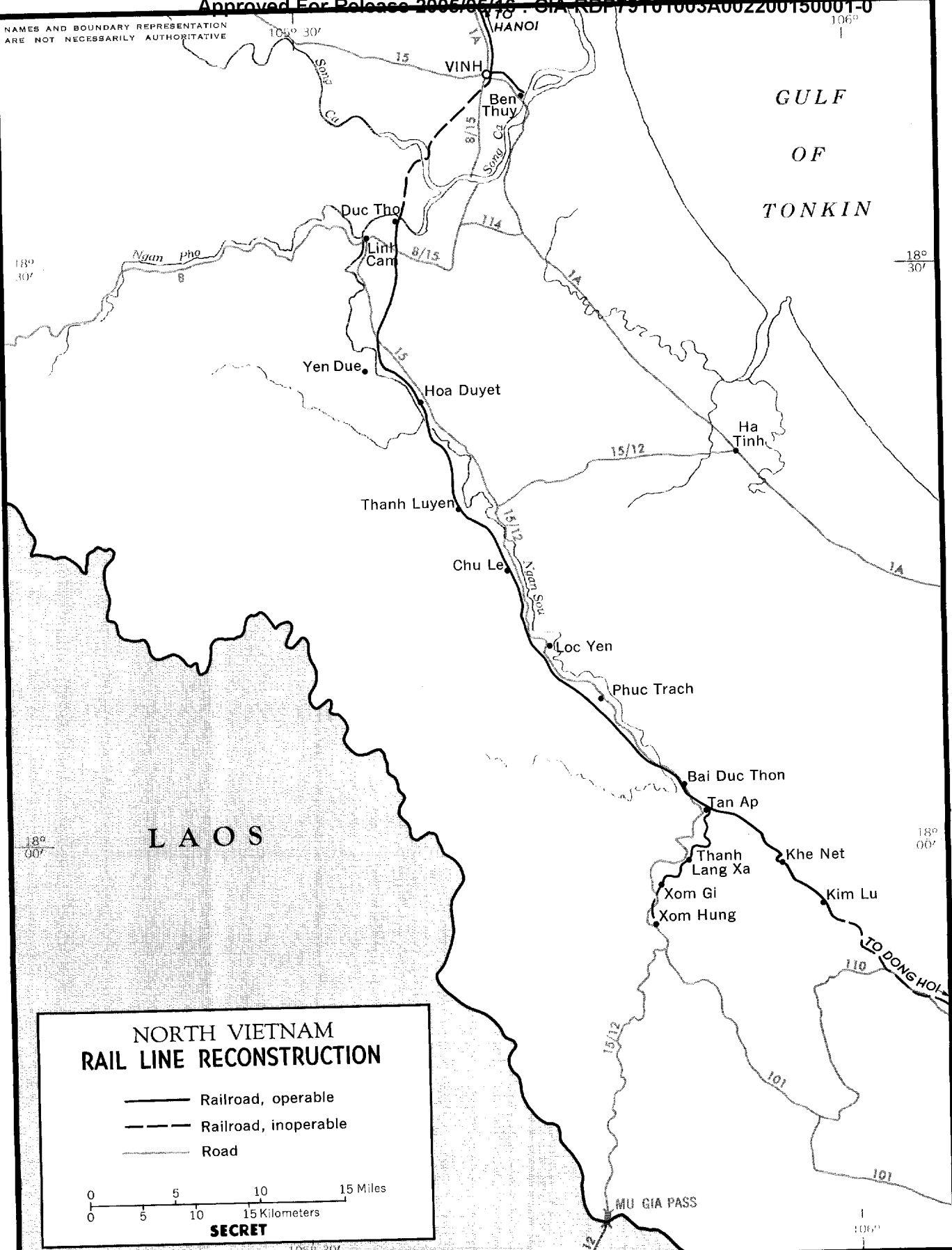
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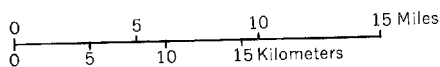
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**NORTH VIETNAM
RAIL LINE RECONSTRUCTION**

- Railroad, operable
- - - Railroad, inoperable
- Road



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