

BEN HET

Ben Het, a former US Special Forces - ARVN Ranger camp, is situated in remote, virtually unpopulated country in the western part of the Central Highlands, 40 miles northwest of Kontum and 8 miles east of the Laos - Cambodia - South Vietnam tri-border juncture. The camp was evacuated by ARVN in 1972. US bombing of the camp, other abandoned ARVN military installations, and bridges along Route 512 to the east was heavy after the withdrawal from the region. Little of the camp remains except for the landing strip and helicopter pads.

The tri-border region has for years been a focus for movement of NVA forces and material into South Vietnam. Prior to its evacuation and destruction in 1972, Ben Het had been a key outpost in the ARVN-border net monitoring such movement. The camp, which is now well within Communist-controlled territory, is situated astride one of the major NVA infiltration networks. Well used tracks and trails extend from the tri-border area to the north of Ben Het into southern MR I, and to the south of the camp into northern MR II. Because of the dense vegetation to the north and south of the camp, visual observation of such movement from Ben Het has been ineffective.

ICCS personnel must travel to Ben Het by air until two key bridges on the roads between Kontum and Ben Het are replaced. From the airfield at Kontum, the Ben Het camp is a 30-mile flight. The landing strip at Ben Het is 1,800 feet long (including helicopter pads at either end), paved, and can accomodate C-123s, Caribous, and -- if necessary -- lightly loaded C-130s. The strip appeared in good condition in late

1972; at worst, it is only slightly damaged and can easily be repaired. A landing strip along Route 512, 12 miles east of Ben Het, is 4,100 feet long and paved (Dak To II, see 1:100,000 map). It could normally handle C-130 supply planes, but it was heavily bombed and will require considerable effort to restore to usable condition. Even if the landing strip were usable, the 190-foot bridge over the Dak Poko between Dak To and Ben Het, destroyed in 1972, would have to be replaced in order to move supplies by road to Ben Het (see 1:100,000 map).

Fog may close landing strips in the Central Highlands at any time of the year. Early morning fog -- common during the October-to-May dry season when several days each month experience fog -- usually dissipates by mid- or late-morning. ICCS personnel should not plan to fly to Ben Het before mid-morning at this time of year. During the May-to-October rainy season, ground hugging clouds may preclude use of the Ben Het landing strip for days at a time.

Under normal conditions, the 40 miles from Kontum to Ben Het could be driven by car in 1 hour. Route 14 from Kontum to the intersection with Route 512 at Kon Hojao is hard-surfaced and all-weather. A 250-foot bridge over the Pak Psi at Dien Binh, 4 miles south of Kon Hojao, was destroyed during the ARVN withdrawal from the region in 1972 (see 1:100,000 map).* Route 512 is hard-surfaced and all-weather to Dak To.

* Both the Dak Psi and the Dak Poko could probably be forded at crossing points near the destroyed bridges by four-wheel drive vehicles during dry weather.

From there to Ben Het it has a laterite surface and, when the Dak Poko bridge is in, is trafficable year-round. (During unusually heavy rains, however, poorly drained stretches may become impassable for most vehicles.) The road degenerates into an unimproved fair-weather road west of Ben Het.

Although rugged ridge-and-valley topography with elevations to more than 8,000 feet characterizes much of South Vietnam's mountainous backbone, such terrain is not typical of the western part of the Central Highlands, including most of Kontum Province. Ben Het is situated on a plateau. Terrain is rolling with prevailing elevations of 2,000 feet or so; streams are only slightly entrenched; and scattered hills and ridges rise a few hundred feet above the plateau. Two such terrain features adjacent to Route 512 were used by Communist forces as bases to fire on US and ARVN vehicles traveling on the road. "Mortar Mountain" is located about 2 miles to the north of the road while "Rocket Ridge" parallels the road to the south (see 1:100,000 map). The Ben Het camp is spread over two hills which rise several hundred feet above the surrounding landscape. The landing strip and helicopter pads are at the base of the hills.

Elephant grass with scattered trees is the most prevalent vegetation type for several miles in all directions from the Ben Het camp. The grass is coarse, up to 12 feet high, and can easily conceal personnel traveling through it. Stands of dense forest form a patchwork in the grasslands. Forests blanket most higher lying terrain features; they are of mixed broadleaf evergreen species that rise to 125 feet high, with up to three canopy levels. The presence of undergrowth is variable, depending on the amount of sunlight that penetrates the canopies to the forest floor.

Concealment of personnel moving through the forests, whether from air or ground observation, is excellent at all times of the year. Despite its hilltop site, ICCS personnel at Ben Het will be unable to effectively monitor NVA infiltration through the region.

There are no wetland rice paddies in the Ben Het region; nor are there many slash-and-burn plots, active or abandoned, for the cultivation of dryland rice or maize because of the dearth of people. Small tea, coffee, and rubber plantations are scattered along the main roads of the Central Highlands but there are none near Ben Het. The nearest, a tea plantation along Route 512 between the Dak Poko and Dak To, has been abandoned and is overgrown with brush and trees. Several abandoned rubber plantations are located along Route 14 north of Kontum.

More than three-fourths of the yearly rain at Ben Het falls during the months May to October. Maximum rainfall occurs during June, July, and August when Kontum (the nearest station where rainfall has been recorded) receives more than 13 inches in each month. Rainy season weather is characterized by low-lying clouds, torrential showers, and severe thunderstorms. Showers occur almost daily, usually starting in the mid- or late-afternoon and continuing well into the evening. Thunderstorms, which may develop several days a month during the rainy season, frequently disrupt radio communications for 2 or 3 hours.

The months of December, January, and February receive the least amount of rainfall; each month has no more than a brief shower or two (Kontum normally records less than an inch for the 3-month period). Despite the scanty rainfall, thunderclouds do frequently develop. But, as often as not, they do not bring rain. Perhaps the most uncomfortable

feature of the dry season is the dust. Choking red dust from the laterite soils on the roads becomes especially thick when churned up by heavy traffic. Dusty conditions are not confined to the dry season; dry periods lasting for a few days during the rainy season may experience heavy dust. Showers serve as a welcome dust depressant.

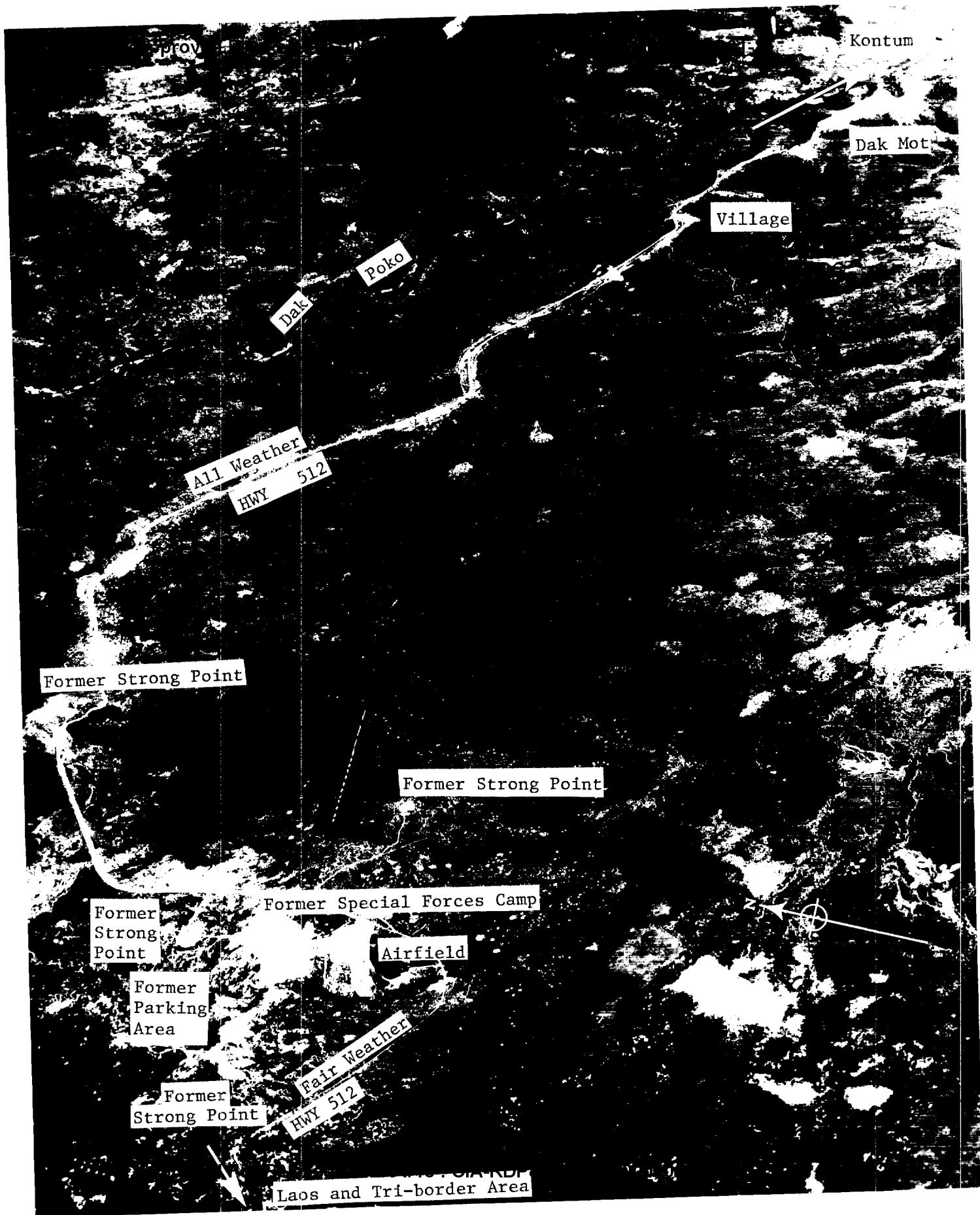
Temperatures are cooler in the Central Highlands than at Saigon. But the Annam Mountains protect the Highlands from the cool winds that chill the northern coast of South Vietnam from November to March. Nighttime temperatures nonetheless may dip into the 50s during this period with minimums in January. A light jacket may be needed. April and May usually record the highest temperatures when they may climb well into the 80s or, occasionally, into the lower 90s. Normal daytime highs are in the upper 70s or low 80s in the June-October rainy season.

Few people now live in the Central Highlands zone extending for 10 to 15 miles east of the border. The few Montagnards (mostly Jarai) that still lived in the Ben Het region in 1972 fled southward towards Kontum when the ARVN abandoned the camp. Earlier refugees from the region had fled south as far as Pleiku Province. While villages along Route 512 on the west bank of the Dak Poko may still be occupied by Communist sympathizers, no one lives between these villages and Ben Het, 6 miles away. A few inhabited villages are scattered along the road east of the Dak Poko; the highway strip between Kon Hojao and Kontum supports a somewhat higher population. Some Montagnard refugees have been moving back into Kontum Province from resettlement camps in Pleiku since the cease-fire. Movement back into the Ben Het area, however, cannot be expected until the military situation becomes more stable.

A final word of caution for ICCS personnel at Ben Het: off-road movement should be avoided as mines and booby traps planted by both the ARVN and NVA saturate much of the region. The area west of the camp for a distance of 1,500 feet or so to either side of the road has been seeded by ARVN Rangers several times with both anti-personnel and anti-tank devices (see Sketch Map).

*BEST COPY
Available*

6/17/98



prov

Kontum

Dak Mot

Village

Dak

Poko

All Weather

HWY 512

Former Strong Point

Former Strong Point

Former Strong Point

Former Special Forces Camp

Airfield

Former Parking Area

Former Strong Point

Fair Weather

HWY 512

Laos and Tri-border Area

BEN HET

Approved F

01-3
Former Strong

Kontum

Former Parking Area

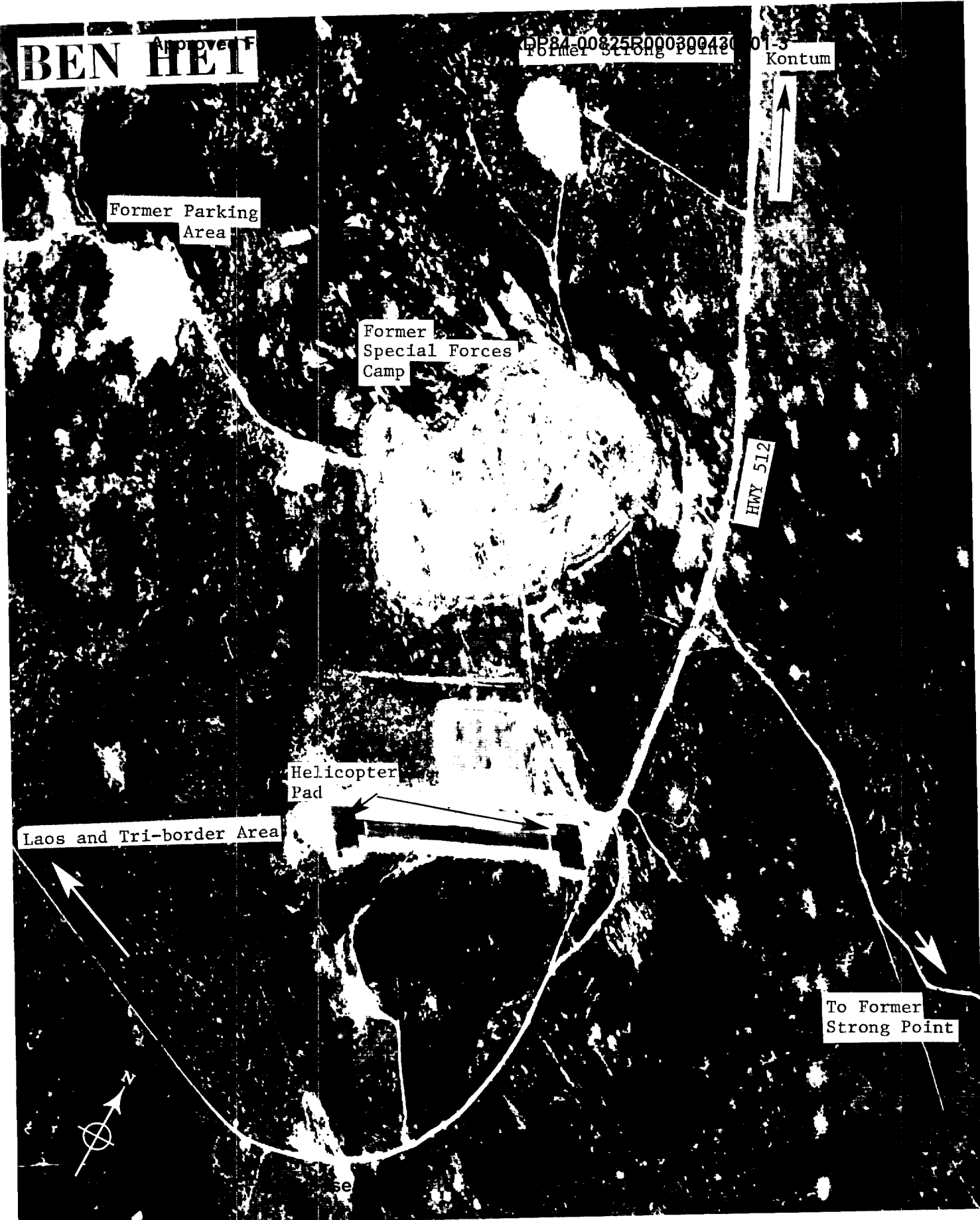
Former Special Forces Camp

HWY 512

Helicopter Pad

Laos and Tri-border Area

To Former Strong Point



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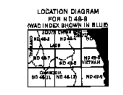
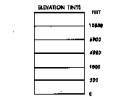
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Typical terrain along Dak Poko, east of Ben Het.

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1:250,000 - EDITION 1
ATTOPEU, LAOS
JOG (A) 1401 ND 48-B
LAOS, VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA

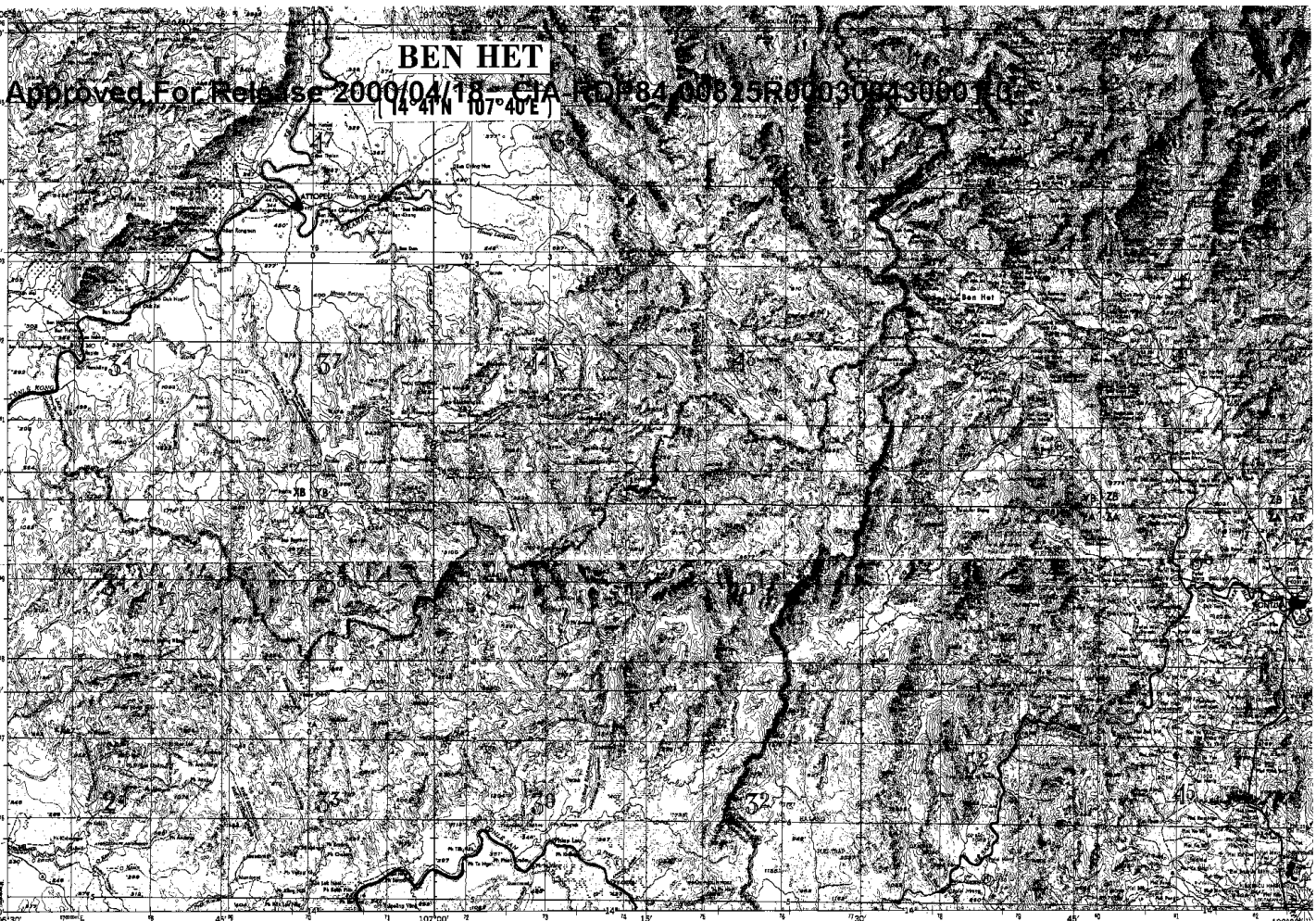


GLOSSARY table with columns for symbols and their corresponding terrain or feature names.

CAUTION
ALL INFORMATION CURRENT THROUGH
THIS MAP IS UNCLASSIFIED EXCEPT
WHERE SHOWN OTHERWISE. FOR
CLASSIFICATION AND DECLASSIFICATION
INSTRUCTIONS, SEE THE
CLASSIFICATION AND DECLASSIFICATION
GUIDANCE.



1:250,000 - EDITION 1
ATTOPEU, LAOS
JOG (A) 1401 ND 48-B



BEN HET
Approved For Release 2000/04/18 : CIA-RDP84-00825R000300430001-0
(14°41'N 107°40'E)

**ELEVATIONS IN FEET
COTES EXPRIMEES EN PIEDS**
Elevations are shown in feet and meters. Contour interval is 200 feet (60 meters).
Spot heights are shown in feet and meters. Contour interval is 200 feet (60 meters).
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JOINT OPERATIONS GRAPHIC (AIR)
Scale 1:250,000
Contour interval approximately 200 feet (60 meters) with supplementary contours at approximately 170 feet (50 meters).
EQUIDISTANCE APPROXIMATE DES COURBES NORMALES, 60 METRES (170 METRES); COURBES INTERCALAIRES A 170 PIEDS (50 METRES).
CAUTION: Contour values are approximate; contours of 100 feet and 200 feet are 10 feet higher than true values.
ATTN: Les valeurs des courbes de niveau sont des valeurs approximatives. Les courbes de 100 et 200 pieds sont 10 pieds plus hautes que les vraies valeurs.

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CONTROLLED ARRAYS
MAGNETIC VARIATION
VISUAL AID AND OBSTRUCTION
MAGNETIC VARIATION
VISUAL AID AND OBSTRUCTION
MAGNETIC VARIATION
VISUAL AID AND OBSTRUCTION

NOTES
1. This map is unclassified except where shown otherwise.
2. All information current through this map is unclassified except where shown otherwise.
3. For classification and declassification instructions, see the classification and declassification guidance.

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