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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Intelligence Memorandum

*Construction and Logistic Activities
in the Khe Sanh Area*

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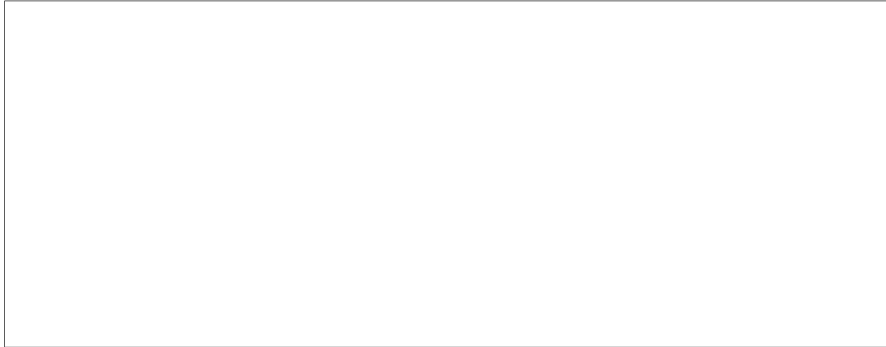
7 February 1968



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
7 February 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Construction and Logistic Activities
In the Khe Sanh Area

Summary

The deployment of more than 22,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops in the Khe Sanh area and upwards of 12,500 troops in the north-central DMZ area has been paralleled by a rapid acceleration of enemy logistic and construction activities. These activities point to the acquisition of a capability for sustained offensive operations.

The construction of two new roads from Laos toward the Khe Sanh area will facilitate the enemy's ability to sustain the resupply of his forces. Construction of new fortified positions and weapons emplacements in the immediate vicinity of Khe Sanh appears to be well advanced. These emplacements will be extremely difficult to neutralize and will provide the enemy with an improved capability to defend areas he now holds and to interdict friendly movement in and out of the Khe Sanh area. These activities are hampered and disrupted by intensive US air strikes, but the enemy appears to be pressing his preparations and they could be nearing completion.

Information on logistic operations during the past five months indicates a sharp increase in the volume of supplies moved into the area. The estimated traffic has been more than adequate to meet

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared jointly by the Office of Economic Research and the Vietnamese Affairs Staff and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence. It should be read in conjunction with the CIA memorandum, "The Enemy Threat to Khe Sanh" of 2 February 1968.

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the logistic requirements of these forces, particularly for ammunition, at greatly intensified rates of combat for a period of 60-90 days. There is no reason to doubt that the Communist rear service units can continue to move daily both the estimated 35 tons of supplies required by the forces at Khe Sanh and the additional 20 tons for the forces in the north-central DMZ area under heavy combat conditions.

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New Road Construction

1. Aerial photography has revealed two new roads being built by the North Vietnamese from a point near Ban Dong in Laos on Route 9 eastward to the Khe Sanh area. These roads, detected in the past month, parallel Route 9 to the north and south and converge on the Khe Sanh area from the northwest and southwest. (See Figure 1). Work on both roads has progressed to the Laos - South Vietnam border, which is within 12 to 15 miles of Khe Sanh, and probably is continuing into South Vietnam. This new road network significantly increases the North Vietnamese logistic capability near the DMZ, and reflects the intensive nature of enemy preparations for major operations in the Khe Sanh area.

2. The Communists have also gained the use of Route 9 at least as far as the Vietnamese border, having driven off in late January the Lao Army battalion (BV-33) which had controlled the Ban Houei Sane area and blocked the use of Route 9 to the Communists since mid-1961. Large bunkers and storage areas have been detected near the terminus of the southernmost of the two new routes, and numerous secondary explosions have followed B-52 strikes in the area.

Supply Depots

3. The Tchepone area of Laos, about 20 miles west of the Vietnamese border, has long been known to be a major staging point for the movement of supplies from North Vietnam through the southern Laos panhandle. Numerous new depots and distribution points in Laos and the DMZ area have been built in recent months to support combat preparations. A series of storage depots or way stations has been established on a north-south axis across the demilitarized zone about 10 to 15 miles east of the Lao border. Additional storage areas have been detected near the eastern terminus of the southernmost of the two recently built roads. Other storage and distribution points have been detected at points in the hill mass northwest of the main US base at Khe Sanh. Jungle cover precludes estimating the capacity of these facilities, but they appear to be extensive.

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Fortifications

4. There are numerous indications of recent construction of fortifications ranging from groups of foxholes to entrenchments, bunkers, weapons emplacements, and large strongpoints. Some of those in the northwest quadrant from Khe Sanh had been built during the heavy Communist pressure in that sector in April and May 1967. One North Vietnamese regiment that has remained in the area since then may have maintained some of these positions in usable condition. More recent construction includes a number of bunkers, entrenchments, and large strongpoints in the hill mass south of Route 9 and extending from the area southeast of Khe Sanh westward to the border of Laos. These positions have been built in some depth.

5. Other new fortifications and weapons emplacements have been detected in and behind the ridges east and north of the main complex. Considerable fortification and entrenchment activity has also been observed north of Route 9 along the hills and ridges west and southwest of the main US base. Photography taken in late January shows several large but unoccupied groups of foxholes--one numbering over 400--between Hill 861 and the main base. One group of foxholes is within 1,000 meters of the base. (See Figures 2 and 3).

6. These activities suggest that the Communist forces are prepared to defend the areas they now hold, to encircle US positions completely, to extend their positions progressively closer to ours in siege fashion, and to prepare in advance assembly areas from which assaults can be mounted. If these positions are subsequently connected by communications trenches, the Communists will be able to maneuver their forces from one portion of the battlefield to another under cover from friendly fire. They would also be in position to block movement from the main base at the airfield to outlying US positions on the hills to the northwest. These techniques are similar to those employed by the Communists in their prolonged siege campaign at Dien Bien Phu.

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Location of Mortar and Rocket Sites

7. The selected weapons sites shown in Figures 2 and 3 are representative of many such sites in the Khe Sanh area. The circles drawn on the map indicate ranges from which weapons of various types can be fired on the base. These include some weapons (82-mm. mortars) which are organic to enemy infantry units. The 120-mm. mortar ring also approximates the range of 75-mm. pack howitzers which the enemy is believed to have in the area. The 160-mm. mortar ring approximates the range of the 122-mm. rockets which the Communists have already employed at Khe Sanh. Thus far, antiaircraft positions for 37-mm. weapons have been detected only at positions from which they can protect rear depot areas. Positions for 12.7-mm. antiaircraft machine guns, however, have been observed within 1,500 meters north and northeast of the airfield. Emplacements for 152-mm. artillery weapons have been detected at distances beyond maximum range of the main US base, although weapons in these emplacements could reach some of the outposts northwest of the airfield and the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei to the west.

8. It is evident from the terrain features and enemy positions that the Khe Sanh base and airfield are vulnerable to interdiction from these known emplacements. Profiles of the terrain in a straight line from each indicated enemy position to the center of the Khe Sanh runway show that in nearly every case the enemy has the advantage of cover and concealment from friendly ground fire, although the positions may be more vulnerable to air attack. There is little doubt that for every location noted there are many more which cannot be detected from the air.

The Logistic Build-up

9. The deployment of more than 22,000 NVA troops in the Khe Sanh area and upwards of 12,500 in the north-central DMZ area was accomplished by a rapid acceleration of enemy logistic activities. Intelligence on logistic operations during the past five months also indicates a sharp increase in the volume of supplies moved into the area. During January an estimated 120 tons of supplies or more per day were moved through the

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Laos panhandle from North Vietnam. This volume is more than twice the supplies normally needed from North Vietnam by the Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam. In addition, substantial amounts of ammunition are moved directly to the DMZ area. The estimated traffic during this period has been adequate to provide stockpiles sufficient for 60-90 days of combat at greatly intensified rates.

Traffic Through the Laos Panhandle

10. The volume of supplies moved into the Laos panhandle from North Vietnam during the last five months has been significantly greater than that moved during comparable periods in the past. The observed increases in traffic have paralleled closely the heavy deployment of troops to the Khe Sanh area, and most of these supplies seem destined for these forces.

11. According to reports of roadwatch teams along Route 15 in North Vietnam just north of the Laotian border, truck traffic moving toward Laos during the last four months of 1967 averaged about 17 trucks a day compared with 15 a day during the comparable period of 1966. These trucks could have delivered over 5,000 tons of supplies for the Communist-held portions of Laos and South Vietnam, or over 40 tons per day during this period in 1967.* During January 1968, southbound traffic on the same route increased to a daily average of 26 trucks compared with an average of 22 for January 1967. Over 1,900 tons could have been delivered during January 1968, or an average of about 60 tons per day.

12. Roadwatch reports are not available on Routes 137/912, the other truck route into the Laotian panhandle from North Vietnam. An analysis of reports of aerial reconnaissance over this route reveals a substantial increase in truck activity on this route in 1967. Although there is no way to quantify the tonnage moving on Routes 137/912, it almost certainly equaled the tonnage moved on Route 15 and could have been more. Moreover, aerial reconnaissance reports show considerable truck activity on Route 911 and on Route 9, which

*The estimates of supplies moved include an allowance of 20 percent for losses in transit and losses due to air operations.

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lead to the two new roads that now branch off from Route 9 to the border of South Vietnam in the direction of Khe Sanh. Roadwatch teams consistently report a low level of truck traffic on Routes 92 and 96 south of Route 9, indicating that most trucks may have discharged their loads in the vicinity of Route 9. Furthermore, the increase in truck traffic in this area observed by aerial reconnaissance began after the first of November 1967.

Traffic to the DMZ Area

13. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the movement of ammunition to Communist units believed to be located just north or south of the DMZ reached a high level in November and continued high in December and January. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] it is estimated that at least 500 tons of ammunition were shipped to the area of the DMZ in November, about 420 tons in December, and about 250 tons during 1-22 January. Data for earlier months show much lower volumes,

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14. During November and December nearly two thirds of the identified tonnage shipped was artillery ammunition. Shipments of anti-aircraft ammunition ranked second. The small shipments of mortar ammunition cannot be explained, but there is a large volume of unidentified ammunition. The identified shipments are shown in the following tabulation:

	Short Tons	
	1967	
	November	December
Total (rounded)	500	420
Artillery (152 and 122 mm., and 85 mm. antitank)	320	240
Anti-aircraft (100, 85, 57, 37, and 12.7 mm.)	41	83
Mortar (82 mm.)	3	0
Rocket (140 mm.)	7	0
Recoilless rifle (122.4 and 82 mm.)	3	3
Explosives, mines, grenades, and unidentified	120	94

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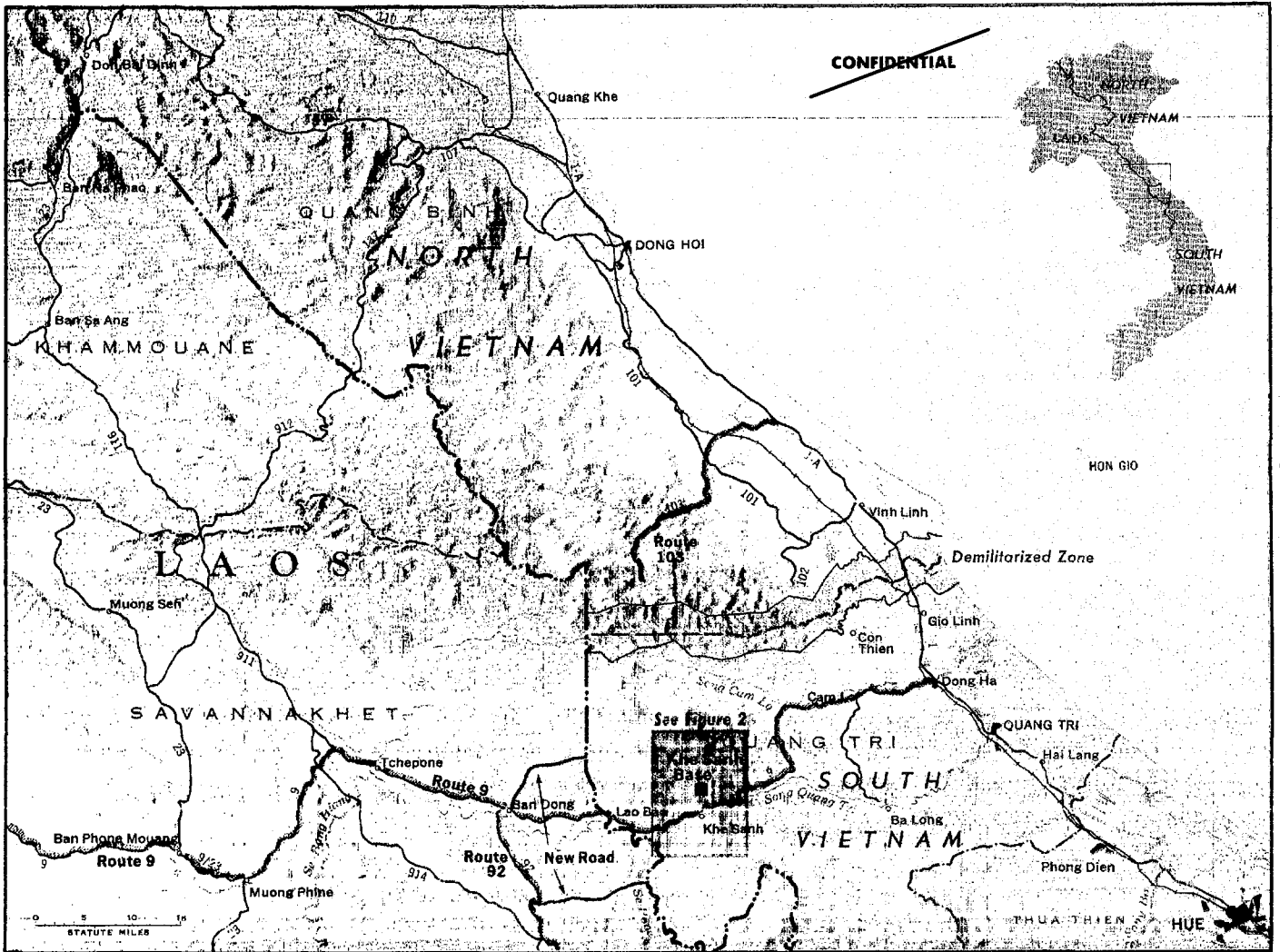
15. Communist forces currently deployed in the Khe Sanh area would require on the order of 32 to 37 tons of supplies per day under sustained heavy combat conditions.* Ammunition supplies would account for 6 to 10 tons of the total daily resupply requirement. Actual consumption of ammunition would depend of course upon combat intensity. The requirements given above are for two NVA divisions--the 325C and the 304th--comprising at least six infantry regiments with artillery support. These forces for the most part probably receive their supplies from those delivered by truck into Laos.

16. In addition to these forces, at least two infantry regiments of the North Vietnamese 320th Division have been deployed in an area in the north-central DMZ. The role of the 320th Division is probably to harass and interdict allied reinforcements moving from the east toward Khe Sanh. In this role their logistic requirements would probably be relatively less than those of the forces in the immediate Khe Sanh area. On this basis, the requirements of the 320th Division are calculated at between 17 and 21 tons of supplies a day, with ammunition accounting for 3 to 6 tons of the total. These forces probably receive their supplies from across the DMZ.

17. Since the deployment of these divisions in the Khe Sanh and DMZ areas and the logistic build-up were parallel developments, Communist forces probably began stockpiling of weapons, ammunition, and equipment possibly by mid-November or earlier. With due allowance for materials already consumed, the estimated flow of traffic has been sufficient to provide a stockpile of from 60 to 90 days. On the basis of past experience it is estimated that the Communists have a daily resupply capability to maintain these stockpiles at that level.

*The infantry battalions are given a rate of combat of 1 day in 10. The artillery regiment and the two AAA battalions are given a support role of 1 day in 3. These rates of combat are significantly higher than the 1 in 30 day rate used by MACV as representative of the 1967 campaigns.

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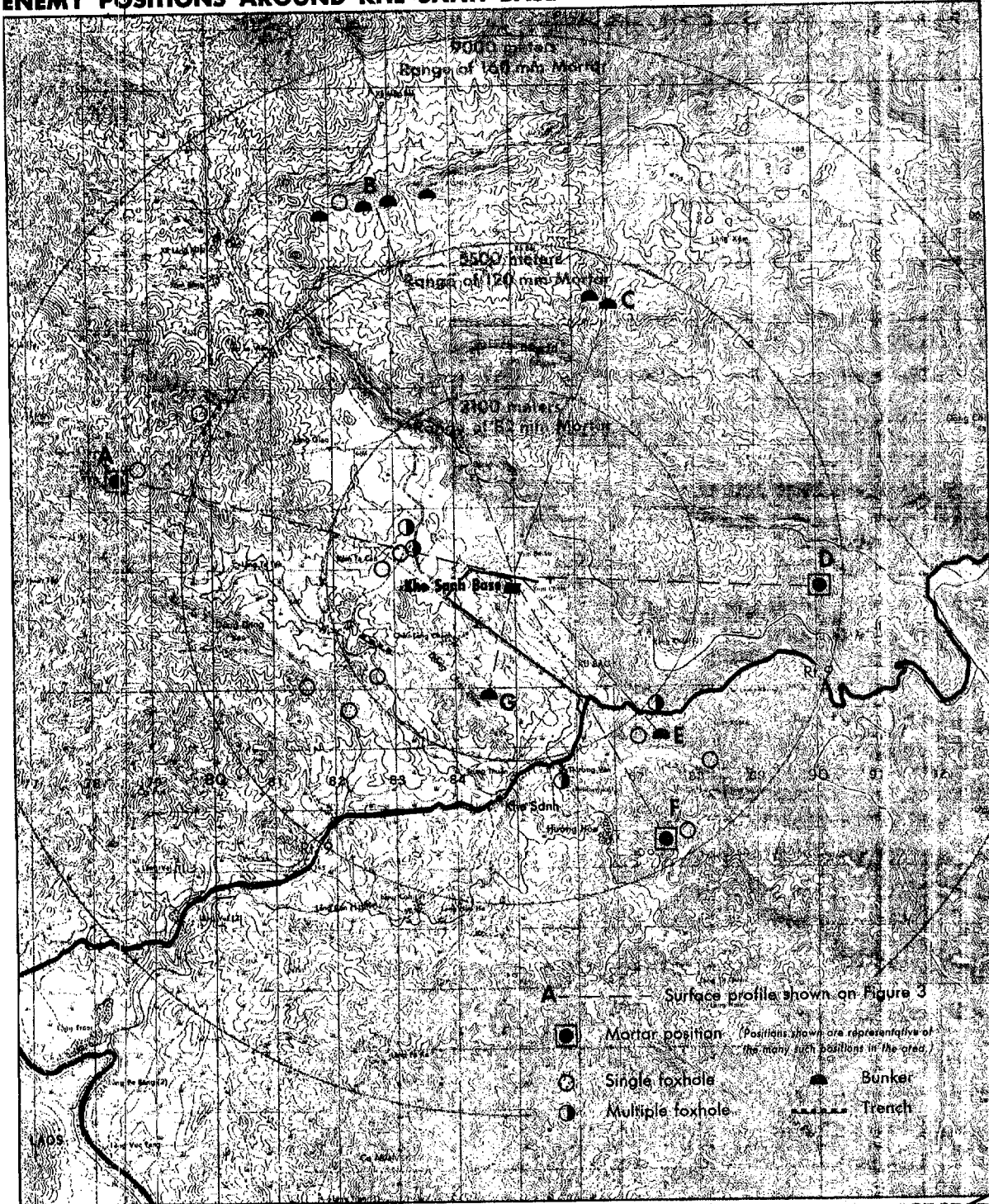


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Figure 1

ENEMY POSITIONS AROUND KHE SANH BASE

Figure 2



- A — Surface profile shown on Figure 3
- Mortar position (Positions shown are representative of the many such positions in the area.)
- Single foxhole
- ⊗ Multiple foxhole
- ▲ Bunker
- - - - Trench

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