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Memorandum

COMMUNIST ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN LAOS

9 December 1965

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29 JUL 1997

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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No. 3097/65

9 December 1965

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
MEMORANDUM

SUMMARY

The Communists have made a substantial effort over the past year to expand and improve their supply routes in the Laotian panhandle. This effort is clear evidence of Hanoi's determination to backstop the Communist military campaign in South Vietnam. It increases the Communist capability to support an even greater level of fighting there. It also raises the prospect of stepped-up military activity inside Laos, which might look attractive to Hanoi as a means of distracting our attention from South Vietnam.

The program, which has involved upgrading existing roads and trails and building new ones, is now ready to show results. With the recent advent of the dry season, [REDACTED] a key section of the supply network, is already reporting trucks moving south in numbers comparable to last season. The Communists should be able to do better this season. By building a number of alternates and bypasses they have also reduced the vulnerability of the supply system to interdiction by air action.

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

COMMUNIST ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN LAOS

1. The Laotian panhandle for several years has provided Hanoi with a primary avenue for supporting the war effort in South Vietnam. The sequence of roads, rivers, trails, supply dumps, and base areas runs through parts of Laos which have been in Communist hands for some four years or even longer.

2. Over the last year, and especially in the past several months, the Communists have been hard at work building additional truckable roads which lead ultimately to the South Vietnamese border. The effort quite obviously carries a high priority tag. One measure of this is that Hanoi, despite a crying need at home, has sent mechanical earth-moving equipment to the panhandle road program--a first in this remote part of Laos.

3. The program, pushed intensively right through the summer monsoon, is now ready to show results. The North Vietnamese can now send trucks 100 miles farther south than they could before, all the way to the South Vietnam border southwest of Da Nang. They have also made the system less susceptible to outages in wet weather.

4. Moreover, by building a number of alternates and bypasses, the Communists have reduced the vulnerability of their supply system to air action. Aerial photography shows they have built an elaborate vine-covered trellis over exposed parts of at least one section of new road. Also, convoys now move almost exclusively at night.

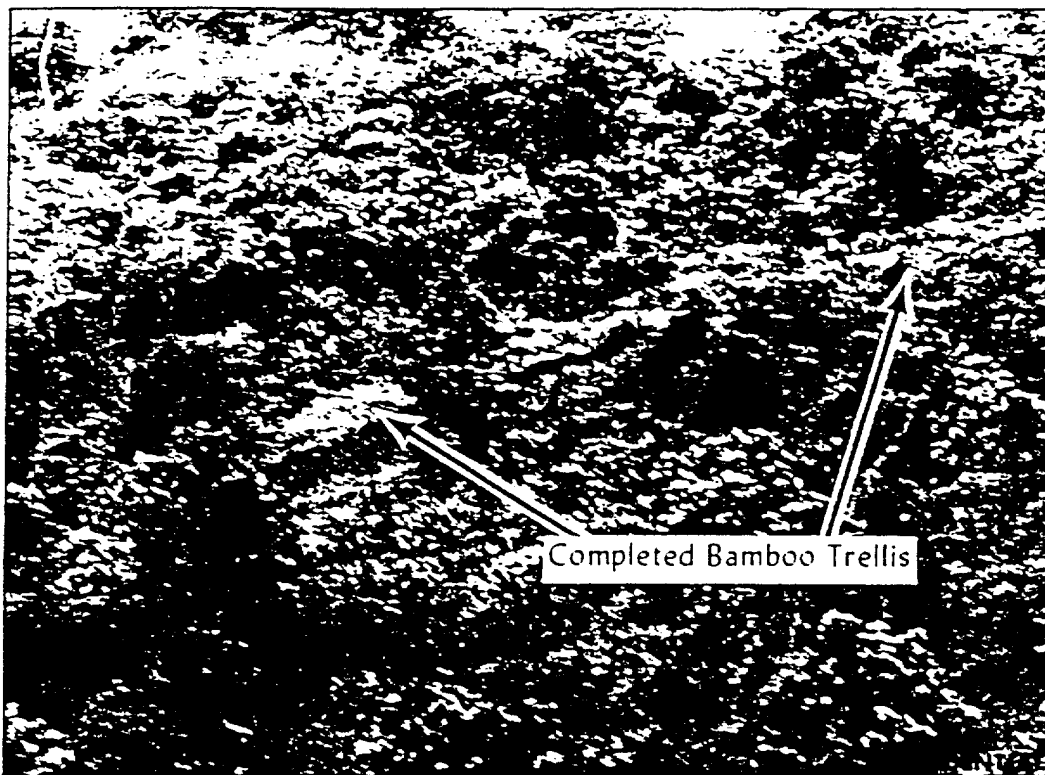
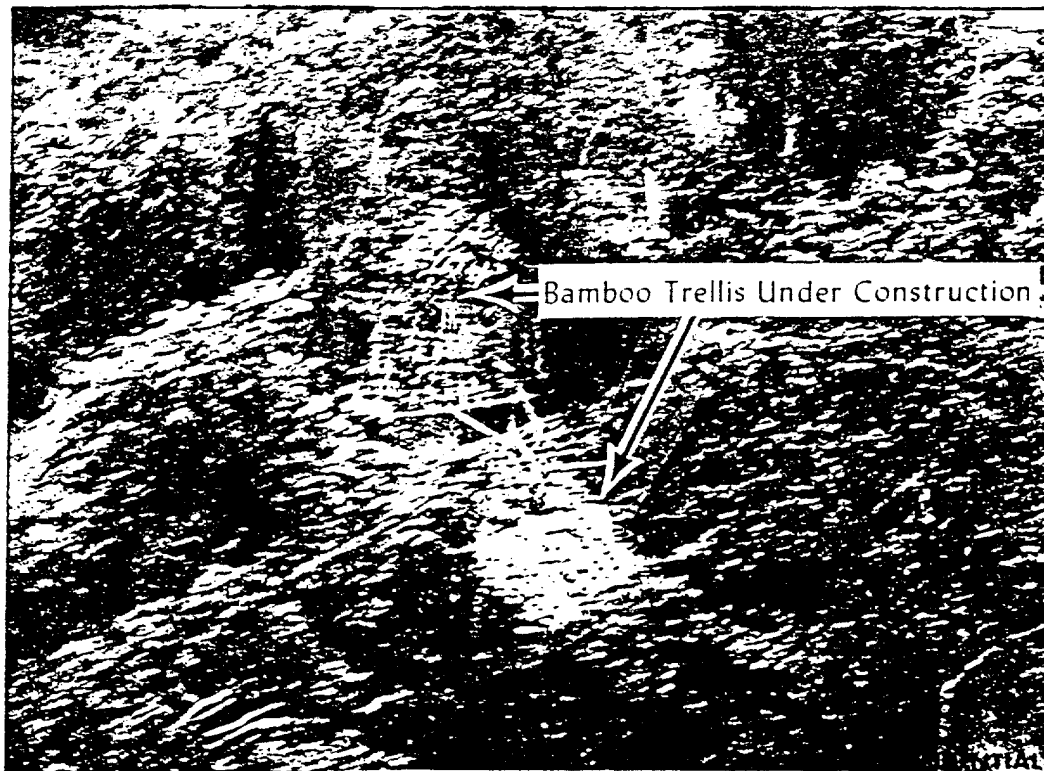
5. [REDACTED] southbound truck convoys began moving about a month ago, a month earlier than last year. In the past ten days an average of some 17 trucks per day have moved past this single observation point. Last year the Communists averaged the same figure over the six-month dry season. Recent evidence that the Communists are using fuel tanker trucks for the first time indicates that they intend to do better this dry season.

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

6. We estimate that the Communists could theoretically deliver some 300 tons per day to South Vietnam during the six-month dry season, if they used the road network to its maximum. To do so, however, the Communists will have to move seven times as many trucks on the roads as they did during the last season, a development which would increase their exposure to air interdiction.

7. A force of at least 8,000 Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese is ranged along the road net. Additional troops may have been transferred into this area recently. These forces, like Communist forces elsewhere in Laos, are in position to launch attacks on government positions at any time with little advance warning. At present, the prime task of these forces is to prevent Souvanna's troops from moving eastward and interfering with the movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies over the road and trail network to South Vietnam, where they are pressing the guerrilla campaign against American and South Vietnamese forces.

PHOTO A



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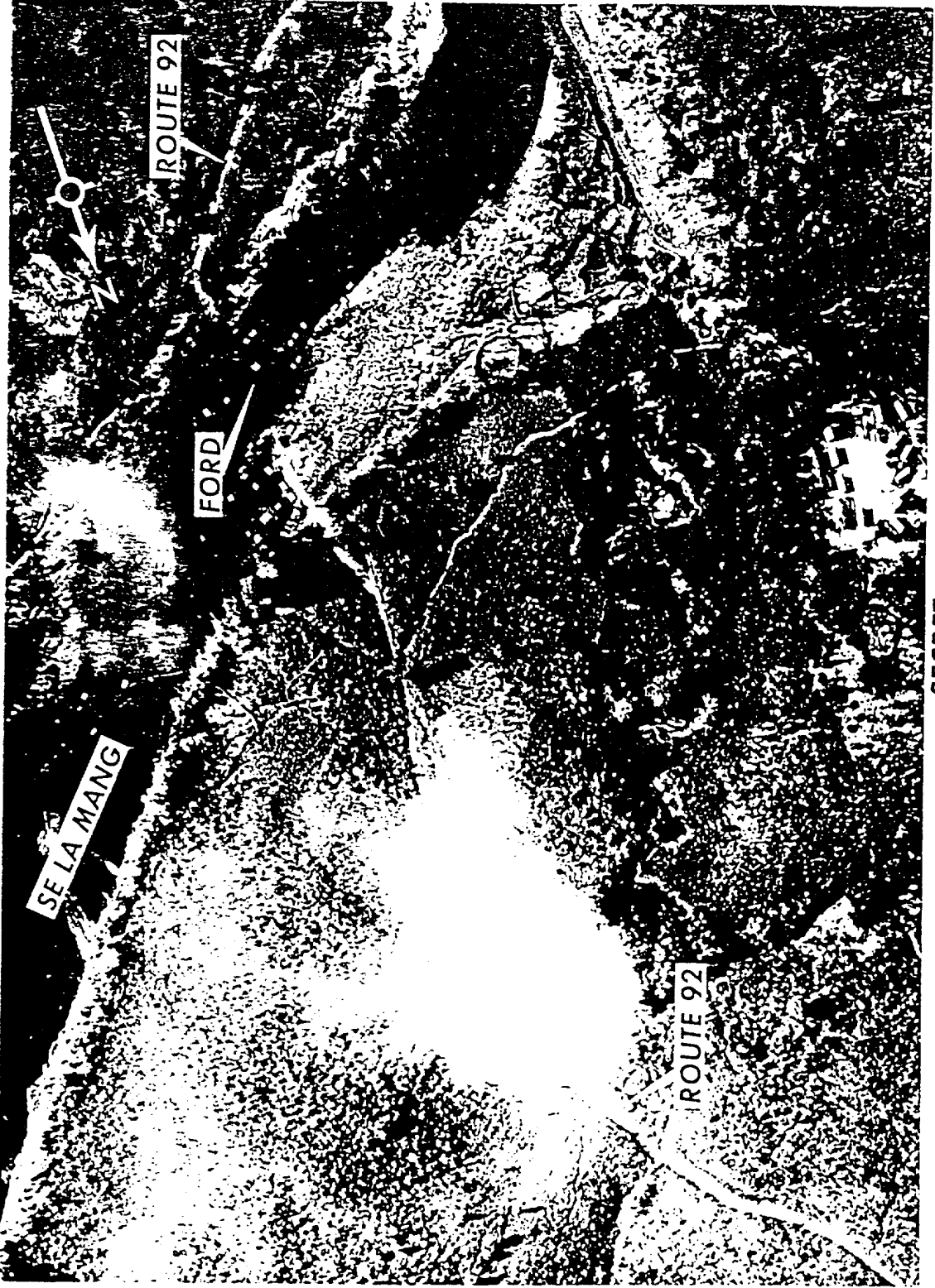
LAOS: ROUTE 911

PHOTO B



~~SECRET~~
~~NO FORN DISSEM~~

PHOTO C



~~SECRET~~
~~NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

PHOTO D

