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29 September 1966

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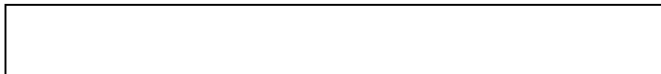
INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES IN NORTH VIETNAM

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: OCT 2002

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

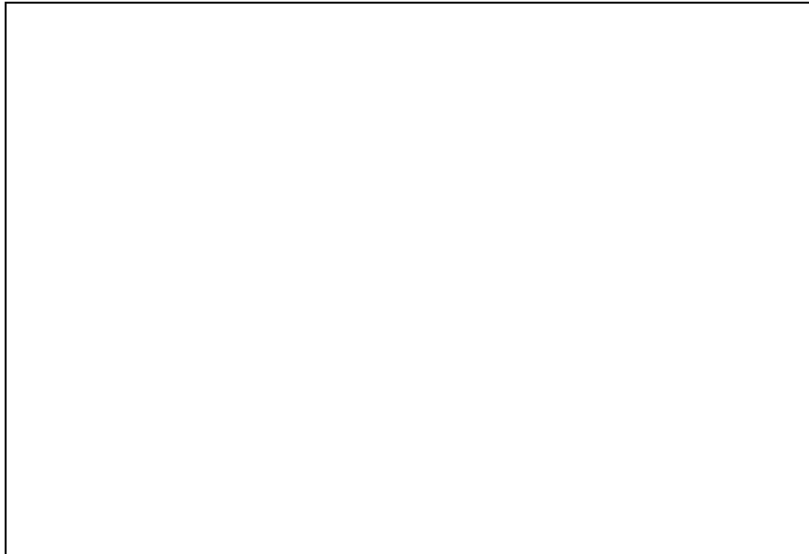
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
29 September 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Chinese Communist Forces in North Vietnam

Summary

There has been no significant change in the Chinese Communist military forces in North Vietnam during the past three months.

[redacted]

at least seven major Chinese units in North Vietnam, all of them probably of division size. One is known to be an air force antiaircraft artillery (AAA) division. Another is a railway engineer division. The other five are thought to be an army AAA division and four special engineer divisions (see map on reverse of page).

These construction units are being supported by service units believed to be of regimental size, drawn from the adjacent regions of southern China. In all, there is an estimated total of 25,000 to 45,000 Chinese support troops in North Vietnam.

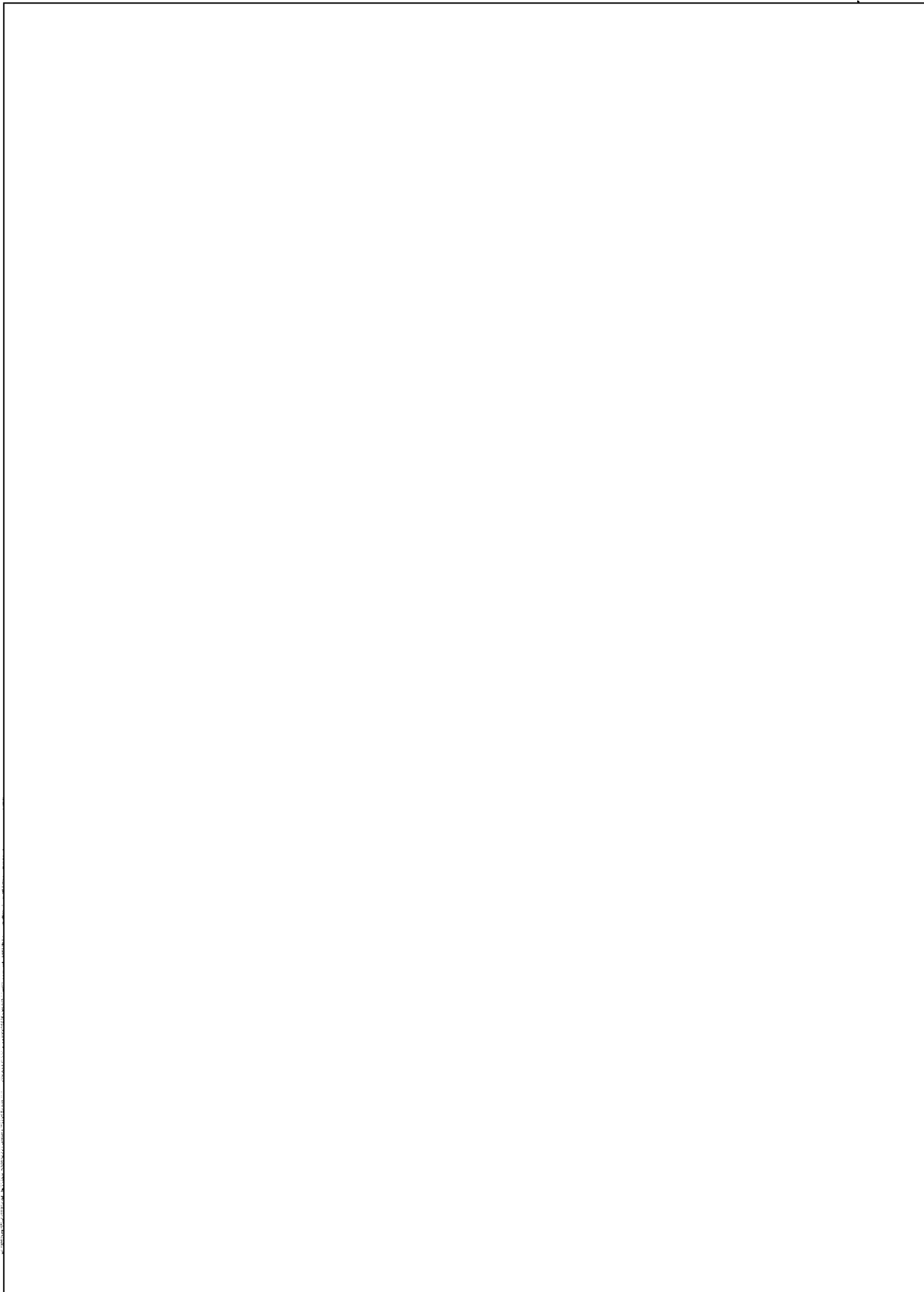
[redacted]

The rail line between the border and Kep may have been converted for use by both standard and meter-gauge rolling stock by adding a third rail. The new standard-gauge line to the Thai Nguyen iron and steel complex from Kep is nearing completion.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced by CIA. Aside from the normal substantive exchange with other agencies at the working level this paper has not been coordinated outside CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Research and Reports.

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Construction is continuing at two major airfields in northern North Vietnam. Photographic analysis of the activities at one of them, the field at Yen Bai, clearly identifies it as a Chinese project. Moreover, both COMINT and collateral reports support a Chinese presence at Yen Bai since August 1965. The runway under construction there now measures more than 10,000 feet.

The other airfield possibly under construction by the Chinese is located at Son Tay (previously referred to as Song Dong), about 20 miles west of Hanoi. Preparations for the runway base now extend about 8,300 feet. There is no firm evidence of Chinese involvement, but the scope of the project, the rapid rate of construction, and the large amount of construction equipment indicate an effort that might strain the capability of the Vietnamese.

A recently captured North Vietnamese Navy officer reports that Chinese engineers are constructing coastal defense sites on Cat Ba Island near Haiphong. His statements have been supported by analysis of photographs of the northeast coastal area. Chinese units may also be participating in road construction and improvement in the North Vietnam - South China border area.

All the evidence continues to point to a logistic support role for the Chinese forces in North Vietnam. As the construction projects are completed the Chinese engineering-type units may return to China. There is some evidence that a few of the smaller units already have gone.

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Recent Developments

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1. The organization and composition of Chinese Forces in North Vietnam (CFNVN) has remained essentially unchanged during the past three months. Some minor realignments, the appearance of new entities,

[redacted]
have been observed, but these changes have not significantly affected either the strength or the mission of the Chinese units. [redacted]
[redacted]

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2. There have been several new developments, however.

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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4.

[redacted] the suspect headquarters may have been in existence as early as June 1965 when Chinese support units first began deploying into northern North Vietnam. [redacted]
[redacted]

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5.

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This suggests that if an element of a Chinese infantry division has deployed into North Vietnam, it is probably only a very small contingent, possibly a support element such as an antiaircraft artillery or engineer unit.

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It seems likely, therefore, that the unit at Yen Bai is, in fact, the 67th AAA Division.

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Return of Some Units to China

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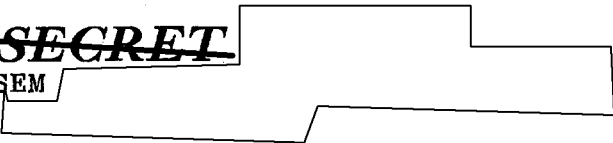
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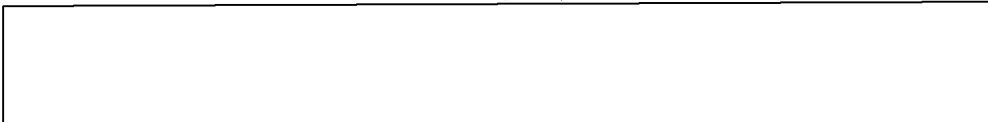


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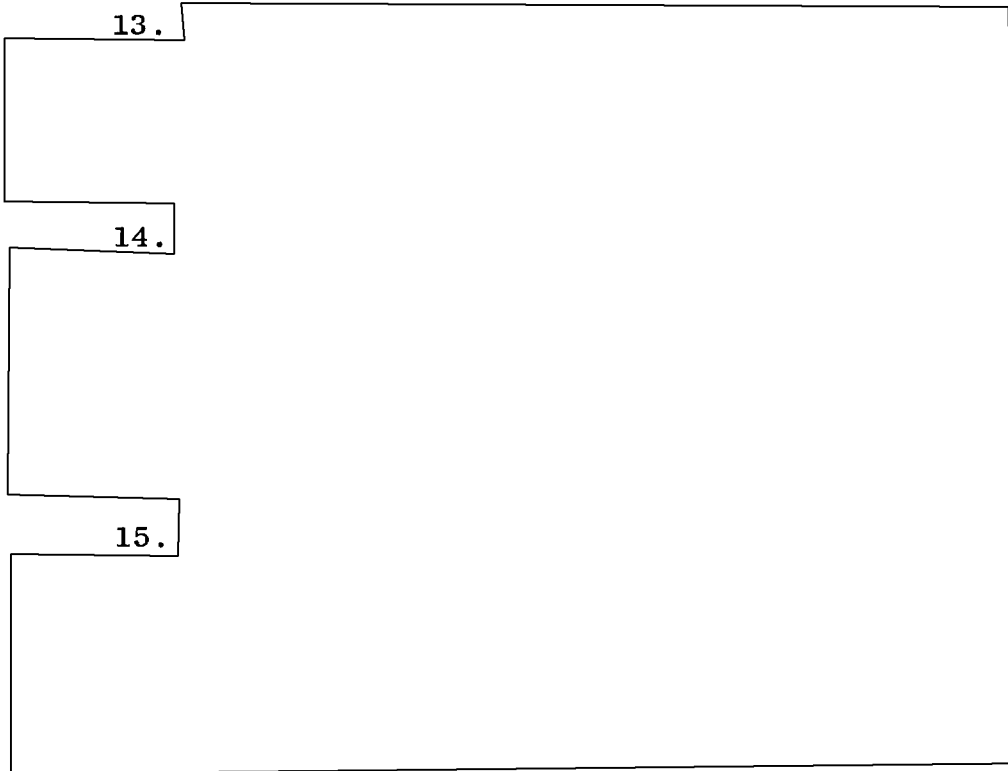
[Redacted] One of these, which may have been a special construction unit [Redacted] in the Lao Cai area of northwest North Vietnam, appears to have had a construction function and may have been engaged in road improvements.

12. A possible counterpart of this unit in northeast North Vietnam may also have withdrawn.

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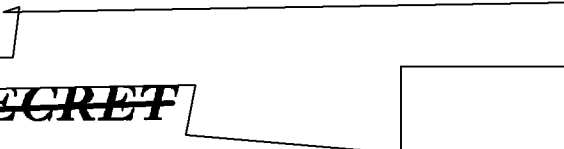
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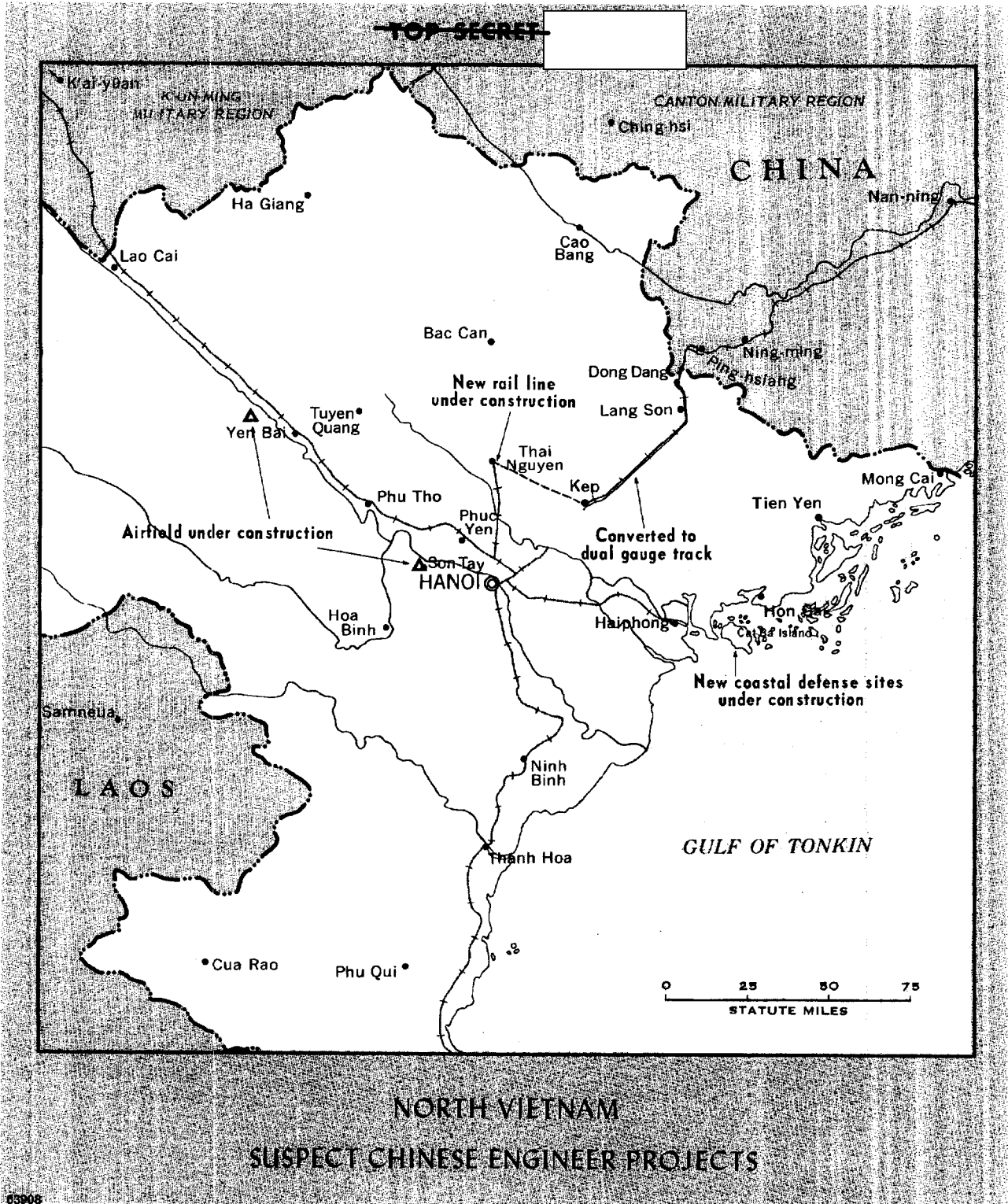
16. We continue to believe that there are at least seven divisional-level Chinese units in North Vietnam. However, our past strength estimate of 30,000 to 47,000 troops has been revised downward to a range of 25,000 to 45,000 troops on the basis of

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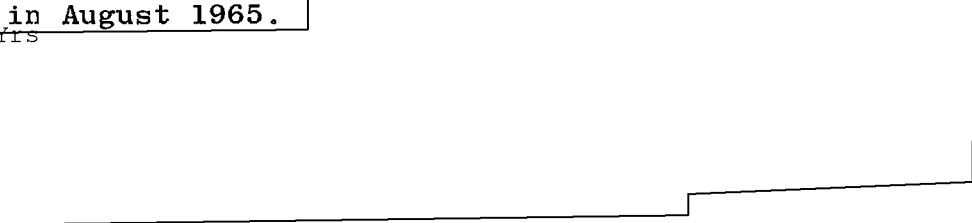
newly obtained organizational data for Chinese ground force units.

Chinese Construction Activity in North Vietnam (See Map)

17. The construction activity at Yen Bai was firmly identified as airfield construction by low-level photography this June. The photography shows that grading and leveling have enlarged the airfield to an area of 10,500 by 950 feet. Photography also revealed that since last fall over 700 storage/support buildings have been built in the vicinity. Over 400 of these have gone up since December. This number is more than would be required for support of airfield construction alone and may point to development of a major support base.

18. There is new evidence that the airfield project at Yen Bai is being built by the Chinese. Two North Vietnamese soldiers, captured in South Vietnam at different times and different places in 1966, reported the arrival of Chinese AAA troops at Yen Bai in August 1965.

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19. Chinese AAA troops were apparently deployed to Yen Bai for the specific purpose of protecting the airfield project, which was started in November 1965. Recent photography has revealed 50 AA sites (20 of which were occupied) and 56 automatic weapons sites surrounding the airfield construction and support base. This is approximately the number of sites required to emplace the guns of a Chinese army AAA division.

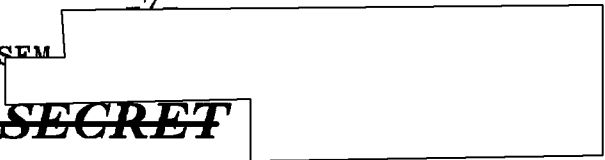
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20. There are no comparable collateral reports to support indications of a Chinese presence at Son Tay, where another major airfield is under construction. Moreover, it has been determined that the Chinese engineer unit [redacted] previously thought

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NORTH VIETNAM
AIRFIELDS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

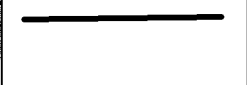


YEN BAI, JUNE 1966



SON TAY, JUNE 1966

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to be at Son Tay is in fact located in the Tuyen Quang area. The general pattern of construction and the number and types of equipment seen at Son Tay, however, are reminiscent of Yen Bai. Moreover, the rate of construction and engineering skill displayed would seem to strain North Vietnamese capabilities. (See photographs)

21. Information obtained from a captured North Vietnamese naval officer has provided a clearer indication of the role of the major Chinese unit [redacted] located on the northeast coast of North Vietnam. The prisoner reported that a Chinese engineering regiment of possibly 1,500 men was engaged in building coastal defense installations on Cat Ba Island, off the coast from Haiphong. He pointed out Chinese barracks and bivouac areas on aerial photography near the new coastal defense sites.

22. Most of the reported construction projects have been confirmed by photographic analysis, and the buildings reportedly housing the Chinese engineers do have definite military characteristics. They are similar in design to the rectangular, gable-roofed storage/support buildings at Yen Bai, but much larger. Photographic measurements suggest they can house approximately 1,200 men.

23. A review of photography has revealed a sharp increase in military activity on Cat Ba Island since last October. This includes several areas of military activity consisting of camouflaged buildings and tents, local defensive positions, building materials and equipment, and at least two new coastal defense sites. These sites have four revetted positions and tunnel entrances, and approach roads. They appear similar to coastal defense sites in South China and are more permanent than those seen south of Hanoi.

24. [redacted]

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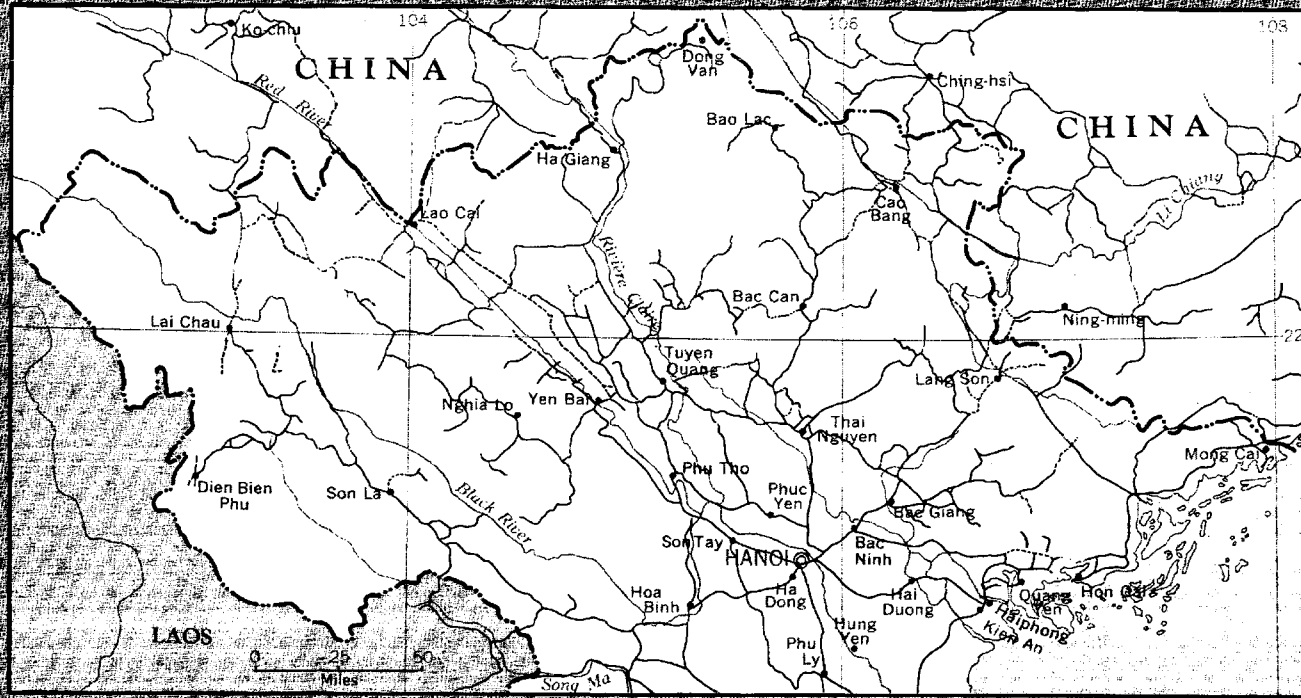
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NORTH VIETNAM-SOUTH CHINA BORDER AREA
ROAD CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY



Existing road (as of 1965) New road New road under construction Road improvement (includes realignment)

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defense mission. However, this more recent information indicates that it is a special engineer division working on coastal defense construction projects.

25. The work of the 2nd Railway Engineer Division at Kep is continuing. A third rail may have been added to the Hanoi-Pinghsiang line between Dong Dang and Kep. Photography of 21 July showed standard-gauge rolling stock near Kep. Segments of the line with the third rail have been observed between Kep and Pinghsiang since early April.

26. Work is also continuing on the standard-gauge line between Kep and the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel complex, a major Chinese aid project. Most of the major bridges and tunnels have been completed on this line. This will increase the load capacity and flexibility of North Vietnam's major rail link with South China and speed up shipments to the Vietnamese. If the third rail is eventually extended to Hanoi, Vietnam-bound freight could be shipped directly to Hanoi without transloading.

27. Chinese construction units may also have assisted in road construction and improvement projects near the Sino/DRV border. A recent photographic study of the status of roads in this area reveals a total of some 500 miles of road construction and improvement on the North Vietnam side of the border. Most of this work, begun since mid-1965, has involved improvements in existing roads and the establishment of connecting links. Two new roads are under construction parallel to the Red River between Yen Bai and Lao Cai. They will provide better Chinese access to the Yen Bai area. In addition, the North Vietnam-South China road network has been joined at several more points along the border. (See Map)

Prospects

28. As the Chinese construction projects in North Vietnam are completed, some changes are likely in the role and composition of the Chinese forces there. The number of support buildings constructed at Yen Bai may indicate that this area is planned

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as a forward Chinese logistical base.

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29. The recent evidence of increased Chinese naval association with North Vietnam

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may indicate a trend toward closer operational cooperation. This could take the form of joint coastal and offshore defense procedures in the northern Tonkin Gulf, similar to those instituted in the field of air defense. It may also signal an expansion of naval support to North Vietnam, in the form of more patrol boats or use of Chinese naval combat units in northern DRV waters.

30. As for the future of the Chinese military presence in North Vietnam, the first indication of change may come if and when the Chinese engineer units start withdrawing following the completion of their tasks. If the experience of the past year is a reliable guide, any major shift in the Chinese role in North Vietnam should then be reflected

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Before the Chinese make any major move in this direction, however, they will probably build up their ground force strength on their side of the border. As yet, there is no indication that any such augmentation has occurred.

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