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MEMORANDUM

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

The Situation in Vietnam

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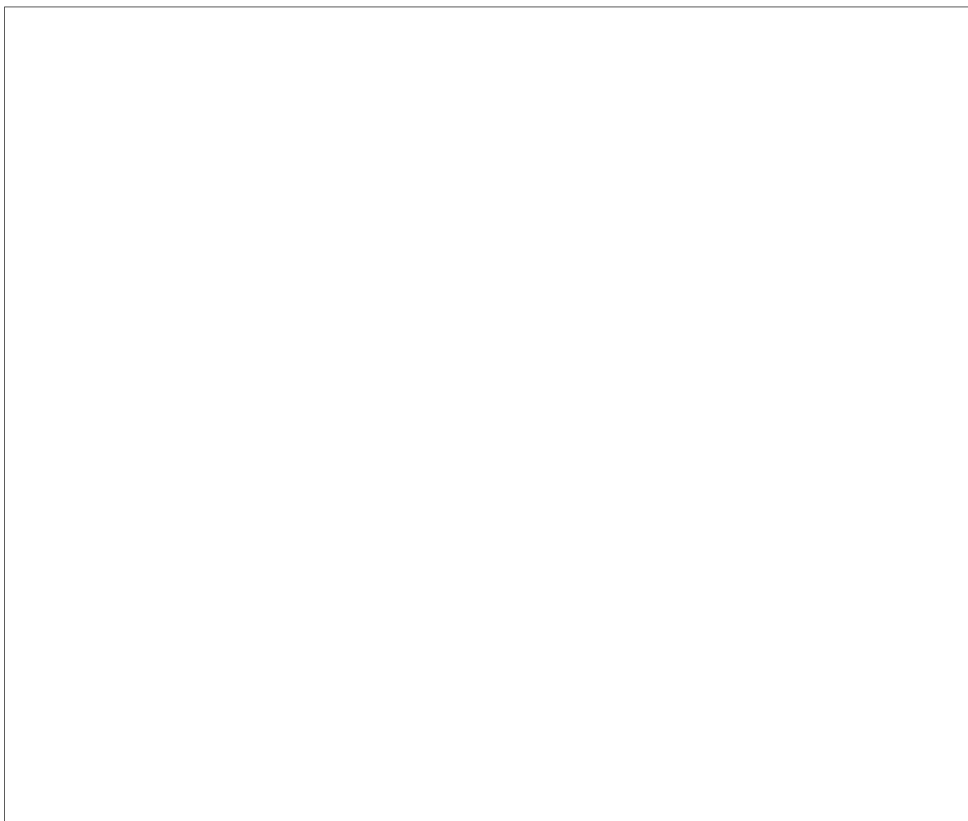
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WARNING

This document contains classified information affecting the national security of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, US Code Title 18, Sections 793, 794, and 798.



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Information as of 1600
17 November 1967

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HIGHLIGHTS

[redacted]

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Fighting continues in the Dak To area and [redacted]

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[redacted] the Communists are preparing more "battle positions" west of Dak To (Paras. 1-5). North Vietnamese forces may be preparing for new attacks near the Demilitarized Zone (Paras. 6-9). Operation ESSEX, a sweep near the Quang Nam - Quang Tin Province border, terminated on 17 November (Para. 10).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Tran Van Don claims that the Freedom Fighters Association is not yet an organized party and that it will be from one to two years before it is (Paras. 1-3). [redacted]

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[redacted] The upper house has been discussing the question of status of forces in South Vietnam, and there are indications that this may soon become a more important issue (Para. 8).

[redacted]

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IV. Other Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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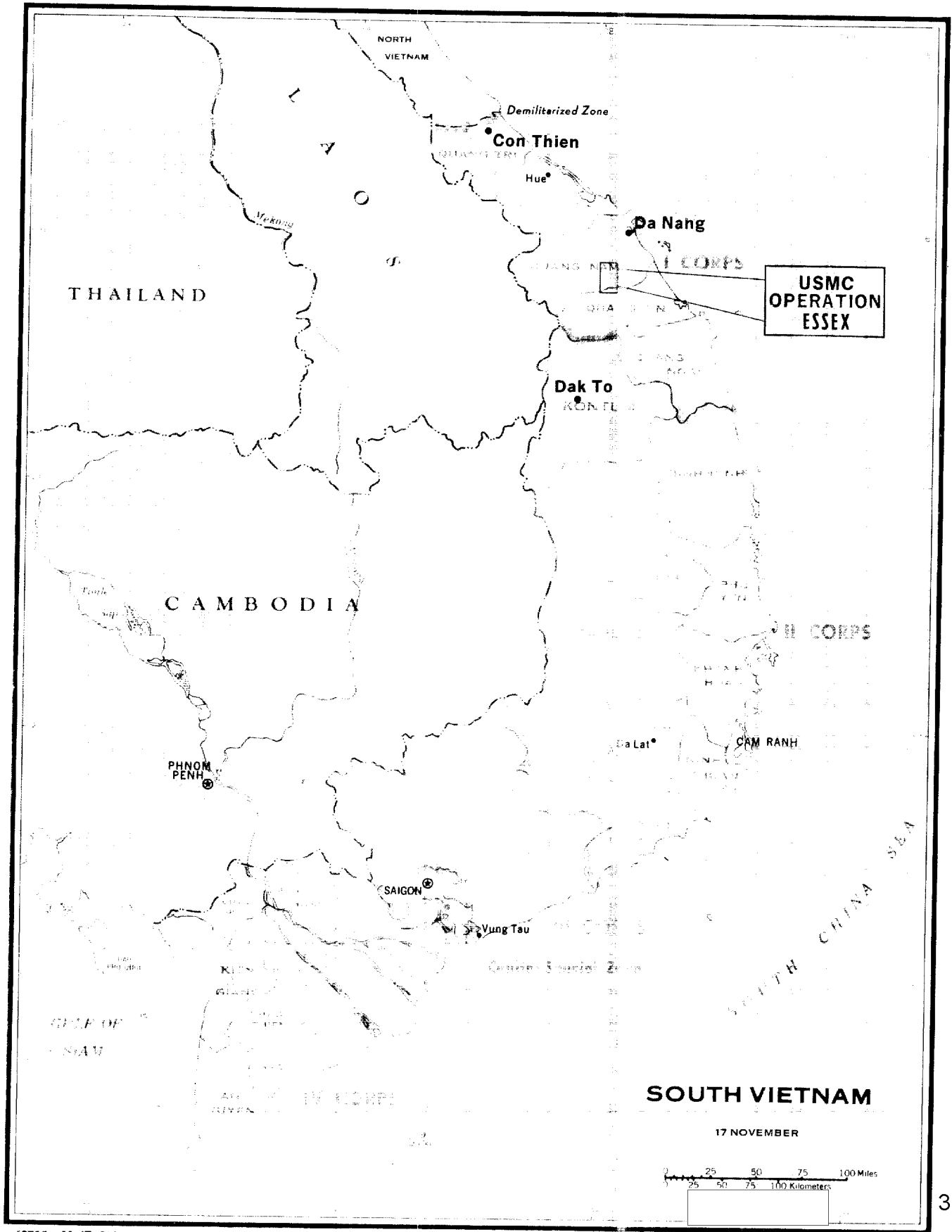
VI. Other Major Aspects: Two US reporters reportedly discovered a Viet Cong base camp while traveling in eastern Cambodia (Paras. 1-3). North Vietnam has now set up or is working on seven different means for crossing the Canal des Rapides (Paras. 4-6).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. On 17 November, two companies of the US 4th Infantry Division advanced behind air and artillery strikes to seize the high ground--hill 1338--on a ridge overlooking Dak To from the south. The US soldiers reported the enemy put up stiff resistance from well dug-in positions before withdrawing. First reports state that seven Americans were killed. Enemy casualty figures have not yet come in.

2. To the north of Dak To, a South Vietnamese Army paratrooper brigade lost four killed and 40 wounded on 17 November when attacked by what were probably elements of the North Vietnamese 24th Regiment. At last report the action was still going on. During the night of 16-17 November, another enemy unit--also believed to be a subordinate of the 24th Regiment--raided a small town less than two miles east of Dak To. Three South Vietnamese Army defenders were wounded and part of the village was set afire.

3. The recent spurt of enemy activity north and east of Dak To probably is intended to relieve pressure on the North Vietnamese 32nd and 66th regiments south and west of the strongpoint. In addition, by spreading the action over a wide area, the Communists probably believe they can improve their chances of isolating and destroying an American unit.

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4. Nearly all of the recent fighting in the Dak To area has developed from US probes into North Vietnamese fortified areas. More of this kind of fighting can be expected as allied forces continue to seek the enemy. [redacted]

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[redacted] 16 November, between intelligence units of the North Vietnamese 1st Division, refers to "three battle positions" in the mountains west of Dak To--presumably manned by Communist troops--and a fourth position which has just been prepared but "has not yet been occupied." The US 173rd Airborne Brigade is now deployed in the neighborhood of these reported positions.

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[redacted] the headquarters of the North Vietnamese 1st Division to a subordinate element claimed that during a "few days of combat, we have destroyed more than eight American companies and worn down more than five others."

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5. An enemy notebook captured on 6 November southwest of Dak To provides further evidence that enemy forces there have received sizable numbers of replacements from North Vietnam. The document states that two thirds of the men in the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment are new recruits and that almost all of the unit's cadre are newly appointed.

Communist Military Activity in the DMZ Area

6. North Vietnamese forces continue to move about in the eastern half of the Demilitarized Zone and northeastern Quang Tri Province despite difficulties imposed by bad weather.

7. At least two of the three regiments of the North Vietnamese 324B Division--the 90th and 803rd regiments--are repositioning within and immediately south of the Demilitarized Zone and have been noted preparing for attacks. Two battalions of the 90th Regiment are in the Con Thien area performing extensive reconnaissance. A recently captured North Vietnamese, who claims to have been a member of the 90th Regiment, states that plans are set for an attack on Con Thien within the next two weeks.

8. Also in the Demilitarized Zone area, the newly identified North Vietnamese 164th Artillery Regiment has moved guns into positions north of Con Thien, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] difficulties in moving artillery weapons because of deep water and damaged roads.

9. This Communist activity may be a tactic designed to maintain pressure on US and South Vietnamese soldiers south of the Demilitarized Zone until new plans are formulated. Representatives from elements of the Communist Demilitarized Zone Front are currently meeting and may be discussing and deciding strategy for the next round of fighting.

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Operation ESSEX Ends

10. Operation ESSEX, a 12-day sweep conducted by a battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment in the Quang Nam - Quang Tin border area south of Da Nang, ended on 17 November. The operation was highlighted by two significant actions in which Marines encountered heavy opposition from enemy forces in fortified villages. Over 100 air strikes supported the operation. Marine casualties were 37 killed and 122 wounded. Enemy losses were 72 killed, mostly from the 3rd Regiment of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division.

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II. POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Senator Tran Van Don recently discussed the future of his Freedom Fighters Association with an American official, indicating that it was not organized as a political party and that it would take from one to two years to develop it as one. For the present, the association is organizing. The emphasis is on establishing local contacts who will join and then organize local association chapters. The political party envisioned by Don is expected to spring from the resulting mass base.

2. When queried about the relationship between the Freedom Fighters Association and the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc, the other political organization of which he is provisional president. Don said that the two groups would probably develop separately. He added, however, that it would be only natural for them to maintain some liaison, given the partial overlapping of their leaderships. He speculated that the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc might itself develop into a political party through the connections its legislators have with their respective constituencies.

3. Don acknowledged that there was talk that he would be elected president of the Senate, and said that, if this occurred, the position would preclude his leading the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc in the upper house. He would still be free, however, to continue to organize the Freedom Fighters Association and use this as a base of political power.

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Upper House on SOFA

8. Discussions in the upper house on 11 and 14 November, as well as current Saigon press comment, indicate that the question of a status of forces agreement is coming to the fore. During a discussion over the articles governing the duties of standing committees to be established in the upper house, the focal point of debate was the question of whether specific responsibilities for defining the status of allied forces in South Vietnam should be assigned to the information and foreign affairs committee or to the national defense committee. Motions to give each of these committees specific responsibilities to take up the status of forces question were voted down, but an "annotation" to the article governing the national defense committee states that the committee "examines and reports to the upper house on regulations for allied forces on the territory of the

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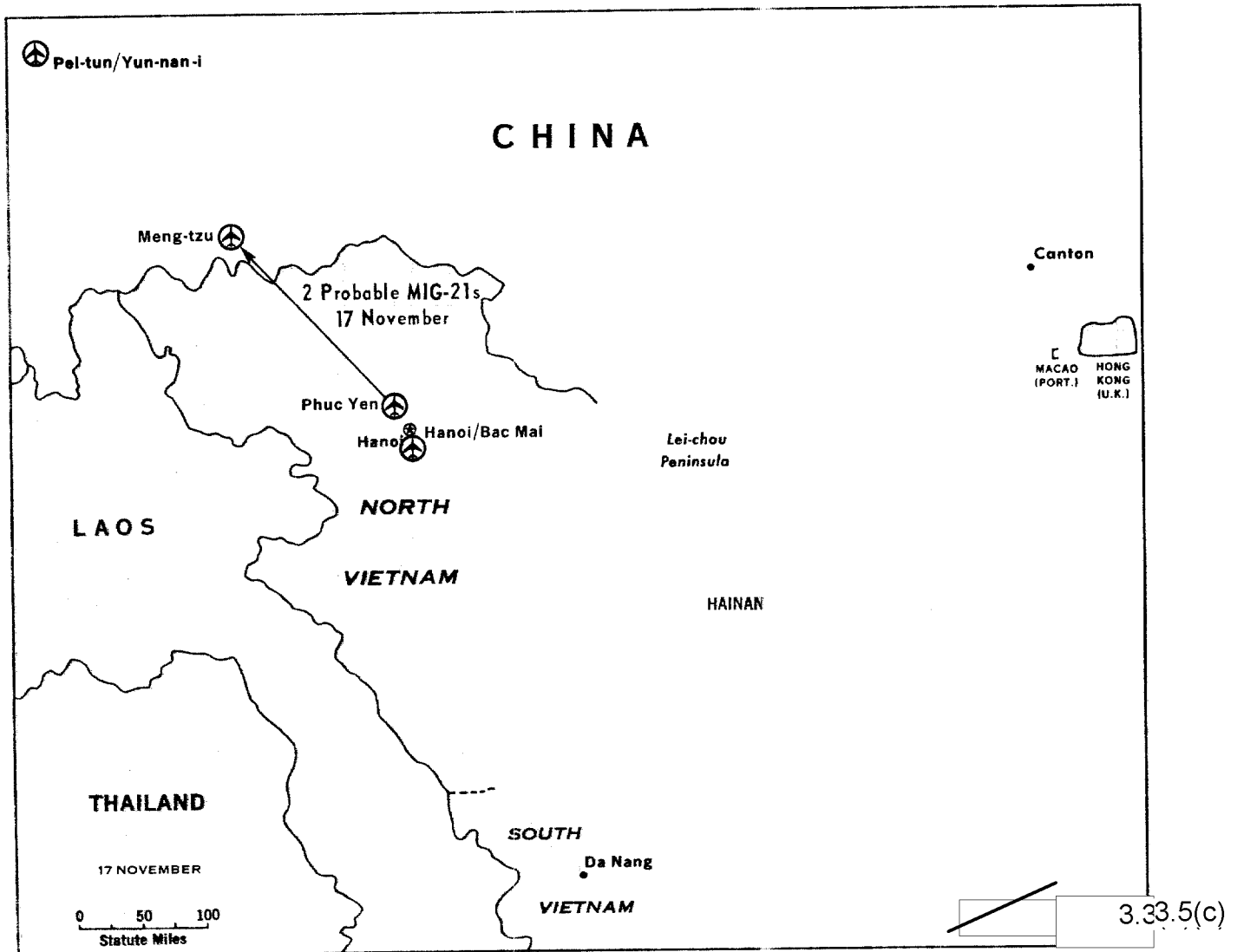
Republic of Vietnam, when such forces are here." Senator Tran Van Lam has indicated that, while he personally does not favor discussing the status of forces question during war time, he feels there will be considerable pressure to do so.

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[Redacted]

III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Bac Mai Airfield and a barge assembly facility, all located within two miles of the center of Hanoi, were hit on 17 November.

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[Redacted]

2. The pilots also reported heavy antiaircraft artillery fire and numerous surface-to-air missiles. Four US aircraft were reported lost, two of them to SAMs.

3. Two MIG-21s tried unsuccessfully to intercept the US planes.

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[Redacted] less than six hours after the Bac Mai raid two probable MIG-21s departed Phuc Yen Airfield for Meng-tzu in Communist China. The MIG pilots were identified [Redacted] as the same two who engaged a flight of USAF F-4s on 16 November, landed at Ning-ming, and later returned to Phuc Yen.

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Bomb Damage to the Hanoi Diplomatic Quarter

4. [Redacted] press sources in Hanoi report that the offices of the Soviet military attaché, the International Control Commission, and the British Consulate were hit on 17 November. Limited damage reportedly was inflicted on the Soviet and British installations. At the ICC quarters one Indian sergeant was killed and another wounded.

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[Redacted] confirmed the casualties. [Redacted] in Hanoi in his report stated it was not clear whether US aircraft or antiaircraft batteries were responsible.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

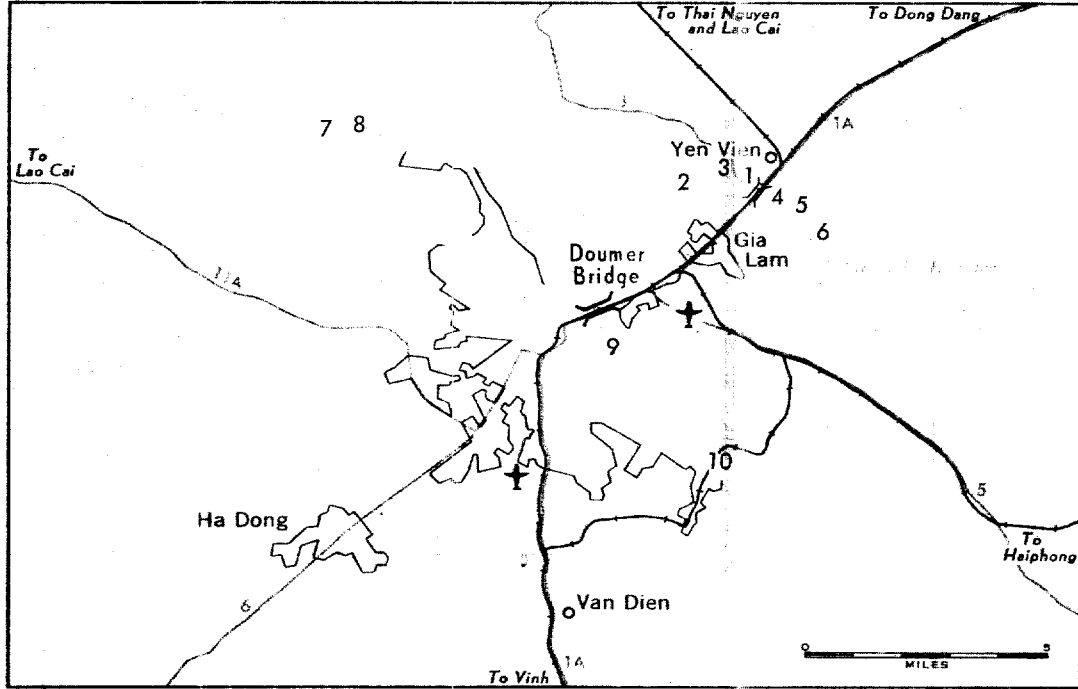
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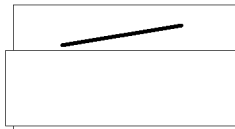
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Hanoi Area By-pass System



- 1 Original Canal des Rapides Bridge
- 2 Highway ferry and pontoon bridge
- 3 Highway cable bridge
- 4 Alternate rail/highway bridge
- 5 Probable rail/highway bridge (u/c)
- 6 Rail ferry
- 7 Highway ferry
- 8 Highway ferry
- 9 Highway ferry
- 10 Rail ferry



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. [redacted] two US newspapermen traveling in eastern Cambodia near the South Vietnamese border discovered what they believed to be a recently occupied Viet Cong base camp. The journalists said the site was big enough for a battalion and included a mess hall, infirmary, and headquarters units, and a vehicle parking area. A Cambodian military officer who was with the newsmen was described as being quite surprised, and apparently refused to take the journalists into the camp without "protective troops." The journalists intend to file their stories in a couple of days after attempting to interview a senior Cambodian official on the matter.

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2. The site in question, opposite South Vietnam's Tay Ninh Province, could well be a Viet Cong facility. It is an area of extensive Communist supply and medical activity.

3. Although Western newspapermen have made numerous trips to border areas in search of Communist activity in the past, this is the first time that any suspicious activity has been identified. Since the US reporters were making the border inspection at Sihanouk's invitation, it will be more difficult for Phnom Penh to issue a flat denial.

Bridge Repair

4. The North Vietnamese now have or are working on seven different facilities for crossing the Canal des Rapides on the main rail and road routes from China to Hanoi.

5. [redacted] as of early November the original bridge across the canal was serviceable again. It was damaged on 26 October. A railroad ferry, a highway ferry, and one cable and one pontoon bridge are available as alternates to the main bridge. One alternate to the main bridge was unserviceable as of 5 November. In addition, construction is under way on what appears to be a new railroad-highway bridge.

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6. With the main bridge and backups available for crossing the Canal des Rapides, the main obstruction to through traffic from China to Hanoi is now the Doumer Bridge at the Red River. Repairs on the two spans knocked out by bombings on 24 October are under way, but the work was proceeding slowly as of 3 November [redacted]

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