Doc ID: 6660612

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) History Today - 23 March 2010

(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

Source	History Today
Repository	Center for Cryptologic History
Publication	*History Today*.
Language	English
Publication date	23 March 2010 00:00 GMT
Last modified	23 March 2010 00:00 GMT
Extracted entities:	Show extracted entities
Summary	(U) During the Vietnam War, from about 1959, North Vietnam moved troops and supplies to the south along what became known as the Ho Chi Minh (HCM) Trail. The HCM Trail was an interconnected route of paved roads, jungle paths, and fuel pipelines through the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia.

(U) During the Vietnam War, from about 1959, North Vietnam moved troops and supplies to the south along what became known as the Ho Chi Minh (HCM) Trail. The HCM Trail was an interconnected route of paved roads, jungle paths, and fuel pipelines through the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia.

The photograph shows North Vietnamese trucks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

(U) The U.S. military sought to disrupt the movement of troops from North Vietnam to the south. At the very least, the U.S. wanted to obtain accurate numbers of troops moving in either direction, so that enemy strength in South Vietnam could be calculated with more accuracy.

(U) Given the high value the U.S. military placed on this information, the U.S. SIGINT service made it a high priority for collection and analysis.

(U) The North Vietnamese established numerous "liaison stations" along the Trail to support the moving troops.

(U) Until 1962, only limited information about the enemy movements became available through SIGINT. Between 1962 and 1967, SIGINT analysts often could identify the movement of units through traffic analysis and direction finding, but could not provide accurate numbers.

(U) Then, in October 1967, the Vinh Window opened. This system was called the "Vinh Window" after the largest North Vietnamese liaison station.

(U) The North Vietnamese began sending logistics information by radio from liaison stations along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Voice communications from this network were collected by U.S. RC-130 reconnaissance aircraft. The communications were protected only by a relatively unsophisticated cryptographic system, which was readily exploited. Combined with other intelligence sources, the decrypts enabled analysts to come up with accurate counts of enemy troops entering South Vietnam.

(U) The Vinh Window stayed open through the rest of the war. The information helped determine enemy order of battle in South Vietnam, although the U.S. could not find a way to stanch the movement of enemy troops and materiel.

(U) Read more about SIGINT and the problem of infiltration in the latest issue of *Cryptologic Quarterly*, in Sharon Maneki's article, "Enemy Infiltration into South Vietnam: An Illustration of the Complexity of SIGINT."

(U) The photograph shows North Vietnamese trucks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

(U) Like to blog? Want to discuss historical topics with interested -- and interesting -- folks? Visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, "History Rocks." (go history rocks)

(U) Larger view of photo

(U) Have a question or comment on "History Today"? Contact us at DL cch or

UNCLASSIFIED