

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

This Document contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, Sections 793 and 794, of the U.S. Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law. The reproduction of this form is prohibited.

618331

~~SECRET/CONTROL - U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY~~

COUNTRY	Indochina	REPORT NO.	CS-35925
SUBJECT	Air Activity Around Dien Bien Phu	DATE DISTR.	19 April 1954
		NO. OF PAGES	2
DATE OF INFO.	March 1954	REQUIREMENT NO.	RD
PLACE ACQUIRED	Indochina, Saigon (10 April 1954)	REFERENCES	

BY CABLE

THE SOURCE EVALUATIONS IN THIS REPORT ARE DEFINITIVE.
THE APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.
(FOR KEY SEE REVERSE)

SOURCE: American observer in an excellent position to report on air activities in Indochina (B). Appraisal of Content: 2.

DISTRIBUTED AS PRELIMINARY
DISSEMINATION NUMBERED

PD-732

1. Anti-aircraft fire around Dien Bien Phu comes from Viet Minh mobile units, which have been seen, firing individually. It appears that the units have been assigned a specific sector of the sky to cover. These mobile units are placed around the entire Dien Bien Phu perimeter and are moved nightly. The anti-aircraft fire is not pattern firing.¹
2. Pilots are encountering anti-aircraft fire from 37mm guns firing vertically and accurately from 400 to 8,500 feet. During a night drop, five 37mm guns were observed firing, but it is believed that there is a total of six or eight.² A considerable amount of 50 caliber anti-aircraft fire has been encountered. Thus far, six of the Civil Air Transport (CAT) C119's have been hit.
3. The effectiveness of the French air force drops from C47's and C119's has been very poor because the French pilots are not dropping from low altitudes. They are dropping from 8,000 feet without parachute delay openers, with the result that only 10 to 20 percent accuracy is achieved. The CAT pilots are the only crews which are following air-ground orders from Dien Bien Phu to come in low. They are dropping at 400 feet with a high degree of accuracy. Air-ground control at Dien Bien Phu has stated that the drop missions of the CAT C119's are the only accurate ones and the French will not fly low enough to drop into the small drop zone.
4. Other French air force activity includes sporadic strafing, napalming and the use of light artillery observation airplanes during good weather. However, the strafing is random, uncoordinated and ineffectual, and the napalming is from too high an altitude for accuracy. The French air force losses include one C47 and about two F8F's per week.

~~SECRET/CONTROL - U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY~~

STATE	x	ARMY	x	NAVY	x	AIR	Ev	x	FBI		AEC				
-------	---	------	---	------	---	-----	----	---	-----	--	-----	--	--	--	--

(Note: Washington Distribution Indicated By "X"; Field Distribution By "#".)

- 2 -

5. Haiphong airfield is the best field in North Vietnam and is capable of handling all heavy air equipment. Hanoi airfield is in fair condition and can handle medium air equipment. The effects of sabotage are clearly visible on both fields. However, the security of these fields is better than average. There is one guard per plane and passes must be shown to walk on the parking strip.
6. The French reaction to CAT participation at Dien Bien Phu has been very friendly at high levels. The French have also been friendly at middle echelon levels except where CAT crews have displaced French crews from C119's, causing the French to fly the more dangerous C47 and B26 missions. No reaction at low levels has been noted.
 1. Field Comment. It is the opinion of CAT pilots in the area that the anti-aircraft firing is possibly radar-controlled, but they are unsure of this point.
 2. Washington Comment. Most reports from Dien Bien Phu agree that there has been fire from 37mm guns. However, estimates of the number of 37mm guns available have ranged from 30 to 100. The above report from an observer considered to be extremely reliable would indicate fewer 37 mm guns than is generally believed.

SECRET/CONTROL - U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY