

# Ho Chi Minh Road in Vietnam - Laos Relationship

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**Abstract:** In May 1959, the Central Military Commission decided to establish the “Special Military Task Force” with the task of opening the Truong Son Road to the South to build a strategic supply line, transport materials and troops from the large rear of the North to the front line of the South. It was also from here that the legendary Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh road was formed, an important traffic artery of the war. During 16 years of construction and development (1959 - 1975), the Truong Son arterial road system not only played the role of a military transport route and strategic logistics but also one general battlefield, one fierce battle front; where the convergence of strength, faith and will to fight unyielding, indomitable for independence, freedom, peace and reunification of the country of the Vietnamese people. Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road is not only a route but a system of transportation routes throughout, sticking to its natural position, wriggling through all terrains, forming a diverse network, always keeping the initiative to deal with the situation, dealing with all means of attacking and blocking the enemy. This strategic support route (both East and West Truong Son) passes through 20 provinces of all three countries, with 216 roads, with a total length of more than 20,000 km radiating to battlefields in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, creating a sustainable continuous system and a vivid expression of the solidarity and combat relationship between the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. With its strategic location and significance, the Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh road has significantly contributed to the victory of the resistance war against American intervention and the fulfilment of noble international obligations. The vigorous development and essential contribution of the strategic route and the coordination of the army and people of the two ethnic groups Vietnam - Laos have become a symbol of the traditional and special friendship between the people of Vietnam - Laos.

**Keywords:** Truong Son Road, Ho Chi Minh Road, Vietnam - Laos Relationship

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## 1. Introduction

Born in the fierce war, the legendary Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh road was formed, an important traffic artery of the war. In that aggressive war, the Truong Son arterial road system played not only the role of a strategic logistics and military transport route but also a general battlefield, a fierce battle front; where the convergence of strength, faith and will to fight unyielding, indomitable for independence, freedom, peace and reunification of the country of the Vietnamese people. Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road is not only a route but a system of transportation routes throughout, sticking to its natural position, wriggling through all terrains, forming a diverse network, always keeping the initiative to deal with the situation, dealing with all means of attacking and blocking the enemy. This strategic support route (both East and West

Truong Son) passes through 20 provinces of all three countries, with 216 roads, with a total length of more than 20,000 km radiating to battlefields in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, creating a sustainable continuous system and a vivid expression of the solidarity and combat relationship between the peoples of Indochina. With its strategic location and significance, the Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh road has made significant contributions to the victory of the Vietnamese people's resistance against US intervention; at the same time, contributing to the fulfilment of lofty international obligations, becoming a symbol of the traditional and special friendship between the two peoples of Vietnam and Laos.

## 2. Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road

After the Geneva Agreement, Vietnam was temporarily

divided into two regions. To ensure that the Party Central Committee directs the revolutionary movement in the South, Vietnam has only one line of communication through the western Quang Tri. Truong Son road appeared during the resistance war against the French colonialists. However, it was only a narrow trail, and the main form of transportation was a simple bag. In the period of anti-intervention by the US, in the face of increasing demands of the Southern frontline, if only relying on such narrow trails, it would not be possible to transport enough and timely human and material resources for the army and people. The South beat the US; therefore, the opening and expansion of the Truong Son trail system are urgent.

Recognizing the requirements of historical practice, in January 1959, the 15th Plenum of the Central Committee set forth the primary task of the Southern revolution, which was to liberate the South with the revolutionary method and the method of struggle using revolutionary violence, from political struggle. Advance to combine political and armed struggle, overthrow imperial and feudal domination, and overthrow the dominant group Ngo Dinh Diem, henchman of the US imperialists [1]. Also, at the conference, the Party Central Committee affirmed that the construction of the strategic Truong Son route to the South “is a great job with strategic significance, directly related to the cause of liberation of the South and reunification of the Fatherland” [2].

Implementing Central Resolution 15, on May 5, 1959, the Standing General Military Commission decided to establish the Southern Military Support Research Department, directly under the General Staff, with the following tasks: Open a special road on the Truong Son mountain range from the North to the South to transfer human and material resources from the North to serve the Southern revolution as well as the revolution of Laos and Cambodia.

On May 19, 1959, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee decided to establish the 559 Corps, to build a strategic supply line - Truong Son road on land and at sea. The Politburo and the General Military Commission affirmed the Truong Son Road's role as “the road to support the South, the most and the most important for you, having vital strategic significance in the immediate and long term” [3]. On September 12, 1959, the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense issued a decision to establish Team 559, under the General Military Commission and the Ministry of National Defense, which is responsible for paving the way, transporting materials, transporting officers and soldiers from the North to the South, from South to North; transport food, weapons, ammunition for the group of experts in Laos and help Laos friends [4]. The rapid development of Group 559 - Truong Son army and the Ho Chi Minh road system can be generalized through four stages: (i) From 1960 to 1964, it was the first years of building a strategic support line [5]; (ii) From 1965 to 1968, it became a mechanized aid line reaching out to support the southern battlefield to defeat the US “local war” strategy; (iii) From 1969 to 1972, the period of expansion of Ho Chi Minh Road; (iv) From 1973 to 1975, perfecting the position of the Ho Chi Minh road, together

with the whole country conducted the General Offensive and uprising of Spring 1975, successfully ended the Vietnamese people's resistance war against American intervention (then the people of Lao tribes).

The Politburo confirms the importance of the Truong Son route and the Central Military Commission as the road to aid the South and give Laos the most basic, most mainly has extremely important strategic significance in the immediate and long term [6]. During 16 years (1959 - 1975), the Ho Chi Minh road was constantly expanded, prolonged, and increasingly developed, reaching deep into the battlefields, strategic directions and campaigns. By the end of the war against American intervention, the Ho Chi Minh road had a total length of 17,000km of roads for motor vehicles, an interchange road of over 3,000km, a petroleum pipeline of nearly 14,000km along with a system of bypass roads, border crossings, rivers, and communication lines... to meet the increasing demands of the battlefield.

When discovering this important strategic transport route, the US and the Saigon government combined air and infantry forces with modern war vehicles to continuously bombard with nearly 152,000 battles, dropped almost 4 million tons of bombs on the road... to cut off the North's support and isolate the battlefields; Route 9 was nearly blocked, making it challenging to provide reinforcements to the Southern battlefield as well as the Laos battlefield. To prevent this strategic supply line, the US turned the Ho Chi Minh route into a battleground for testing a series of strategic undertakings and tactical tricks and a testing ground for various weapons and methods and modern technical facilities. Truong Son soldiers fought over 2,500 battles, shot down 2,455 aircraft, and destroyed tens of thousands of tons of weapons and other means of war of the enemy [7]. Over 20,000 cadres, soldiers, and young volunteers died that same time, nearly 30,000 people were injured, and thousands of people were severely affected by agent orange [8].

With its strategic location and significance, the Ho Chi Minh Road has significantly contributed to the victory of the resistance war against American intervention and fulfilling noble international obligations. This is a strategic military transport route, successfully completing the task of supplying human and material resources to the battlefields. Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road and Truong Son soldiers played a significant role in providing support from the large rear of the Socialist North to the battlefields of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, contributing significantly to victory on the battlefields.

### 3. “Flip the Wings” to the West Truong Son

Based on the inherent traditional relations between the two nations and the Vietnam - Laos combat alliance, with an objective request urgently needing aid from the large rear of the North, at the end of 1960, the representative of the Central Committee Vietnamese Labor Party and the Central

Committee of the Lao People's Party had a meeting, exchanged and agreed to open more roads west of Truong Son running in Laos; determined "East-West Truong Son is a solid strategic area, connecting the rear of the revolution of the three countries of Vietnam - Laos - Cambodia, a specific expression of the fighting alliance between the three countries became an important strategic direction in the resistance war against the US, saving the country" [9]. The Vietnam Labor Party has agreed with the Lao People's Party to use a part of the land west of the Truong Son Mountains in the liberated region of Laos, from Road 8 west of Ha Tinh (Vietnam) through Khammouane, Savannakhet, Saravane, Champasak provinces to Attapeu province (Laos) to build a strategic supply route and build a strategic base for the battlefields of South Indochina. The Politburo of the two parties assigned the Truong Son Command to unify the command of all forces on the Ho Chi Minh route.

With the consensus and help of Laos, the opening of the Truong Son road in the west was implemented quickly. After a period of the survey, the plan to open the way to the West was started, in which the opening of the road across the Vietnam - Laos border at the Ta Cu mountain shelf, with an altitude of over 700m, deployed quickly. When requested to widen the road, the arterial route starting from Western Nghe An to Quang Binh was "turned over" to the West Truong Son, through the three provinces of Quang Binh, Khammouane and Savannakhet. The people of Lao tribes actively contributed to and contributed with Vietnamese cadres and soldiers to pave the way. The Lao People's Party Central Committee had a meeting and proposed the policy "Find ways to help the Truong Son soldiers pave the way". People of Lao tribes in Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces have voluntarily moved their houses and left their fields to serve the new route, ensuring the "closest and easiest to go" requirement.

Volunteer soldiers, a delegation of experts and advisors from Vietnam under the direction of Truong Son High Command have regularly coordinated with Party committees and authorities of seven provinces of Laos with Ho Chi Minh Road (*including* Bolikhamxay, Khammouane, Savannakhet, Champasak, Sekong, Saravane, and Attapeu), including the two provinces of Khammouane and Savannakhet, to organize topographic surveys, coordinate to open the West Truong Son road, fight to protect the strategic base and strategic route, manage to fight the enemy, liberate the land, expand the liberated area, create conditions for the strategic way to be smooth, grow and develop. By April 1961, with the help of Vietnamese volunteer military units, the Lao revolutionary forces had opened many military operations in central and lower Laos, liberating a large area from Bolikhamxay province to the west. East of Bualapha district (Khamouane province) to Savannakhet Province, connecting Route 12 with Route 9, quickly forming a long and wide corridor in the East-West direction. All six Laotian Muong in North and South Road 9 were liberated. The liberated area in Central - Lower Laos was expanded, creating a continuum, which is a condition for the two Parties and two states of Vietnam - Laos to agree to "turn over" to the West Truong Son from Ho

Village (Quang Binh) to Nong district and then gradually into Lahap, Atuc (Savannakhet), paving the way along the border of Vietnam - Laos - West Truong Son, ending the monopolistic situation, meeting the growing requirements of the battlefield.

With active help and sacrifices of the people of the Lao tribes, at the end of June 1961, the newly opened Road 129 connected Road 12 and Road 9. This is a new development step of the strategic route. Truong Son - From the monolithic position of East Truong Son, it is simply a domestic road. Along the border, an additional 200km road for motor vehicles has been opened to the West Truong Son. With bravery, wisdom, courage, and sacrifice for the great cause of the army and people of the two ethnic groups Vietnam - Laos, the Truong Son route was further expanded, becoming the lifeblood of the Indochina battlefield. In Laos, Vietnam advocates renovating several horizontal lines such as Road 20, Road 16, Road 9 to Muang Phine (Savannakhet), and road 25 to Saravane... to form a smooth route from the rear to the battlefield.

To implement the plan to "flip the wings" from East to West, the horizontal roads on Quang Binh land are connected with the West Truong Son to Khammouane and Savannakhet in Laos. Quang Binh province has both vertical and horizontal roads. The longitudinal route includes Road 15A, which runs parallel to National Highway 1A, passing through Quang Binh territory from Tan Duc (Tuyen Hoa district) to Khe Gat (Xuan Trach commune, Bo Trach district) and continues to divide into two branches: The western branch goes from Khe Gat to Dan Chu slope (Ho Village, Le Thuy district) and the eastern branch goes to Ben Quan (Vinh Linh district, Quang Tri province). Crossroads include Road 12A, a trail that crosses Truong Son, from Khe Ve to Mu Gia Pass (Minh Hoa district); Road 20 (also known as Quyet Thang street, starting from km No. 0, Son Trach commune (Bo Trach district) to Ta Le (Vietnam - Laos border); Road 16, beginning from Thach Ban junction (Phu Thuy commune, Le Thuy district - Road 15) turns southwest to Vit Thu Lu - Ho Village (Kim Thuy commune, Le Thuy district); Road 10 (also known as Road 20 of July), from Ang Son junction (Van Ninh commune, Quang Ninh district) to Dan Chu junction (Huong Hoa district, Quang Tri province). Thus, the horizontal roads on Quang Binh land are connected with the West Truong Son to Laos. The Western Truong Son route is located in Laos with a length of over 800km, a crossroads of more than 100km, and 3 clusters of bases in the old forest. The opening of the western branch of the Truong Son road was a wise decision, with strategic significance, thanks to which the battlefields of the three Indochina countries were linked through a strategic transport system from the large rear of North Vietnam to Laos to Cambodia to the battlefield of South Vietnam.

The Ho Chi Minh road through Quang Binh is not only a route but a system of transportation roads throughout the area, sticking to the natural position of the province, wriggling through all terrains, forming a multi-faceted network, always keeping the initiative to deal with all the enemy's raiding and blocking tricks. The process of building the Ho Chi Minh route lasted for decades in extremely harsh war conditions; the people of Quang Binh, Khammouane, and Savannakhet

provinces have united, joined forces, and provided spiritual and material support for the road construction force to complete the task. Quang Binh, with the function of being a significant and direct rear of the great southern front line, a “general storehouse” of resources to radiate to the south of battlefields, a strategic base of Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road; is one of the main areas for storing and supplying weapons, ammunition, gasoline, and food; the garrison, training troops, gathering technical troops to continue to supplement the battlefield. Quang Binh is also home to hospitals, teams to treat wounded and sick soldiers, car and artillery repair workshops, a traffic center, and a base that meets all the factors of seaports, river ports, and airports, serving the battlefields of the South and the battlefields of Laos. Through Cha Lo border gate on Route 12 and Ca Roong border gate on Route 20, millions of tons of military equipment and food, medicine, and necessities for the battlefield were supplied by the army and Vietnam - Laos youth volunteers with the care, protection and cooperation of the people of Quang Binh, Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces transported to the battlefields of Central, Lower Laos and South Vietnam. The cooperation between the people of Quang Binh, Khammouane, and Savannakhet areas in building and organizing the transportation of goods on the strategic transport route of Ho Chi Minh Road has contributed to making the provinces of Quang Binh, Khammouane, Savannakhet into cities. The rear directly ensured the victory of the troops and people of the two countries Vietnam – Laos, on the fronts of Central, Lower Laos and South Vietnam.

#### **4. Become a Symbol of the Special Relationship Between Vietnam - Laos**

Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh road crosses the Truong Son mountain range, starting at Lat town (Tan Ky district, Nghe An province), marked by milestone 0, running to Chon Thanh district (Binh Phuoc province), about 16,000km long, including five vertical roads, 21 horizontal roads; 20,000km of the motorway; 3,000km of cargo road by bicycle, elephant, horse and human; 500km of river road; 1,445km of petroleum pipeline [10]. In addition to the function of transporting human and material resources for the battlefields of South Vietnam and Laos, the Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road, with a continuous vertical and horizontal system, created favorable conditions for the Lao revolution to build revolutionary bases and resistance rears in the localities through which the route passed. Truong Son road establishes a network of heaven and earth, traversing all terrains, linking many battlefields, and creating strength and surprise for the enemy. The West and East Truong Son roads connect with transport routes on the battlefield, connect with the routes of the two countries, form a strategic support transportation network, become a battlefield to fight the enemy, a battle base, a continuous, sustainable, unified strategy with special uniqueness, that is: (i) The lifetime of the route is longer than any war route anywhere in the world; (ii) Truong Son Road was an essential battlefield

and a strategic rear base for the three Indochinese battlefields.

The results of the contributions and sacrifices of the Lao army and people, especially the decision to agree for Vietnam to “turn its wings” on the Truong Son Road to the West to continue connecting the “lifeline” to the southern battlefield, and at the same time to meet the demand for aid for the battlefields of Laos and Cambodia, defeating the plots of the forces opposing the revolutions of the three Indochina countries. From 1960 - 1964, Truong Son soldiers supported the battlefields of the South, Laos, and Cambodia with 10,136 tons of weapons and food of all kinds... Particularly on the battlefield of Lower Laos, Group 559 transported to the armed units of Lower Laos 90 tons of rice, 35 tons of salt and some other essential items. Up to 1975, the Truong Son strategic transport route transported 1,349,000 tons of goods and weapons, delivered to the battlefields and revolutions of Laos, Cambodia, more than 583,000 tons were, 515 million m<sup>3</sup> of petroleum. During the General Offensive and uprising of Spring 1975, the transport route 559 through Truong Son Road transferred to South Vietnam more than 110,000 officers and soldiers and 23,000 tons of materials of all kinds; which, from 1973 – to 1975, brought to Laos over 108,000 tons of all sorts of goods [11]... The Lao revolution made steady progress with timely support, and the Vietnam - Laos fighting alliance was strengthened. General Secretary of the Lao People's Democratic Party Kaysone Phomvihane affirmed: “Because of the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos, the Lao people sacrificed and suffered from more than 3 million tons of bombs of the American enemy, contributing a part to the cause of the war. Vietnam has favourable conditions for the complete liberation of South Vietnam”. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong said: “The Truong Son Road is a symbol of the fighting solidarity of the three countries, so it has miraculous durability... It has become a strategic feat contributing to the fight of the three countries, together to win the national liberation of Indochina in the spring of 1975”.

Speaking on the occasion of the 100th birthday of President Ho Chi Minh, in May 1990, General Secretary Kaysone Phomvihane affirmed: “... Lao people are extremely proud along the western part of the Truong Son range to have a child. The road named after Uncle Ho, the road that stood proudly against millions of tons of bombs and bullets of the enemy, along with the road east of Truong Son, greatly contributed to the liberation of Laos and South Vietnam... To well implement Uncle Ho's legacy and be worthy of the blood and blood sacrifices of so many martyrs and heroes, with the painful tears of mothers and sisters, the efforts and enthusiasm of our compatriots, comrades from our two countries, the Lao people vow together with the Vietnamese people to forever preserve that special solidarity. From generation to generation, that sincere solidarity will forever be a precious tradition of the two peoples of Vietnam - Laos, which no enemy can break” [12].

#### **5. Conclusion**

Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road is a unique creation of the strategy of the Communist Party of Vietnam in the period of

anti-US intervention, the legendary road of North-South unification, the route of alliance and solidarity and the victory of three countries: Vietnam - Laos - Cambodia, is a shining symbol of revolutionary heroism in the Ho Chi Minh era, as Le Figaro (1971) commented: “America spent billions of dollars trying to choke the Ho Chi Minh trail. It still exists. It is a hundred-headed snake that always grows back. It is not the heads but the arms of this snake that always grow back because they cannot be cut off at the same time”; or “the trail is a miraculous product of human talent, patience, and endless sacrifice” [13]; “is the embodiment of dreams and aspirations of an entire nation” [14] so no force can stop it or destroy it. General Vo Nguyen Giap also repeatedly affirmed that “Truong Son Road - Ho Chi Minh Road is a heroic feat, a historical feat, a valuable experience of the Party, army and people of Vietnam that will forever be remembered. will forever exist in the history of the nation's resistance against aggression, will forever remain in the memory and the sacred sentiments of the South-North a home for each Vietnamese people” [15].

Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Road passes through 20 provinces in 3 countries of, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, radiating to battlefields on the Indochina peninsula. With an important strategic position and significant contributions to the liberation struggle of all nations, Ho Chi Minh Road is a shining symbol of solidarity, especially against the common enemy not only of the two peoples of Vietnam - Laos but also of the three countries Vietnam - Laos - Cambodia; is the link linking the battlefields of the three Indochinese countries, creating a sustainable continuous system; “is one of the great achievements in military engineering of the twentieth century” [16]. With great contributions and strategic significance, the Ho Chi Minh Road has become a symbol of the special relationship between Vietnam - Laos.

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