



# **International Boundary Study**

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## **Vietnam – “Demarcation Line”**

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**The Geographer  
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**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY**

**No. 19**

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# THE VIETNAM "DEMARICATION LINE"

## I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Viet-Nam "Demarcation Line" is not an international boundary in the traditional sense; rather it is a provisional military demarcation line. As such, it should never be shown on official maps by the standard symbol for an international boundary.

The line represents the partition effected by the 1954 Geneva Conference which brought an end to the hostilities between the French Union - Vietnamese forces and those of the Viet Minh. The "demarcation line" is approximately 47.25 miles long.

## II. BACKGROUND

French Indochina consisted of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China--which together made up Viet-Nam--and Cambodia and Laos. At the end of the war, it was anticipated that these entities would form a federated part of the newly constituted French Union. France, however, was never completely able to reassert its authority and over a period of a few years granted independence to the three states. Moreover, the area in Tonkin over which the French had regained control after the war was slowly lost to the Communist Viet Minh. After the surrender of Dien Bien Phu, an international conference was held in Geneva to resolve the difference and end the war. One of the results of the conference was the temporary partition of Viet-Nam approximately along the 17th parallel of north latitude.

## III. TREATY

According to the Geneva Conference of 1954 and the Central Mixed Commission for Vietnam, the provisional military demarcation line and its associated demilitarized zone were described as follows:

### PORTANT STATUT DE LA ZONE DEMILITARISEE

#### AVANT-PROPOS

La Presente decision, etablie dans le cadre des Articles 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 et 32 de l'Accord sur la cessation des hostilities, du paragraphe I de l'annexe a cet Accord, et de la decision conjointe No 6 signee a TRUNG-GIA le 13 Aout 1954, apporte des precision sur les modalites d' application de ces textes.

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#### I. LIMITES GEOGRAPHIQUES DE LA ZONE DEMILITARISEE -

1°/- Ligne de démarcation militaire provisoire -

- a)- Le trace de la ligne de démarcation militaire provisoire est defini comme suit, d'EST en OUEST :
- l'embouchure du SONG BEN HAI (riviere de CUA-TUNG) et le cours de cette riviere (qui prend dans la montagne le nom de RAO THANH) jusqu'au village de BO-HO-SU; puis le parallele de BO-HO-SU jusqu'a la frontiere LAO-VIETNAMIENNE.
- b)- Dans la partie de la ligne de démarcation militaire provisoire qui suit le cours du SONG BEN HAI, des signaux visibles portant la mention bilingue :
- " Ligne de démarcation militaire provisoire "  
" GOI TUYEN QUAN SU TAM THOI " .
- seront places aux points de passage definis au paragraphe VI, a la charge de chacune des Parties, sur la rive lui appartenant.

Dans la partie de la ligne de démarcation entre BO-HO-SU et la frontiere LAO-VIETNAMIENNE, les memes signaux seront places tous les kilometres environ en des points caracteristiques du terrain (points de passage, sommets, cols, etc...).

2°/- Limites de la zone demilitarisee -

- a)- La zone demilitarisee est delimittee au Nord et au Sud par des lignes appelees "lignes de securite" (carte 1/25.000 No 18 E & O; 19, 20 E & O, & 21 O, carte au 1/100.000 119 E & O ci-jointes)
- Limite Nord -
    - une ligne Est-Ouest joignant l'embouchure de la riviere (2 Kilom. 800 Nord de CUA-TUNG) (251-850) au village de YEN-GIU-BAC, passant directement aux villages de TRAN TRAI THUONG, LIEM CONG TAY et la cote 46 (189-850).
    - une ligne separant les villages de LIEM CONG TAY et DAN THAM et traversant la R.N.I. au ponceau (2 Kms 500 Sud-Est de DON DUE).
    - une ligne jalonnant la limite entre les village de QUANG-XA, TIEN LAI, TIEN TRAO a l'Ouest, et les villages de PHAN XA LE-XA a l'Est.

Cette ligne traverse la voie ferree en 146 - 800 puis passe par les cotes 16 (136-804), 15 (126-810) en contournant par l'Ouest le village de THUY BA HA et rejoint le cours de la riviere NGON DAO en 122-816.

Elle suit ensuite le cours de cette riviere jusqu'a sa source, puis est jalonnee dans la partie montagneuse par les cotes 52 - 84 - 146 - 414 - 776 - 1023 - 1254 - 977 - 1250 et 700, tous ces points inclus.
  - Limite Sud -

Une ligne partant de la cote en 281 - 771 aboutissant a la riviere de TAN YEN en 241 - 754 en passant par les cotes 10, 5 et 23 incluses.

- Le cours de la riviere de TAN YEN, jusqu'au confluent de la riviere de CAO XA.
  - La limite entre les villages de TRUNG SON, GIA BINH au Sud et DONG THI, KINH MON au Nord.
  - Le cours de la riviere de KINH MON entre les points 154 - 750 et 110 - 731.
  - Une ligne joignant ce dernier point a la riviere KHE MUOC en 089 - 715 en englobant les rizieres de DINH KUONG et THANH KHE.
  - Le cours de la riviere KHE MUOC jusqu'en 050 - 690.
  - Une ligne jalonnee par les cotes 330 - 360 - 415 - 570 - 624 - 705 - 828 - 805 - 895 - 849 - 808 - 1028 - 442 - tous ces points inclus.
- b)- Les limites Nord et Sud de la zone demilitarisee seront materialisees, sur le terrain, par des piquets, initialement en bois, places en des points biens visibles, en portant sur une des faces la mention K F Q S,<sup>1</sup> les lettres etant placees l'une en-dessous de l'autre et lentes en bleu ou noir sur fond blanc. Le haut des piquets devra etre a 1 m. 70 au dessus du sol. A l'Est de THANH KHE et de THUY BA HA respectivement pour les limites Sud et Nord de la Zone demilitarisee, ces piquets seront plantes a des intervalles variables suivant le terrain (de 500 m. a 300 m.) a l'ouest de ces deux villages, un jalonnement kilometrique (ordre de grandeur) accroche aux points caracteristiques du terrain sera suffisant. Aux carrefeurs importants, les piquets seront remplaces par des pancartes reproduisant en toutes lettres l'inscription ci-dessus. Chacune des parties assurera la confection et la mise en place des piquets et pancartes la concernant.<sup>2</sup>

#### **IV. SUMMARY**

The provisional military demarcation line runs through a demilitarized zone, varying in width from less than four miles to almost six. The boundaries of the zone were delimited in the quoted Bylaw (Portant...) of September 15, 1954. East of the village of Thuy Ba Ha on the northern boundary and east of Thanh Khe on the southern boundary, the zone has been marked by wooden poles at intervals of 300 to 500 meters. Although zone boundary

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviation en langue vietnamienne de "Zone demilitarisee".

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for an English translation and the attached map for the proper representation.

The provisional military demarcation line, as stated before, is not to be considered as a normal international boundary. As a result the standard symbol for an international boundary is not to be used to represent the line on official cartography.

markers were to have been erected at one kilometer intervals west of these villages, there have been no reports to indicate that this work has been accomplished.

A number of villages, concentrated mostly in the eastern part, i.e., the lower Ben Hai river valley, lie within the demilitarized zone. Residents of the zone are permitted to cross the lines at authorized crossing points.

In view of the dim prospects for reunification which exist at present, the division of Vietnam along the provisional military demarcation line will probably continue in the foreseeable future. Disputes over the alignment are unlikely even though the western segment follows no visible physical or human boundary. The sparse population and relative inaccessibility of the western area lessen the likelihood of disputes.

## APPENDIX I

Phu-Lo, Sept. 15, 1954

2024051  
Joint Central Commission  
for Viet-Nam

### RULING NO. II

(Annex I: Police)

(Annex 2: Navigation on the Song Ben Hai)

## DETERMINING THE STATUS OF THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE

### FOREWARD

This Ruling, issued in accordance with Articles 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 32 of the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities, with paragraph I of the Annex to that Agreement, and with the attached Ruling No. 6, signed at Trung-Gia on Aug. 13, 1954, gives precise details regarding the procedure for carrying out these texts.

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#### I. Geographic Boundaries of the Demilitarized Zone.

##### 1. The provisional military line of demarcation.

- a. The provisional military line of demarcation shall be drawn as follows, from east to west: the mouth of the Song Ben Hai (river Cua-Tung), and the course of that river (which takes the name of Rao Thanh in the mountains) as far as the village of Bo-Ho-Su; then the parallel of Bo-Ho-Su as far as the boundary between Laos and Viet-Nam.
- b. Along that part of the provisional military line of demarcation which follows the course of the Song Ben Hai, clearly visible signs bearing the legend "Provisional Military Line of Demarcation" in two languages, as follows--

"Ligne de démarcation militaire provisoire"

"Goi tuyen quan su tam thoi"

will be placed at the crossing points specified in paragraph VI, by each of the Parties on their respective sides of the river.

Along that part of the line of demarcation which lies between Bo-Ho-Su and the Lao-Vietnamese boundary, the same signs shall be posted at intervals of approximately one kilometer, at prominent points in the terrain (crossing points,

high points, hills, etc.).

2. Boundaries of the demilitarized zone.

- a. The demilitarized zone shall be bounded on the north and the south by lines called lignes de sécurité [security lines] (map on scale of 1/25,000, No. 18 E & W; 19, 20 E & W, and 21 W, map on scale of 1/100,000, 119 E & W, attached).

Northern Boundary:

- i. An East-West line running from the mouth of the river (2.8 km. north of Cua-Tung) (251-850) to the village of Yen-Giu-Bac, passing direct to the villages of Tran Trai Thuong, Liem Cong Tay and hill 46 (189-850).
- ii. A line separating the villages of Liem Cong Tay and Dan Tham, and crossing R.N.I. [Route Nationale 1] at the culvert (2.5 km. southeast of Don Due).
- iii. A line marking the boundary between the villages of Quang-Xa, Tien Lai and Tien Trao to the west, and the villages of Phan Xa and Le-Xa to the east.

This line shall cross the railroad track at 146-800 and then skirt hills 16 (136-804) and 15 (126-810), passing around the village of Thuy Ba Ha to the west, and rejoin the course of the river Ngon Dao at 112-816.

It shall then follow the course of this river as far as its source. It shall thereafter be defined by hills 52, 84, 146, 414, 776, 1023, 1254, 977, 1250 and 700, all points included.

Southern Boundary:

A line beginning at the hill at 281-771 and ending at the river Tan Yen at 241-754, skirting hills 10, 5 and 23 inclusively.

- i. The course of the river Tan Yen, as far as its junction with the river Cao Xa.
- ii. The boundary between the villages of Trung Son (and) Gia Binh to the south and Dong Thi and Kinh Mon to the north.
- iii. The course of the river Kinh Mon between points 154-750 and 110-731.
- iv. A line connecting the last-named point with the river Khe Muoc at 089-715, including the rice fields of Dinh Kuong and Thanh Khe.
- v. The course of the river Khe Muoc as far as 050-690.



- vi. A line defined by hills 330, 360, 415, 570, 624, 705, 828, 805, 895, 849, 808, 1028, and 442, including all these points.
- b. The northern and southern boundaries of the demilitarized zone shall be marked on the terrain by stakes, initially of wood, placed at conspicuous points, bearing the legend K F Q S.<sup>1</sup> These letters shall be written under each other, and painted in blue or black on a white background. The height of the stakes shall be at least 1.7 m. above the ground. To the east of Thanh Khe and Thuy Ba Ha, respectively, on the southern and northern boundaries of the demilitarized zone, these stakes shall be placed at intervals varying, according to the terrain, from 500 m. to 300 m.; to the west of these two villages, stakes conspicuously placed at intervals of 1 kilometer will be sufficient. At important crossroads, the stakes shall be replaced by signs bearing in full the legend given above. Each of the parties agrees to make and to post the stakes and signs on its side of the border.

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese abbreviation for "Demilitarized Zone".

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared in the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of the Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8744, State Department Building, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (Telephone: Code 182, Extension 4508).