

U.S. Spray Strips Foliage Hiding Vietnam Reds

By HOMER BIGART Special to The New York Times

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SAIGON, Vietnam, Jan. 18—United States planes have sprayed jungle growth along the Saigon-Saint Jacques road to remove foliage hiding Communist guerrillas.

The results are not known yet. The chemical mixture is supposed to kill all trees and brush, but the withering and dropping of leaves may take five days to three weeks.

The seventy-mile route connecting Saigon with a popular seaside resort has been unsafe for months, and diplomats with seashore villas have had to travel by air.

A high South Vietnamese of-

ficial said today that defoliant chemicals would also be sprayed on Viet Cong plantations of manioc and sweet potatoes in the highlands. The exact locations of these plantations have already been plotted by aerial surveys.

Tests have shown, he said, that manioc and sweet potatoes die four days after having been sprayed. These are the two most important food staples for the Communist bands in the mountains, especially manioc, a plant from which tapioca is made. When dried, it can be stored indefinitely.

The spraying operation along the highway was accompanied by the dropping of pamphlets assuring farmers that the chem-

icals were harmless to humans and animals.

Defoliants will play an important part in plans to isolate the Communists from their food sources in the highlands.

Another move, this one inspired by the British success against the Communists in Malaya, involves the creation of "white zones" in the highlands. This entails the linking of new land-development centers with near-by villages of primitive mountain tribes, which have been major targets for Communist infiltration.

Civil guard and self-defense units from the land-development centers, in which thousands of Vietnamese from the crowded coastal strip have been resettled, will undertake the defense of the tribal villages. A network of trails providing easy access

to the villages is being built, and over these will go food and medical supplies and social service workers who will attempt to win the loyalty of the tribesmen.