

U.S. Widening DMZ Buffer Strip

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon said Friday military teams are clearing more jungle area to extend a free-fire strip just below the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam.

The idea is to expose infiltrating Communists to American air and artillery fire.

The Pentagon refused to say

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exactly how wide and how far the so-called barrier will extend. Presently the cleared area is about six miles by one-third of a mile, the Pentagon said.

Reports Friday said Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara apparently is considering extending the belt through rugged inland terrain along the entire 40 miles of the DMZ.

In response to questions the Pentagon said information about the extension is classified

and declined to comment on possible future military plans.

Pentagon officials are skeptical that a Maginot Line-type barrier could be built at a reasonable cost to halt completely the Communist infiltration of South Vietnam from the north.

But they have been considering various types of obstacles and electronic sensors which would alert U.S. forces to movement of enemy troops through a cleared area.