

# Oddest Press Briefing in

Saigon

A senior army colonel summoned the press corps Saturday and, over bottles of warm beer and orange soda, denounced President Nguyen Van Thieu as a stooge, said President Ford is a criminal and predicted that the Viet Cong are on a final march to victory.

In response, the Saigon government hardly blinked an eye. But if the remarks had been made by anyone other than Colonel Vo Dong Giang, a guerrilla fighter in the highlands for 25 years, it is quite certain his ability to hold future news conferences would have been quickly impaired.

Giang, 52, a pencil-thin South Vietnamese with impeccably polite manners, is chief of the 290-man Viet Cong delegation. The group, established by the Paris peace accords of 1973, is held virtual prisoner in its Tan Son Nhut compound known as Camp Davis, a former U.S.-occupied compound named after the first American killed in the war.

Each Saturday morning for two years, Giang has held a press conference. Usually only six or seven people show up. But Saturday, with Communist forces threatening the capital and with about 300 foreign correspondents on duty in Saigon, 120 journalists jostled their way into the spotlessly clean compound to see exactly what a real live Viet Cong officer looked like.

Except for his neat, dark-green jungle uniform and ankle-high black boots, Giang looks like many other South Vietnamese officers.

Since the cease-fire was signed in January, 1973, Giang has become a master of "doublespeak." Answers seldom fit questions. He can respond to a question at great length without answering it. Saturday, however, several noteworthy points did emerge:

- Giang reiterated that only when Thieu is removed from office and U.S. military aid has stopped can negotiations begin to end the war.

- He refused to rule out the possibility of a major at-

tack on Saigon. He said, in fact, that a directive issued April 4 ordered Saigon residents to "uprise and rise up," and added that activities would be increased on three fronts: military, diplomatic and political.

- He declined to offer any guarantee of safety to the estimated 6000 Americans in Saigon. He said most are soldiers in disguise and he termed the Ford administration's plan to evacuate them in an emergency "a treacherous scheme."

Giang picked up a package of Hanoi-made cigarets. It was empty and he accepted an American filter-tip from a correspondent. "Bad for the health," he joked. Although fluent in French and English, he spoke in Vietnamese, which was translated into flawless English by a young Viet Cong sergeant sitting on his left.

On his right, at the long U-shaped table in front of the red and blue Viet Cong flag, sat two other officers wearing sun glasses who jotted down in notebooks each question the correspondents asked during the 45-minute question session.

Outside the press conference, Viet Cong soldiers wearing safari-like sun hats and baggy olive-colored fa-

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figures stood quietly with pistols on their right hips. A dozen yards away, on the far side of the compound fence, South Vietnamese policemen stood guard with rifles.

A government agent posing as a journalist took pictures of the correspondents. The correspondents took pictures of him.

Giang shook hands warm-

ly with everyone. A government infantry company marched down the street, singing in unison.

"All in all," noted a British journalist, "I'd say the whole scene's a bit unreal."



*AP Wirephoto*

VIET CONG COLONEL VO DONG GIANG (RIGHT) MET REPORTERS AT SAIGON  
He called President Thieu a **stooge** and President Ford a **criminal**