

Hanoi Tells Banker It Is Willing to Trade With U.S.

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD
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HONG KONG, July 18—An official of America's biggest bank has visited Hanoi at the invitation of the North Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce and discussed the possible trade between the United States and North Vietnam.

The visit, by Louis E. Saubolle, a vice president and Asia representative of the Bank of America, was believed to be the first by an American banker to Hanoi since North Vietnam was established in 1954.

Analysts here said the invitation indicated that North Vietnam was interested in trade with the United States to help rebuild its shattered economy. But they cautioned that the visit did not represent a major breakthrough in relations between the two countries and emphasized that Mr. Saubolle was acting on his own.

Trade Embargoed

The United States has long had an embargo on trade with Hanoi and declared a similar one on commerce with South Vietnam after the fall of the Thieu regime.

Diplomatic relations with the two Vietnam governments have also been frozen since the Communist victory on April 03. The North Vietnamese have made two offers to move toward setting up relations, but Washington rejected them as insulting because they were

tied to demands that the United States provide postwar aid as called for by the Paris peace accords.

However, the United States has reportedly allowed some medical supplies to be sent to Saigon through the American Friends Service Committee as an indication of American goodwill.

Interest Expressed

Mr. Saubolle, who spent a week in Hanoi, Haiphong and the Red River delta, said that the North Vietnamese had several times stressed that "they are willing to develop mutually beneficial trade with American corporations." According to Mr. Saubolle, the Communist officials also told him "they hoped similar friendly and useful sessions could be held in the near future."

Several American companies that were exploring for oil off the Mekong delta or selling oil in Saigon before the war ended have indicated to Washington that they would like to approach the Communists about resuming operations there, diplomatic sources say. These companies are said to include Mobil, Shell and Exxon.

Mr. Saubolle, who holds a French passport and was born in China, is a specialist on contact with Communist countries. He has visited China three times in the last six months, an official of the Bank of Amer-

ica said, and speaks Chinese, Russian and a little Vietnamese as well as French and English.

According to a written statement issued today, Mr. Saubolle met with officials of the North Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce, the national import-export corporations and the Bank of Foreign Trade of Vietnam. Although he was representing an American company, Mr. Saubolle said he felt he had had very good access and useful discussion.

'Very Definite Market'

Mr. Saubolle declined to provide details of his meetings or say whether any agreements had been reached. But in his prepared statement he observed that "there is a very definite market in Vietnam for goods and materials which she can only obtain from foreign sources and which she needs to further her industrialization."

These include grain, agricultural machinery, communications and transportation equipment and industrial raw materials, he said.

Mr. Saubolle said that Hanoi's principal export now was coal, but that the North Vietnamese hoped soon to be able to sell iron ore, tea, art objects, textiles, shoes, jute and tropical agricultural products.

It was unclear whether the Bank of America had cleared

the visit with Washington before Mr. Saubolle left. A bank official said that the State Department had been contacted and that informal permission had been given. But official American sources said that Mr. Saubolle was operating on his own and that his trip, in possible violation of United States restrictions, had not been officially approved.