

Custody of Vietnamese Boys Disputed

BLACKSTONE, Va., Dec. 14 (AP)—Two Vietnamese boys whose mother says that, for their safety, she had an American take them out of South Vietnam months before the Communist takeover, are caught in the middle of a custody battle in Virginia.

The boys' mother, Thi Phuc, apparently had a change of heart about allowing them to be adopted by an Army lieutenant colonel and his wife who live in this community near Fort Pickett.

The boys, Bobby, 10 years old, and Sammy, 5, attend public schools in Nottoway County. Both believed they would be adopted by Lieut. Col. and Mrs. Glen Kohler, with whom they have been living the last 19 months. Colonel Kohler is deputy post commander at Fort Pickett.

2d Home in States

For Bobby and Sammy, the Kohler home is their second in the United States, since the Kohlers managed to obtain custody of the pair from the Nottoway County Welfare Department. A United States Army captain to whom the boys were originally given by their mother is a bachelor.

Mrs. Phuc later fled South Vietnam and took a job as a

maid for a retired couple in Dallas. She flew to Richmond in September, where she was picked up by Colonel Kohler and reunited with her two sons.

The Colonel says that during Mrs. Phuc's two-week stay at his home "she said she in no way would attempt to take the children."

But Mrs. Phuc recently alleged in national news broadcasts that the Kohlers were preventing her from regaining custody of Bobby and Sammy, whom she said she parted with because of poverty and fears about their safety.

George S. Cummins, a lawyer, said here, that until the mother made her claims on television, the adoption procedure for the Kohlers had seemed routine.

The mother had been quoted by a newspaper as saying she was happy that her sons had a good home and that as long as the Kohlers wanted the children, she would not try to take them away.

Her apparent change of mind has surprised him and his wife, Colonel Kohler says. They say her reversal has had a bad effect on the boys.

Colonel Kohler said Bobby broke out in hives when children at school told him they

had seen his mother on television saying bad things about the Kohlers. "Bobby stated he does not want to go back to his mother," the Colonel said.

"They are beautiful boys, extremely changed and anyone would want them, especially a mother who is lonesome, who had six children and two of them killed in the war and still is searching for two daughters somewhere in the United States," he said.

Mrs. Phuc's husband was killed in a helicopter crash in South Vietnam.