

Viet reds kill U. S. officer

Associated Press

SAIGON — Communist troops ambushed and killed an unarmed American officer and wounded four other U.S. soldiers yesterday as their unarmed helicopters landed to search for the remains of a GI 12 miles south of Saigon, a survivor said.

In Washington, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger denounced the shooting as "a despicable act" and said "we should be prepared to take the necessary measures" to prevent a recurrence.

The mission's operations officer, Maj. Richard Laritz, 33, of St. Paul, Minn., said one South Vietnamese pilot also was slain and at least three other Vietnamese crewmen were wounded and that he saw about five dead attackers left in the field. Twelve South Vietnamese accompanied the Americans in their three choppers.

The American officer killed was identified as Capt. Richard Morgan Rees, 32, of Kent, Ohio.

The five are the first American casualties repatried among the 150 - man Joint Casualty Resolution

Center, charged with searching for 1300 Americans missing in action in the Indochina war.

Spokesman for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong delegation to the Joint Military Team said they had no report on the incident and had not been informed of the mission in advance.

The helicopters had the orange stripes of the Joint Military Team authorized to conduct searches under the cease-fire, Laritz said.

Laritz said he had been instructed as recently as Friday that if his team met hostile fire it was to surrender immediately.

Laritz said Rees was knocked to the ground and as he got up he put his hands up in the air "and said something, I don't know what he said. And at that time he was shot and killed."

"I fought in the Korean War and numerous battles in Vietnam. I've seen many people die. I can understand that in a war . . . But my officer, my man, was murdered in cold blood. It's as simple as that."

"We will not cease the search for the missing in action," Schlesinger said during a talk before a group of Jaycees officers.

He did not indicate what "the necessary measures" might be. The United States is barred by Congress from any military action in Indochina.

In a wide-ranging question and answer session, Schlesinger also said he expects

an increase in Communist military attacks in South Vietnam, but not an all-out offensive.

He accused the North Vietnamese of "massive violations" of the Vietnam peace agreement in the moving of major military forces into the border areas of South Vietnam and said the North Vietnamese also were violating that agreement by sending supplies into the country.



WHERE REDS AMBUSHED UNARMED U.S. OFFICER
Major Richard Laritz shows killing site near Saigon

—UPI Photo