

# U.S. Protest in Slaying Of Officer in Vietnam

## Saigon

The United States lodged its first protest with the international peacekeeping force yesterday, calling for a probe of a Communist attack on an unarmed helicopter in which an American officer was killed.

It was the first such U.S. note to the four-nation International Commission of Control and Supervision since the peacekeeping force was established by the Paris cease-fire agreement last January 27.

The note called Saturday's

attack on the three helicopters carrying an American team searching for traces of U.S. servicemen a "deliberate attack by a hostile force who had infiltrated into the area with the intention of ambushing the team."

Meanwhile, the Viet Cong denied that any helicopter mission in South Vietnam Saturday had been authorized by the commission.

The Viet Cong statement added: "No aircraft of the four-party joint military team was sent out on mission on Dec. 15, 1973."

The dead officer was Captain Richard Morgan Rees, 32, of Kent, Ohio.

The four wounded Americans were identified as Army Sergeant Herman Ballard of Columbus, Ohio, who was treated and released; Army Staff Sergeant Ronnie L. Watson of Fort Pierce, Fla., treated and released; Army Specialist 4 Randall J. Nash of Amarillo, Tex., hospitalized with fragments in his arm; and Lieutenant Ben C. Elfrink of Isabel, S.D., who suffered scalp wounds and other injuries.

One member of the South Vietnamese crew also was killed and three were wounded.

## South Vietnam Battle

### Saigon

The South Vietnamese command today reported 97 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops killed in a battle 50 miles southwest of Saigon.

The fighting took place yesterday afternoon on the fringe of a Viet Cong-controlled zone near the

towns of Cai Lay and Cai Be.

The command said a large Communist force that attacked South Vietnamese government infantry units in the area was driven off.

South Vietnamese casualties were put at four killed and 12 wounded.

The protest note was signed by Colonel William W. Tombaugh, chief of the U.S. delegation to the four-party joint military team. Tombaugh told Iranian Ambassador Assad K. Sadri, chairman of the ICCS, that U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin had directed him to file the protest.

Reuters

Associated Press