

JUN 4 1971

HANOI NOW SAYS
IT WON'T ACCEPT
RETURN OF P.O.W.'S

Terms Reduction 'an Odious
Act' as Only 13 of the 570
Sail for Release Point

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By HENRY GINIGER
Special to The New York Times

PARIS, June 3—North Vietnam announced today that it was canceling all arrangements to receive sick and wounded prisoners of war from the South on the ground that only 13 out of 570 originally announced would be transferred.

The cancellation was announced when the 13 prisoners were already at sea heading north from Danang in South Vietnam toward the point near the 17th Parallel previously fixed for the transfer. The official North Vietnamese information agency said that it would have a statement "soon" about the 13 men.

Both the United States and the Saigon Government were clearly caught by surprise. In today's session of the peace talks here, the Saigon delegate, Pham Dang Lam, declared flatly that the operation would take place tomorrow "as provided for and following conditions already fixed."

Neither Xuan Thuy, chief of the North Vietnamese delegation, nor Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, representing the Vietcong, responded.

'An Odious Act'

Hanoi's statement, distributed afterward to the press, declared that talking first of 570 prisoners then only of 13 was "an odious act on the part of the United States and of the puppet administration of Saigon."

The conditions that Hanoi had laid down for the transfer, it said, "no longer have reason or pertain."

Nguyen Trieu Dan, the Saigon spokesman, continued to insist that his Government was complying with the Geneva convention, which stipulates that only prisoners who agree can be repatriated.

According to the allies, a

commission of the International Red Cross interrogated 660 sick and wounded prisoners, 90 more than first announced, and found that only 13 wanted to leave.

The fact that 98 per cent had refused to be repatriated, Mr. Dan said, was a commentary on the Hanoi regime. He added that it was possible that pressure had been put on the prisoners by Communist agents and referred to a commitment that he said North Vietnamese soldiers were compelled to sign before going South not to re-

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turn home before the end of the war.

North Vietnam has never formally acknowledged the presence of its regular forces in the South. The prisoners were referred to today as "patriots" who had been arrested illegally.

Nguyen Than Le, the North Vietnamese spokesman, repeated Hanoi's demand that all such "patriots" be released and be allowed to stay in the South or go North if they wish. Those who go North should, according to Hanoi, be released near the demilitarized zone or in adjoining areas.

Mr. Le said he doubted the ability or willingness of the Red Cross to know the truth about conditions in Southern camps and referred to "the parody of the 570 prisoners."

As for Stephen Ledogar, the American spokesman, he appeared particularly bitter and said that the United States deplored Hanoi's prisoner statement "when it knows the men are already at sea." In an unusual reference to his fellow spokesmen, Mr. Ledogar said:

"You have heard from the two spokesmen for the side that favors an immediate cessation of the violence throughout Indochina. Now you'll hear from two spokesmen who are in favor of more war in Indochina."

Neither Mr. Le nor Duong Dinh Thao of the Vietcong had any comment on this assertion.

13 Head for Rendezvous

By ALVIN SHUSTER

Special to The New York Times

ABOARD THE U.S.S. UPSHUR, Off South Vietnam, June 3 — Thirteen disabled North Vietnamese prisoners of war headed back to their homeland tonight in the air-conditioned

hospital ward of this luxurious troop transport.

The prisoners, six of whom had lost a leg, were the only sick and wounded to agree to repatriation among 660 North Vietnamese interviewed by the International Red Cross.

This troop transport, originally designed is a passenger liner for the American President Lines and now used to carry Korean troops assigned to Vietnam, accommodates more than 1,500. In addition to the 13 prisoners, it sailed tonight at 6 P.M. with some 200 crewmen and officials and about 70 journalists.

The atmosphere aboard tonight resembled that of a cruise to the Caribbean. There were two sittings for dinner — the men did not dress—and two movies were shown in the passengers lounge on the promenade deck. Coffee followed.

As for the prisoners, a Vietnamese official said they were "living like kings, having all their meals in the hospital ward." They arrived earlier today from Bienhoa, near Saigon, wearing dark brown prison uniforms.

Mass Refusals Weighed

It was clear from the vast logistical effort that the United States and South Vietnam wished to focus world attention on allied humanity in dealing with the sensitive prisoner issue.

At his news conference Tuesday, President Nixon said that he hoped that the refusal of the other prisoners to go back "will not deter the North Vietnamese at least to consider some kind of action on their part with regard to sick disabled pris-



Associated Press

BEFORE PLENARY SESSION IN PARIS: Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the Vietcong delegate, talking to newsmen.

oners."

Officials abroad and in Saigon cited a variety of possible reasons in trying to explain the mass refusals to return to the North. South Vietnamese officials, including the Foreign Minister, Tran Van Lam, said that the prisoners "would prefer to live under our regime rather than the dictatorship of the North."

Others suggest that the prisoners were following an unwritten rule not to volunteer to return home until victory. Some feel that Hanoi passed the word through the prison compound not to accept repatriation as part of an effort to embarrass the allies and provide Hanoi with an opportunity to charge insincerity.

International Red Cross officials aboard tonight insisted that they had taken great pains to give the prisoners every chance to accept the offer. They questioned the prisoners in one day from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M., told them of Hanoi's radio broadcast accepting the Saigon proposal, and answered questions from the prisoners. "Everything was done carefully and thoroughly," one Red Cross official said.