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13 Downcast Prisoners, Spurned by

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DANANG, South Vietnam, June 4—Thirteen disabled North Vietnamese prisoners, described as saddened and bewildered by the last-minute refusal of Hanoi to take them back, returned here today after a 24-hour sea journey to nowhere.

The Upshur, a 19,000-ton unarmed Navy troop transport, turned around after traveling 70 miles north and headed back to Danang on orders sent at midday to forego any effort to carry out the planned ship-to-ship transfer of the captives. Plans had called for the prisoners to be moved early this morning to a civilian barge, which was then to have been met by North Vietnamese craft near shore.

Hanoi, which had suggested the transfer arrangements in precise detail in response to a Saigon offer to return up to 570 prisoners, said that the low number aboard was "treacherous and dishonest." It then annulled its agreement to meet the barge off the coast of the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between North and South Vietnam.

New Offer by Saigon

The South Vietnamese Government charged Hanoi today with "bad faith in going back on its word and refusing to receive its own invalid soldiers," but offered again in general terms to free all the sick and wounded who wanted to return to the North.

Despite the renewed offer,

many observers believe that the whole episode set back the chances of any similar venture for some time. It was clear that Saigon would think long and hard before again making any specific proposal for unilateral release of North Vietnamese prisoners.

United States officials have persuaded Saigon to make such gestures in the hope that mounting world pressure would result in release by Hanoi of at least some American prisoners.

Some officials expressed the belief tonight that Hanoi's refusal to accept the prisoners was meant as a warning to Washington that North Vietnam wants serious concessions at Paris in return for the release of the American prisoners and not its own men back, no matter how many.

Issue Embittered

In broader terms, officials say, the abortive effort has further embittered the atmosphere surrounding the sensitive prisoners issue. American officials, from the White House down, had hailed Hanoi's acceptance of Saigon's offer as an encouraging sign and a possible first step toward the return of the imprisoned Americans.

The lingering hope of American officials for reciprocity was illustrated by the appearance aboard the Upshur of a special five-man team. One member reported that they were there "just on the slim chance" that Hanoi would send a few Americans out with the vessel sched-

uled to pick up the North Vietnamese prisoners. The team included a doctor.

The dejected captives who walked or were carried from the Upshur today represented the only disabled among 660 interviewed by the International Red Cross who expressed a desire to return to the North. Officials have offered several possible reasons why the others refused repatriation: the fear of reprisals at home, underground instructions from Hanoi to remain or a sincere desire to stay in South Vietnam.

'Sad and Confused'

American hospital corpsmen, who helped care for the prisoners in the ship's hospital ward assisted the disabled captives down the ramp here today. One prisoner who had lost a leg left the ship on the back of an American corpsman.

"The corpsmen and the prisoners got along so well together on the brief voyage that they and the prisoners had tears in their eyes when it came

Hanoi, Return to Danang

time for them to leave," one of the ship's officers said.

Reporters traveling aboard the Upshur were not allowed to interview the captives. But officers reported that one or two of the prisoners began to suspect that they would not be going home when the time came and passed for the transfer.

They were finally informed of the change in plans at about 4 o'clock this afternoon, nearly eight hours after they had been scheduled to leave the Upshur for the barge.

"They were sad and confused when they heard the news," said Maj. To Cong Bien, public relations officer for the Joint General Staff. "They couldn't understand why North Vietnam would do that. We promised them that they would be in the first batch, if any, to return in the future."

The prisoners also told South Vietnamese and International Red Cross officials aboard that they wanted to be kept apart from all other prisoners if they were sent back to the camp at

Bienhoa, near Saigon. They expressed fear for their safety in a prison where almost all of their sick and wounded countrymen disagreed with their decision to return.

In Camp at Danang

The prisoners were taken to a prison camp in Danang tonight. South Vietnamese officers said that a decision would be made later on whether they would be sent to a separate compound at Bienhoa.

In its statement today, the South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry said that Hanoi, in accepting Saigon's offer to take back the prisoners, "did not mention any specific number of prisoners as a condition for agreeing to receive them."

"On the contrary," the statement said, "the Hanoi regime solemnly declared at that time that it was ready to receive and help any prisoners of war who wished to return to North Vietnam."