

Haiphong Asks U.S. to Clear Mines

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HAIPHONG, Jan. 21—North Vietnam's major port, its lifeline to the sea mined with concealed American weaponry, will still have to deal with special hazards after a cease-fire.

It will certainly take months, and it may take years, to locate and deactivate all the thousands of underwater explosives planted in the harbor approaches, rivers and canals of this area, the mayor of this bruised city said today.

Since the United States planted the mines, said Mayor Le Duc Thinh, "I think it is also the responsibility of the Americans to remove them."

"We of course hope to sweep them away as soon as we can," said the mayor, but he stressed: "I wanted to emphasize the moral responsibility of the American side."

Mayor Thinh said that he and other municipal and military officials in the Haiphong region do not know what has been said in the secret Paris talks about the mine removal task ahead. But, he said, "The quantity of mines is quite great." He recalled that for years after World War II mines continued to endanger shipping off many coasts, especially in heavily mined European waters.

Mining technology has become considerably more sophisticated since then, the mayor noted, and with the United States boasting of having the most modern technology, he said, if that is correct "I think it will take much longer" to remove the mines from North Vietnam's waters.

Mayor Thinh agreed on short notice to give the first interview of its kind to this reporter, presently the only American newsmen in North Vietnam. The mining of North Vietnam's waters never has been publicly discussed in this manner by

See HAIPHONG, A12, Col. 1

HAIPHONG, From A1

any North Vietnamese official, nor was the discussion initiated by them. The request for an interview centered on the mining was made only a few hours before hand, upon my arrival in Haiphong. The recent Amer-

ican air attacks on Haiphong were described by a group of foreign journalists allowed to enter the city two weeks ago, but there was no opportunity then to report on the mining.

The mayor emphasized at one point that he was expressing "purely opinion" about the American for actual removal of the bombs by American equipment. This obviously could raise security complications if American ships or men were permitted to enter North Vietnamese waterways. In this tightly disciplined, Communist-ruled society, however, officials do not speak haphazardly, especially to Western newsmen.

Even the title of "mayor" evokes an imprecise impression. Mayor Thinh is in command of Haiphong, as his counterpart, Mayor Tran Duy Hung, is in command of Hanoi, the capital. In addition to running the cities administratively, they control the regional arm forces which defend them. Both are commanding personalities, and Haiphong's mayor arrived for the interview dressed in khaki accompanied by a military guard in a very newlooking, Chinese-built jeep.

Evacuation Place

The mayor had come from what is called here his "evacuation place"—outside Haiphong—for the interview. High officials all continue to work from such outposts away from the cities even though the American bombing of this portion of North Vietnam stopped Dec. 31. Mayor Thinh said, "The townspeople and I will remain vigilant about what Mr. Nixon has said. He might have some pretext to reattack our town any time."

Before meeting with the mayor, a brief trip to the harbor provided a look at the extraordinary sight of a line of foreign seagoing freighters tied up at the quay, bottled up in Haiphong harbor since President Nixon's May 8 order for mining this country's harbors.

It was surprising to find the ships so close to the shore, only about 30 feet away, alongside the pier. Storage warehouses, some

with bomb-damaged roofs, are a short distance away. There were oil drums and other equipment on the ground, but there was no sign of much activity in this section of the port. Out in the harbor, one could see sampans and junks, two patrol vessels, and a very large sunken dredge.

The identifiable mine-blocked ships at the dock were a Chinese freighter, the East German vessel Frieden, the Soviet freighter Divnogorsk, Cubas Imias, Polands Jozef Conrad and, at its stern, the Polish freighter Kilinski. All are about 10,000 tons.

Restricted Photos

Photographs are permitted only of the heavily damaged Conrad. Even then, when I stepped back for an amateurish snapshot, an armed guard accompanied me to check the camera angle to make sure no other vessel would show on the film.

The vice director of the port, Le Van Hon, said that at 6:15 a.m., Dec. 17 (after the Paris talks ended in stalemate on Dec. 13), American planes "began to put more mines in the water at the entrance to the harbor" which is about 12 miles away on the coast of North Vietnam.

"And on the 18th, at 9:45 p.m." he continued, "they dropped bombs throughout the harbor." The Jozef Conrad was hit in subsequent bombing on Dec. 20 at 4:45 a.m., when there was a standby crew of about 30 aboard, he said. The port official said that three bombs, which he described as 500-pounders, hit the ship and, as previously reported, killed three of the crew. Another reportedly died afterward.

An examination of the vessel showed yawning holes squarely in the middle, with buckled and torn steel plates and the charred remains from a fire that gutted the ship. Han said, "We mobilized the firemen to save the ship and to move the other ships away which were then moored alongside it."