

Vietcong General Joins Military Team in Saigon

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD FEB 2 1973

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Friday, Feb. 2—The chief of the Vietcong delegation to the joint military commission, who is the second highest-ranking member of the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam, arrived in Saigon yesterday aboard a United States Army helicopter after being picked up in a Communist-held town near the Cambodian border.

His arrival coincided with reports that the meeting of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission yesterday was "quite businesslike." For several days the commission had been bogged down in tense procedural disputes.

The military commission, which with the International Commission of Control and Supervision was created by the Paris agreement to monitor the cease-fire, is composed of

the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government.

The head of the Vietcong delegation is Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Tra, the commander of Vietcong forces and the deputy head for military affairs of what is known as the Central Office for South Vietnam, or COSVN.

General Tra and 28 other Vietcong delegates were picked up by seven United States UH-1 helicopters in Loc Ninh, a devastated district capital 70 miles north of Saigon. It is one of eight district capitals held by the Communists.

Although a native of Quang Nam Province in what is now South Vietnam, General Tra is known to be a deputy chief of staff of the North Vietnamese

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Army and at least an alternate member of the Central Committee of North Vietnam's Workers (Communist) party.

According to accounts in North Vietnamese newspapers, General Tra was promoted to major general in a public ceremony in Hanoi on Sept. 1, 1959, shortly before coming south down the Ho Chi Minh trail and disappearing from sight until today.

Because of these obvious close links to Hanoi, General Tra's appointment as the head Vietcong delegate surprised some American officials here. It seemed to confirm the long-held belief of most United States intelligence analysts that the Vietcong forces are directed and controlled by Hanoi through its commanders in the south.

Directed Offensive

General Tra has not previously been publicly identified by the Communist press or radio as a leader of the National Liberation Front or the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Knowledgeable analysts here say that General Tra's work has been exclusively at COSVN, which is the agency through which the Hanoi party leadership transmits its orders to the South. The literal translation of the term from Vietnamese means "The Central Committee's Office for South Vietnam."

It was General Tra who directed last year's spring offensive against An Loc and the series of attacks last fall around Saigon, these analysts believe. He is considered an extremely capable and tough officer—"the best they have," one American analyst said.

With his arrival at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, where the Communist delegations are quartered and working, the four chief delegates are now all present. The North Vietnamese leader, Maj. Gen. Le Quang Hoa, arrived Monday.

Officials close to the military commission said that yesterday's session, which was attended only by the deputy heads of the delegations, showed a marked improvement in atmosphere over the three previous days, when the Vietcong delegates had at first refused to present their credentials.

"I've been quite heartened by the progress," one official said. The official, who said he could give no details of the

meetings because of strict orders to keep the sessions secret, added that he expected the military commission might now be able to start sending out its seven regional inspection teams, "perhaps by early next week."

The Paris agreement specified that the seven regional teams were to be in place by last Tuesday.

Chief Delegates May Meet

It was also believed that the four heads of the delegations would hold their first formal meeting today. So far only their deputies have met.

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegates, who are living in a ramshackle compound of former United States Army barracks inside the air base, have been carefully guarded by South Vietnamese military police and have had no contact with either ordinary South Vietnamese or with the press.

Yesterday, however, according to a reliable United States official, the North Vietnamese requested permission to visit a market off the base "to get some fresh fruit and vegetables." The Communist reportedly said they were satisfied with the South Vietnamese military rations they have been fed, but would appreciate a change in diet.

The North Vietnamese representatives are said to have been correct and courteous in their behavior toward both American and South Vietnamese military officers with whom they have had contact.

Progress Reported

The four-nation International Commission of Control and Supervision also reported minor progress toward setting up its half of the peace-keeping machinery.

Michel Gauvin, the Canadian delegate to the commission and its acting chairman, said after yesterday afternoon's session that it had been agreed in principle to send preliminary teams to inspect the commission's facilities at three of its seven regional headquarters today. These visits would not be to begin supervising the cease-fire, but to reconnoiter the living quarters, officers and transportation that the United States and South Vietnam have made available, Mr. Gauvin said.

The three regional headquarters are at Hue, Danang and Pleiku.

But Mr. Gauvin stressed again, as he has over the last three days, that "it is for the joint military commission to get details of the moving."

"We can urge them to act," he said, "but if they don't there's not much we can do."

In the meantime, the Canadians, Indonesians, Poles and Hungarians, each in their different uniforms, have been wandering around downtown Saigon, warding off beggars and street urchins, picking up Vietnamese bar girls and snapping pictures like regular tourists.

One Hungarian officer was seen carrying a brand new Sony portable television set into his hotel room.