

# Military Truce Unit Holds First Top-Level Meeting

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD FEB 3 1973

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday Feb. 3—After several days of tense preparation, the chief delegates to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission held their first formal meeting yesterday, and sources close to the commission said it was "working surprisingly well."

But the commission, which is composed of the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, has reportedly resolved only the most preliminary procedural problems, such as the color of its flag—orange. United States and South Vietnamese officials said it appeared that the commission would not be able to dispatch its first regional inspection teams until at least sometime next week.

commissions should have had seven regional teams in place

Under the protocols of the Paris agreement that established the military commission and the International Commission of Control and Supervision to monitor the cease-fire, both by last Tuesday.

## Two Delegations Balk

At yesterday's meeting of the international commission, or I.C.C.S., the Canadian and Indonesian delegates decided to try to send out their regional teams without waiting for the military commission to organize, Canadian officials reported. But the Polish and Hungarian delegates, the other two members of the I.C.C.S., reportedly argued that the commission could not act until the military commission's teams were in place.

One Canadian official said that the Canadians and Indonesians might go ahead on their own today anyway. The

issue of which of the two peace-keeping commissions has primary responsibility and which has to be organized first is not clearly spelled out in the Paris agreement, diplomats here say.

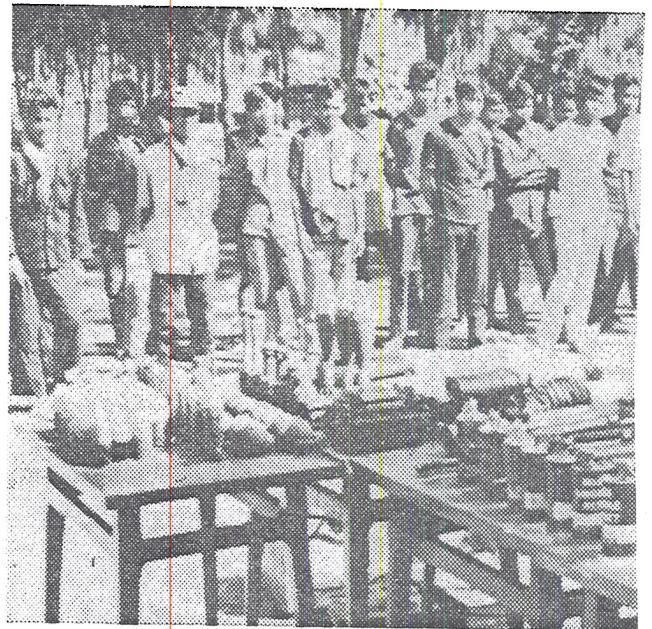
In the meantime, the I.C.C.S. yesterday did dispatch three teams of eight men, two from each delegation, to inspect the commission's facilities in Hue, DaNang, and Pleiku, three of the regional headquarters.

The chief Vietcong delegate to the military commission, Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Tra, and the chief North Vietnamese delegate, Maj. Gen. Le Quang Hoa, drove up to the commission's freshly painted offices in Tan Son Nhut Air Base yesterday afternoon in black United States Army staff cars. General Tra, who directed the 1968 Tet Offensive against Saigon, is the second highest ranking member of the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam.

Before the meeting of chief delegates yesterday only the deputy delegation heads had met, to deal with such touchy problems as the color of the flag that the four-party commission will use to identify its vehicles and aircraft. It will be bright orange, which diplomats here call "international orange," like the color of road crews' vests, with a black numeral four.

The South Vietnamese and Americans had originally equipped all the vehicles used to transport the Communists with white flags, the standard sign of safe conduct. But the North Vietnamese and Vietcong are said to have angrily charged that white was also the sign of surrender and that they had not surrendered.

In turn the Communists de-



A group of Khmer Rouge, or Cambodian Communists, on including some U.S. M-16 rifles. The scene is 18 r

manded a red identifying flag, but the South Vietnamese said that red was the color of the Communist flag and therefore unacceptable, diplomats say. Hence eventually the compro-

A Western official familiar with the talks said that while such "little hangups, tough feelings" were to be expected in view of all the obstacles, he was "pleased with the progress made so far."

According to the official, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegates have been polite, though sometimes tough, and have hidden their bitter feelings better than the South Vietnamese.

## Delegates Heavily Guarded

On their arrival yesterday at the military commission's headquarters, which is next to the United States Officers' Club, the Communists were heavily guarded by South Vietnamese military police, but they carried no visible weapons themselves. As has been the case since the North Vietnamese and Vietcong began arriving on Sunday, newsmen were barred from getting near them by the South Vietnamese.

The sight of the Communists in their dark olive drab, Soviet-style uniforms with red stars on their shoulders and caps, drew little apparent interest from Vietnamese soldiers and civilians on the base.

After years of war and suffering, the Vietnamese seem to have developed an impenetrable layer of reserve and "skepticism that shuts out new and difficult situations and slows down their reactions.

A young woman working in

a barber shop across the street from the joint military commission said she had not even been aware the Communists had arrived in Saigon.

What were all the police sirens about, the woman, Hoang Tu Tuy, was asked. "We never pay any attention to the sirens," she replied. "If there are Communists across the street, they should go back to Hanoi. I don't trust them."

## Secrecy Breeds Myths

Although the strict secrecy that has cloaked the meetings of the military commission has made it virtually impossible to ascertain many details of the sessions, a mythology has already begun to spring up about how the various parties have behaved toward each other.

One senior, retired South Vietnamese general said yesterday that he had been told the North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegates had complained after a United States officer, angry about Americans being killed after the cease-fire began, cut off their supply of food. In this account, the Americans had also turned off the Communists' electricity and air-conditioning, though a preliminary inspection by this correspondent of the ramshackle barracks where they are staying did not reveal any air conditioners.

A ranking American diplomat, on the other hand, said that the Communists had complained about their food because all that the South Vietnamese were feeding them were C-rations, the standard United States Army food for use in the field.