

10 Trapped Ships Leave Haiphong

Washington

Ten ships trapped since May by the American mining of Haiphong steamed out of the North Vietnamese harbor after the U.S. provided navigational charts locating the mine fields, the Pentagon said yesterday.

Defense Department spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said the ships "left at their own risk without any U.S. assistance or guidance" other than the general information contained in the maps given the North Vietnamese.

The first left February 9, and the last departure was Tuesday.

"In our view the maps of the mine field was not enough in itself to guarantee safe passage," Friedheim said. "Apparently one of the ship captains decided it was worth the risk and the others followed after the first ship got safely through."

Twenty-eight ships were bottled up in the harbor May 8 when U.S. planes mined North Vietnam's seven major ports and inland waterways. The remainder are expected to come out shortly.

In accordance with the Vietnam cease-fire agreement, the U.S. is preparing to clear the mines. Indications yesterday were that the actual operation would get under way within a few days.

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