

Cease-Fire Groups Begin Investigation of Violations

After Weeks of Inactivity, Field Teams Start Observations—Few Result in Unanimous Finding of Blame

NYTimes **By CHARLES MOHR** MAR 21 1973
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 20 — After weeks of inactivity, field teams of the International Commission of Control and Supervision have started investigating the frequent violations of the cease-fire in Vietnam.

Most of the commission's activity has been described as "observations" rather than formal investigations and few have resulted in unanimous findings of blame.

However, it seems possible that, simply by moving about the countryside from time to time, the commission teams may inhibit the tendency of both the Vietcong and the Saigon forces to continue the shooting, in the opinion of some American officials.

20 Incidents Studied

More than 20 such observations or investigations have taken place in the populous Mekong delta in recent days, informed officials reported.

Midlevel commission personnel said that similar activity was taking place in other areas of the country.

That such actions are finally under way, weeks after the cease-fire agreement took effect, reflects some changes in attitude among the Canadian, Hungarian, Indonesian and Polish delegations that make up the commission.

When they first arrived in South Vietnam late in January, senior commission officers of all four nations made it clear that they expected certain conditions to be met before they began the job of investigating violations—which is only one of the commission's tasks under the cease-fire agreement.

Conditions Were Set

For one thing, the commission wanted the two South Vietnamese parties—the Government and the Vietcong—to specify zones of control "so we will know where they are." The commission leaders also insisted initially that nothing could be done until the Four-Party Joint Military Commission composed of the formerly hostile parties was in full operation.

None of this proved practicable and for weeks the control commission did little more than set up housekeeping in seven regional-team sites and more than 20 subregional sites in rural Vietnam.

Other factors hampered effective commission action, informed officials said. One was

the suspicion and alarm with which the teams were often treated by South Vietnamese Government administrators and military officers in the field.

In one location, the local province officials repeatedly tried to force the hiring of secret police as part of the commission team's local staff. In other areas, officials said, province and military officers avoided contact with the teams and offered little cooperation.

Dramatic Change Occurs

This situation changed dramatically more than a week ago when President Nguyen Van Thieu met with province chiefs and other key officials. Informed sources said he told them that improved administration of the cease-fire was in the national interest and that the commission members were to be treated "as honored guests." He also permitted more friendly treatment of Communist delegates on the Joint Military Commission.

Then, small local commission teams began to act and to look into complaints of fighting in violation of the accords. Technically, a full "investigation" must be ordered by unanimous decision of the commission officials in Saigon, but the local teams have begun to carry out observations on their own.

Since there are almost no Vietcong officials and few North Vietnamese at many of the team sites shared by control commission and Joint Military Commission groups, almost all observation has been of South Vietnamese complaints.

Examples include mortar attacks, rocket barrages and small ground attacks against Government outposts and villages.

Only One Agreement

In only one case, a visitor was told, had the control commission team unanimously agreed that the incident was caused by hostile Vietcong action.

"In most cases the Canadians and Indonesians seem to put the blame where it appears to belong," one of the official said. "The Hungarians and Poles look around, admit there has been an explosion and that there is blood but say they can't determine who was to blame."

The reports, which are not "official" because they are not unanimous, are evidently sent on to the individual senior officials of the member countries in Saigon.

Feeble as these efforts are, they do seem to represent a lessening of the commission's previous paralysis.

Delegates of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government are still not reaching Joint Military Commission team sites and this remains a major problem because it prevents the commission from investigating complaints of Government violations.

One reason for the Vietcong's absence is the refusal of the Government to permit Vietcong officers in combat areas close to the team sites to come in under a flag of truce.

In one Mekong delta province, an informed source said, "the Vietcong gave a pickup site for their delegates—and right away the province chief moved in troops to occupy the area. Nothing has happened since."

Investigation Blocked

SAIGON, March 20 (Reuters) — An international observer team failed today to investigate allegations of sieges at two Government military camps north of Saigon because it could not get clearance from Vietcong representatives.

Sources from the International Commission of Control and Supervision said a commission team at Bien Hoa outside Saigon received orders by courier this morning to investigate reports of fighting around Tong Le Chan and Rach Bap camps north of the capital.

But regional representatives of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government had not given clearance for an investigation in territory around the camps held by the Communist forces, they said.

"We are hoping clearance will be given tomorrow," one commission official said.

Meanwhile, the South Viet-

namese military spokesman said the situation at the two besieged camps was "critical" and that the Tong Le Chan Ranger camp 60 miles north of Saigon was hit by 250 shells this morning.

More P.O.W.'s to Be Freed

SAIGON, March 20 (UPI) — The Communists promised today to free some of the last group of American prisoners by

Sunday and the rest by the following Wednesday which is the deadline for the return of all American prisoners and the withdrawal of all American troops in Vietnam.

The Communists still hold 146 Americans—140 military prisoners and six civilians—plus one Canadian. Ten more Americans* are reported being held in Laos and there has been no word on when they would be freed.

* Previous reports and the one following this one (NYTimes 22 Mar, AP) give the number as nine: seven military, two civilian.

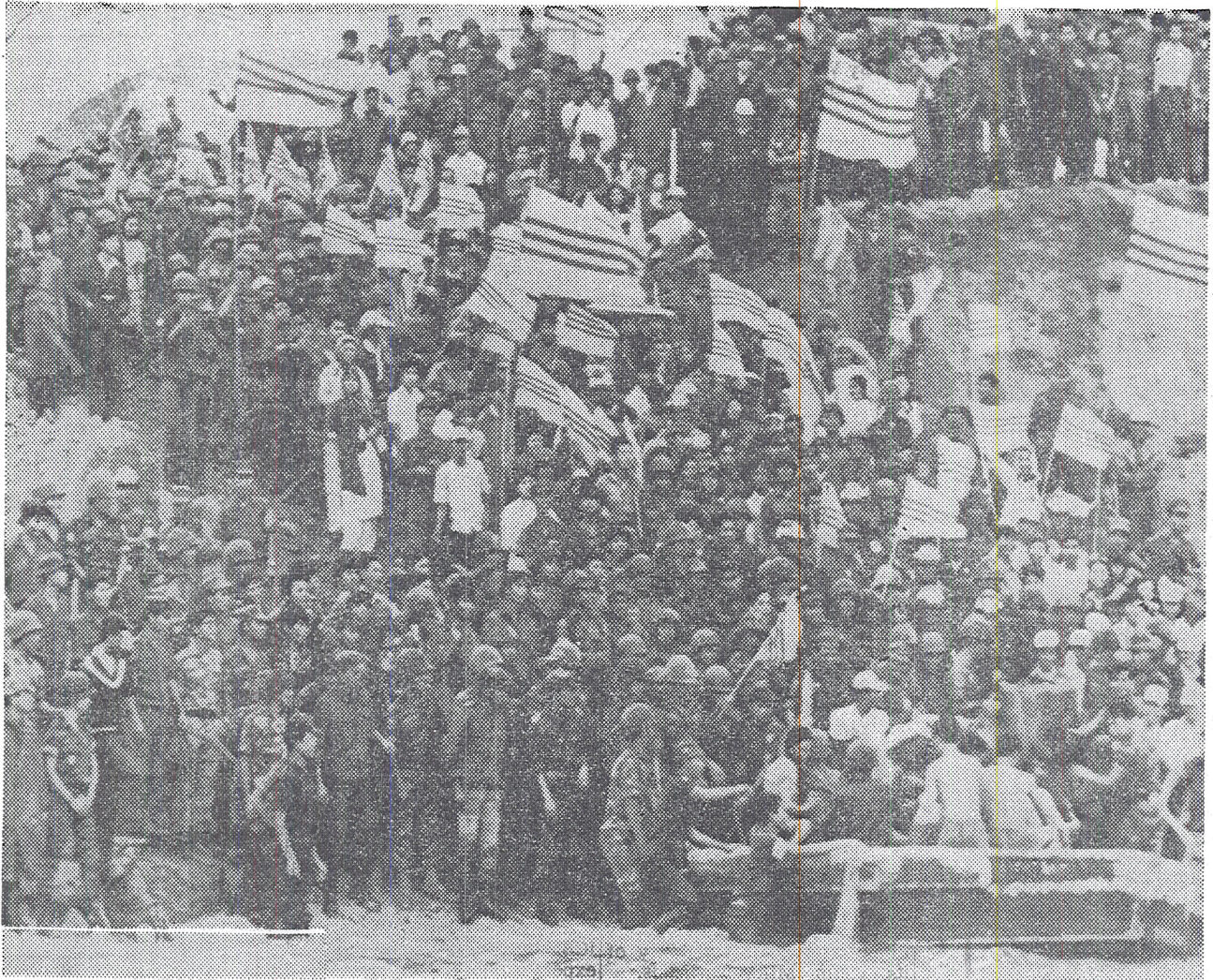
FOX, NYT 23 MAR: 10 - (3 CIVILIAN) **

FOX, NYT 24 MAR: 9

SF CHRON, UPI 24 MAR: 9

SF CHRON, LATIMES 26 MAR: 9

** The tenth prisoner may be Lloyd Oppel, a civilian captured in Laos 28 Oct 72. (See SFChronicle 2 Apr 73.) Since he is Canadian, he might not have been included in lists of Americans only, although Mohr does say ten Americans.



Associated Press

South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians crowding the south bank of the Thach Han River in Quang Tri as a boatload of prisoners, freed by the Vietcong on the north bank, arrives at the shore.