

# Hanoi Plea on Harbor Mines

## Washington

North Vietnam is arguing that the United States must physically "dig out" the mines dropped into its harbors to block movement of war supplies last year, the commander of U.S. Pacific forces said yesterday.

Operations have been under way all this month to clear the principal port of Haiphong, but Admiral Noel Gayler told a news conference his command has not accepted any responsibility for actually removing the explosives from North Vietnamese waterways. \*

He described Operation Endsweep, the mine-clearing effort by U.S. naval vessels and helicopters, as an insurance policy to make sure none of the thousands of mines remains active.

Gayler acknowledged the dispute over removal of the mines when asked whether

explosives buried in the bottom of shipping channels could explode\*\*when the channels are dredged.

"If they have to dredge to get ships through, that is not our responsibility," Gayler replied.

The main channel leading into Haiphong harbor has to be dredged frequently to keep it open to normal shipping.

The U.S. has not declared the harbor safe, and Gayler indicated that sweeping of the major port and its entrances will go on for at least several more days.

Planning is under way for clearing several other port minefields.

Gayler said it may take six months to complete the clearing operations.

The North Vietnamese have said 8000 mines were dropped into its harbors and waterways by U.S. planes.

*L.A. Times Service*

\* Protocol on Clearing Sea Mines, Article 1: The United States shall clear all mines it has placed in the territorial waters, ports, harbors and waterways of the [DRV]. This mine-clearing operation shall be accomplished by rendering the mines harmless through removal, permanent deactivation or destruction.

\*\* Article 2 - over

Article 2: With a view to insuring lasting safety for the movement of people and watercraft and the protection of important installations, mines shall, on the request of the [DRV], be removed or destroyed in the indicated area; and whenever their removal or destruction is impossible, mines shall be permanently deactivated and their emplacement clearly marked.