

Red Threat On Return Of Bodies

Saigon

North Vietnam and the Viet Cong said yesterday torture stories from former American war prisoners threaten to interfere with return of the bodies of prisoners who died in captivity and the search for U.S. servicemen listed as missing.

American officials tended to play down the statement in the belief that the Communists made their statement more "for the record" than as a sincere indication of their plans.

The Communist warning came at the first formal meeting of the four-party military team charged with accounting for hundreds of missing Americans and with recovery of the remains of those killed in action or who died while held prisoner.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong delegations referred to what they called their "humane treatment" of POWs and protested America's "distortion" of that policy.

Several former American prisoners have complained on their return home that they were beaten, tortured and held for months in solitary confinement. Hanoi has charged that their complaints were orchestrated by the U.S. government.

The January 27 Paris peace agreement provides that both sides will help get information on personnel listed as missing in action, seek out graves of the dead, and return their remains to their countries of origin.

Hanoi has given the U.S. a list of 55 Americans it claims died in captivity. The U.S. has listed 1100 servicemen who were killed in action in Indochina whose bodies have never been recovered and another 1328 simply as missing.

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