

# VIETCONG BLAMED IN COPTER ATTACK

Canada Rejects Assertion  
Truce Aircraft Strayed  
—Threatens Pullout  
NYTimes APR 10 1973

By SYLVAN FOX

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, April 10—Canada's highest-ranking military official here has rejected Vietcong assertion that two helicopters carrying representatives of the international peace-keeping commission were shot down Saturday because they had strayed off their prescribed course.

Only hours before the official, Maj. Gen. Duncan A. MacAlpine, made his remarks yesterday, another shooting incident involving such helicopters occurred in the Mekong Delta.

[In Washington, a White House spokesman said Monday that President Nixon views as "extremely serious" armed attacks on clearly marked helicopters of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, The Associated Press reported. In Ottawa, External Affairs Secretary Mitchell W. Sharp said that Canada would withdraw from the commission unless operating conditions "improve very substantially."]

In the second such incident, a helicopter of the Two-Party Joint Military Commission, es-

Continued on Page 12, Column 3

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

porting a copter of the international commission, came under small-arms fire over a Communist-held area in the delta. The military commission's helicopter was damaged slightly but no one was reported injured.

Nine men—four representatives of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, two Vietcong liaison officers and three helicopter crewmen, two of them Americans—were killed in the incident Saturday. The aircraft were on their way to inspect new international commission facilities in an area of northernmost Quang Tri Province under Communist control: one helicopter was struck by a Communist missile and crashed into the side of a mountain.

At a news conference General MacAlpine, who heads the Canadian military delegation to the international commission, raised doubts about both the validity of the Vietcong assertion that the two craft were off course Saturday and on Communist statements that they were fired upon because they were off course.

**No Excuse, General Says**

"Surely this is no excuse," the general said, emphasizing that the helicopters, with their silver-and-black coloring, their Day-Glow green stripes and the white letters "ICCS" would have been clearly recognizable from the ground.

"People who want to see things in the air have the optical equipment to see," General MacAlpine said. "A properly marked I.C.C.S. helicopter was the victim of sustained fire causing tragic loss of life."

The general made his comments at a news conference at Tan Son Nhut Airport immediately after he came back from Gio Linh, in Quang Tri, where he and other officials of the commission had negotiated the return of the 11 survivors of the incident and the recovery of seven of the nine bodies.

He said the other two bodies had not yet been recovered.

General MacAlpine described the negotiations as "a bargain-



Associated Press

**Maj. Gen. Duncan A. MacAlpine, head of Canadian delegation to Control Commission, at his Saigon news session yesterday.**

ing session" with the Vietcong, saying that the Communists wanted the commission officials to sign papers containing a "certain suggestiveness" about what had taken place.

It was understood that the Vietcong, who have repeatedly referred to the helicopter shootings as "an accident," had sought to obtain statements absolving them of blame for the incidents and that the commission officials refused to sign such statements.

"We signed for our people and the remains of our people, and that is all we signed," General MacAlpine declared. He provided the first reasonably coherent account of how the helicopters were shot down, though many details remain sketchy. He said that an investigation had been opened to clear up those details.

According to his account, which he said was based on reports from survivors, the two helicopters were flying one behind the other, from Gio Linh to Liao Bao, on the Laotian border, to inspect the new facilities there. At some point along the way and the precise point is still a matter of contention — the rear helicopter came under small-arms fire. Moments later, the front helicopter was struck by a missile.

"The pilot saw it go pow! and a ball of flame," General MacAlpine said, referring to the pilot of the second machine.

The helicopter hit by the missile crashed into the mountainside, killing all on board. The other helicopter, though damaged by the small-arms fire, landed some distance away. General MacAlpine said that the second craft landed "in rather desperate circumstances" but that no one aboard was injured.

The survivors spent Saturday night in a Vietcong hamlet. On Sunday night, they were taken to Gio Linh, where they were turned over to General MacAlpine's group yesterday.

The Vietcong say that the helicopters were supposed to be following a corridor, along Route 9 from Gio Linh to Lao Bao, this is 4 kilometers, or slightly less than 2½ miles, in width. According to the Vietcong, the aircraft "met with an accident" at least 25 kilometers south of that corridor.

Those killed included one Canadian member of the international commission, one Indonesian member, two Hungarian members, two Vietcong liaison officers and two Americans and a Filipino, the crewmen.

#### Vietcong Note Regret

In statements issued yesterday the Vietcong repeatedly referred to the Saturday incident as a "regrettable accident."

A Vietcong spokesman said that Maj. Gen. Hoang Anh Tuan, deputy chief of the Provisional Revolutionary Government's delegation to the two-party joint Military Commission had expressed "sincere condolences" to the Hungarian, Indonesian and Canadian delegations to the international commission.

The Vietcong also said they had instructed their officials in Quang Tri Province "to conduct an immediate investigation to find out the direct cause of the accident." They said that they would work out with the Saigon Government "specific measures to avert any recurrence of such regrettable incidents."

A Vietcong spokesman denied any knowledge of the shooting incident yesterday morning in the Mekong-Delta. According to Western sources and to sources in the international commission, a helicopter of the Joint Military Commission was struck by six rounds of small-arms fire as it accompanied an international commission copter from Can Tho to an undisclosed site in the delta.

The military commission's

aircraft was reported forced down six miles northwest of Vi Thanh, but the passengers and crewmen, all South Vietnamese, were safe.

#### U.S. Deplores Incidents

WASHINGTON, April 9 (AP) — President Nixon views as "extremely serious" the armed attacks on clearly marked helicopters of the international commission in Vietnam, Gerald L. Warren, the deputy Presidential press secretary, said today.

The State Department, meanwhile, termed the Saturday incident "a totally callous" flouting of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

John F. King, a department spokesman, said that the United States "can only condemn the incident" and that it "deeply regrets the loss of life of the men aboard the helicopter."

"One can hope," Mr. King said, "that perhaps the tragic results of the violation will finally persuade the North Vietnamese and Vietcong of the compelling need to abide by the terms of the agreement."

#### Canada Threatens Pullout

Special to The New York Times

OTTAWA, April 9 — The death of a Canadian observer in Vietnam brought a new threat from the Government today to withdraw its 290 men from the International Commission of Control and Supervision.

Mitchell W. Sharp, the External Affairs Secretary, deplored the Vietcong attack Saturday on a commission helicopter as a "tragic and unnecessary incident."

"Whatever the facts, no cir-

cumstances should ever justify firing on the plane," said Mr. Sharp in reporting to the House of Commons the death of Capt. C. E. Laviolette of Quebec. Unless conditions in Vietnam "improve very substantially" the Government will withdraw from the truce commission, Mr. Sharp said.

A spokesman for the Conservative Opposition said that the incident demonstrated the inability of the Government here to insure the security of

its observers in Vietnam. And David Lewis, leader of the New Democratic party, reasserted his party's position that the Canadians should be brought home before the June 30 deadline for Canadian participation in peace-keeping in Vietnam.

Ten days ago the Government extended the original 60-day "experimental" period for another 90 days, during which, it said, it hoped for better operative conditions for the commission.