

Dead U.S. Mines to Stay in Haiphong

Honolulu

Under current plans, the Navy's renewed mine-sweeping in North Vietnamese waters will leave numerous deactivated mines at the bottom of Haiphong harbor, according to a high-ranking military commander here.

A task force of U.S. mine-sweepers, now on its way to North Vietnam from the Philippines, intends to make certain that the mines are harmless, the officer said. But it plans to stop short of actually removing those mines that have disarmed themselves, he said.

He noted that the idea of leaving mines is likely to encounter strong objections from North Vietnam, and might therefore be modified through negotiations on the scene once the task force arrives. He held out the possibility that the negotiations might result in the removal of all the mines.

But he stressed the great difficulty and possible danger of divers attempting to dig up mines that have settled in the mud of the harbor bottom.

"We see no useful purpose in removing them," said the officer, who agreed to discuss the matter only on the condition that he not be

identified. Naval operations in Southeast Asia are under the control of the Pacific Command headquarters, which is situated here.

"Practically all the mines involved have long since sterilized themselves anyway," the commander said. "A lot of commerce has been going in and out of Haiphong harbor."

The mines that were sown by U.S. aircraft beginning about a year ago were designed to rest on the bottom and to explode in response to any change in the magnetic field caused by the passage of a metal-hulled ship. They were also set to deactivate themselves after a number of weeks, according to military spokesmen.

The minesweeping, therefore, is essentially an attempt to detonate mines that are still armed.

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