

U.S. Regrets Break in Talk on Men Missing in War

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, June 4—The United States Embassy today expressed frustration and disappointment at the refusal of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese to attend discussions on the search for men missing in action.

"Their obvious intent," declared John Swenson, the Embassy's acting press attaché, "has been to turn the clearly humanitarian tasks defined in Article 8B"—of the Paris agreement—"and the uncertainty of over 1,100 American families to their own political purposes."

"The United States can only regard such cynicism with deep regret," he continued, reading a statement. "The dead are past the cares of the world, there is no honor in bartering with their bones."

Mr. Swenson's statement came at a news conference, one of the very few called by American officials in Saigon these days. The ambassador, Graham A. Martin, was not present and had no remarks of his own on the matter.

Little Progress Previously

The Vietcong announced last week that they would no longer attend meetings of the four-party joint military team, whose only task is to facilitate the search for the missing. The reason given was the South Vietnamese Government's cut-off of the Vietcong delegation's telephone lines, press conferences and liaison flights. Once these privileges are restored, the Communists said, they will return to the talks.

Today neither the Vietcong nor the North Vietnamese ap-

peared at the regular session, the first since the withdrawal announcement. American and South Vietnamese Government representatives attended, and Mr. Swenson said they would continue to do so.

Even before the breakdown, however, the talks made virtually no progress.

American officials close to the situation said that they were convinced that both the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese had information on numerous Americans still listed as missing.

Furthermore, as a display of good faith, the officials said, the United States had provided the Vietcong with information on about 100 dead or missing Communist soldiers.

One American described the Communists' attitude as obstreperous.

In March, for example, when North Vietnam allowed the return of the remains of 23 Americans who had died in captivity, officials said, they would not permit the exhumation of a 24th, buried nearby, because he had been found dead and therefore, it was said, the body did not fall into the same category.

Neither North Vietnam nor the Vietcong have allowed teams of American soldiers to examine sites of downed aircraft, even though the Paris agreement provides for this. Last December, a United States Army captain was killed and several other American soldiers wounded in a Communist ambush southwest of Saigon as they prepared to search for remains in a helicopter that had crashed seven years earlier.

Since the incident, the tactics of the search teams have changed somewhat, one official explained. A campaign of

radio and television announcements, leaflets and posters has been launched in South Vietnam urging citizens who find downed aircraft or remains to report them. Since March, four American dead have been positively identified as the result of such information brought forward by the South Vietnamese, officials said.

Meantime, the 160 American military men who make up the search teams are mostly involved in training—parachute-jumping in Japan and scuba-diving off Okinawa, one officer said.

The purpose is to prepare them for virtually any kind of entry that the Communists might ultimately permit into a crash area, the officer explained, adding that the United States had told both North Vietnam and the Vietcong that it would accept virtually any conditions attached to such searches.

The reasons for the Communists' resistance are not clear. In public statements, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong link the missing-in-action question to the charge that the United States and South Vietnam are continuing to violate

the Paris agreement's broad military and political provisions.

Furthermore, unconfirmed reports have been circulated that the Pentagon had once drawn up a plan—later abandoned—to use the search teams for intelligence gathering, but this has not been a centerpiece of the Communist argument.

One theory holds that the North Vietnamese see the missing-in-action issue as the last one they have that directly affects the United States, and that their protracted negotiations, therefore, are designed to retain this last bit of leverage, possibly to help them get the American economic aid they were promised but never given.

In any case, American officials say that they have no reliable evidence that any missing Americans are alive, except for Emmet James Kay, the Continental Air Services pilot who is still a prisoner of the Pathet Lao. It is simply a matter of confirming that the missing are really dead, the officials explain, to remove that final doubt that gnaws at the families.

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