

Detective Tells of POW Negotiations

Grand Rapids, Mich.

A private detective said yesterday he was involved in secret negotiations with Pathet Lao officials in 1974 for the release of about 300 American prisoners secretly held in Laos and Hanoi.

Theodore R. Grevers, head of Fatman International Detective Agency, said his talks with the Laotians broke off after American officials in Thailand learned of his mission.

Grevers said he decided to make the matter public after the North Vietnamese recently announced they are holding no more American prisoners in North Vietnam.

Grevers said he learned in 1974 from high level Pathet Lao officials that about 300 Americans were still being held in four Vietnamese-controlled camps in Laos and that a few others, said to be suffering "nervous disorders," had been moved to a hospital in Hanoi.

Grevers, 46, said he had been working on a number of investigations involving American prisoners in Asia and the Soviet Union when the Pathet Lao contacted him through an associate in Vientiane, Laos, in 1974.

"At first it was a monetary thing," Grevers said. "They wanted \$225,000 ransom for the return of two American prisoners."

He said the Laotians insisted the talks be kept secret from the U.S.

government and the news media. Grevers said he agreed to the conditions and took the preliminary step of depositing the money in banks in Vientiane and Bangkok.

"But we never got past that point," Grevers said. The money was recovered.

During negotiations over the details of the ransom, Grevers said he learned there were as many as 300 Americans and 700 mercenaries from Thailand being held secretly in Laos.

He wrote to Pragna Khamsouk Keola, chairman of the 42-member National Coalition Political Council of Laos, and appealed for the release of the prisoners on humanitarian grounds.

Keola was impressed by the letter, Grevers said, and arranged for Grevers to meet with Prince Souphanouvong in May, 1974. Keola was personal secretary to the prince at the time.

"There was no doubt in my mind we had reached the upper echelon," Grevers said. "Had he been convinced of my sincerity, they would have released all of the men."

But ten days before the meeting was to take place, Grevers said, a note was delivered to his hotel room in Vientiane from an American embassy official stating he knew of Grevers' mission and asking him to make contact with the American embassy in Thailand. Grevers said he still has the note.

United Press