

CIA agent in phony Thai plot

Examiner News Services

BANGKOK — A CIA agent sent the Thai government a phony cease-fire offer in the name of a Thai Communist insurgent leader, the U.S. Embassy said yesterday.

American officials said they had apologized to the Thai government for the bungling incident.

The letter was purported to be from the Communist guerrillas in northeastern Thailand and offered a cease-fire with government troops in return for autonomy for the northeastern part of Thailand, near the Laos border.

Informed sources said the letter was mailed in November from Sakon Nakhon, a province capital 350 miles northeast of Bangkok in an area where U.S. reports say up to 2000 armed rebels operate.

The agent was said to

have hoped the letter somehow would increase defections to the government.

The U.S. Embassy, which admitted the affair after three Bangkok newspapers carried stories about it, called it "a regrettable, unauthorized initiative."

It added that U.S. Ambassador William Kintner, who presented his credentials only Nov. 29, "has directed categorically that no American official be involved in any activity which could be interpreted as interference in Thai internal affairs."

The U.S. spokesman would neither confirm nor deny reports in Thai newspaper's the agent, who was not identified, has been transferred from the guerrilla zone to Bangkok.

However, sources said an account of the affair in the Bangkok newspaper, The Nation, was accurate.

It cited "an unimpeachable source" as saying the CIA had apologized to Thai authorities and that the agent — code-named "Lion" — who sent the letter actually had contacted insurgents in the northeast jungles and had sent the hoax letter with the intention of winning more Communist defections.

The letter was signed "Chamras" — the code name of a Central Committee member of the Communist Party of Thailand in the northeast, The Nation reported.

It said the agent put no return address on the phony letter, which was sent to Premier Sanya Thammasak with copies to five Bangkok newspapers, but the boy who mailed it had it registered and the government traced the registration to the agent's address in Sakon Nakhon.

The head of Thailand's

communism suppression organization, Lt. Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol, had previously termed the letter's offer ridiculous and sources had expressed suspicion of its authenticity, saying it was not consistent with past Communist strategy.

On Dec. 9, the Thai government radio station reported that Communists in nine northern provinces had been distributing leaflets with essentially the same promise — cooperation with the new civilian government in return for autonomy behind "the Communist line." Officials were skeptical of that proposal, too, and said they were investigating.