

The PRG authorities in Quang Tri have issued their own account of what they call "the accident". They claim that the two helicopters were at least 25 kilometers, that is about 15 miles, away from the approved flight corridor when helicopter number 006 was shot down. The statement maintains that they had been this far off-course for 40 minutes.

Within minutes the Commission's regional headquarters at Hue were informed of the radio distress report and were told that there had been subsequent loss of contact. Immediately, Canadian and other ICCS personnel began common efforts in Quang Tri and in Saigon to get information on what had happened, and most important, to launch a search and rescue mission.

All efforts were to no avail. At Quang Tri, about forty miles away, Colonel McLeod, commander of Canadian forces in ICCS region one, contacted representatives of the Viet Cong, which claims to be the party in control of the area of the incident, who were across the river from Quang Tri. During the course of the afternoon of April 7, he was three times refused permission to proceed by either land or air to Lao Bao. He was eventually informed early in the evening of April 7 that necessary arrangements for safe passage to Lao Bao could not be made. Later he was told that one helicopter had landed safely, but that the other had, and I quote, met with an accident unquote. The PRG or Viet Cong representative would give no information on casualties or on the condition of the personnel involved. In Saigon, while General McAlpine and his three colleagues on the Military Committee of the ICCS left for Hue to conduct the inquiry personally, similar attempts were being made to secure information from the PRG or Viet Cong Delegation to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission. These efforts, which involved a three-hour meeting between the PRG representatives and the Indonesian Chairman acting on behalf of the Commission, also failed. The Viet Cong would not permit a proffered American search-and-rescue operation to proceed from Thailand as the Commission had requested, and they refused to provide liaison officers for any search organized by the ICCS, although helicopters were standing by. Nor would they give any information on the personnel involved. Almost twenty-four hours after the incident, the best that could be obtained from the Viet Cong was a letter to the Commission confirming that one helicopter had quote met with an accident unquote, and that the PRG was organizing its own search and rescue operation.

By this time General McAlpine had proceeded from Hue to Quang Tri with other members of the ICCS Military Committee where, on the morning of April 8, he met with the same PRG representative who had refused Colonel McLeod permission the day before to go to Lao Bao. The Viet Cong representative reported, at last, that all those aboard one helicopter had been killed in the quote accident unquote, but he still either could not or would not say which helicopter was involved. General McAlpine was also told that the Viet Cong were bringing out the dead and survivors to Gio Linh that evening, and that he and his colleagues should proceed there to receive them. Early in the morning of April 9, which was yesterday afternoon by our time, General McAlpine received the Canadian survivors and we were able to positively identify, for the first time, which helicopter had been shot down. As I mentioned above, the survivors were examined medically and found to be in good condition.

We have been informed by the Canadian representative on the Military Committee of the ICCS, Major General McAlpine, that when the so-called PRG officially handed over the bodies and survivors on the morning of April 9 at Gio Linh, it made an attempt to have the ICCS Military Committee sign a