

even difficult of reconciliation. Indeed I think a solution might have been found if the communist representatives had not turned from negotiation to abuse, thus indicating that if their principals wanted a conference at all, they did not want one at that time. Hence the negotiations were suspended. As I have said, steps are being taken--which we hope will be successful--to bring about their resumption. The present situation in Korea is simply that there is no fighting, but there is no peace. Our servicemen in that area, while they remain at the alert, have for more than five months, however, been spared the tragic consequences of actual conflict. That is a blessing which we would all do well to remember.

One other issue out there has now been disposed of in the prisoners-of-war question. I do not need to go into details of that matter inasmuch as they will be familiar to most hon. members. We have taken the position as a government that the action of the United States commander in releasing and returning to civilian status the prisoners-of-war under his jurisdiction when they were returned to him by the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission was not only legally correct but morally sound and quite consistent with the terms of the armistice agreement itself. It seems to us that no other course was open to the United Nations commander at that time. Our own position in regard to this matter has been, I think, quite clear and consistent from the beginning. We have not believed nor do we now believe that any prisoner should be compelled by force to return to what was once his homeland. The provisions of the commission's terms of reference were drafted to prohibit enforced repatriation, and those of us who took part in the long, complicated and difficult negotiations to that end will recall this very clearly. But that prohibition would have little meaning if the only alternative facing a prisoner was indefinite captivity. Therefore the terms of reference in the armistice agreement made clear provision for the final release of prisoners to civilian status 120 days after their being placed in the custody of the commission. In the words of General Hull--

The plain intent of paragraph 11 of the terms of reference is to prevent either party to the agreement from frustrating the basic purpose of avoiding indefinite captivity for the prisoners.

We subscribe to that position.

Of course if there had been a different attitude taken by the Communist representatives on the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission and by the Communist side in Korea it would have been, I think, quite possible, almost easy, to have arranged for the examination of these prisoners in the time allotted for it, ninety days. It was understood by those who took part in these negotiations that the ninety days meant ninety consecutive days. However, after the first examinations took place, and when it was clear to the world that the great majority of the prisoners would rather go back to captivity than to go home under Communist rule, this was such a terrific blow to the prestige of communism in the Far East that the Communists themselves from that time forward did everything they could to prevent further examinations. That seems to me to be a simple and pretty obvious explanation of why the examination of prisoners broke down before the end of the ninety-day period.