

# U.S. suspects Vietnam villagers have American remains

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Villagers may be holding the remains of Americans lost in the Vietnam War, or at least know about them, but Hanoi is no longer keeping them for political leverage, a U.S. official said Monday.

Army Lt. Col. John C. Cray said some of the 12 sets of remains believed to be those of Americans that Hanoi gave to the United States on Monday were turned in by villagers.

The latest repatriation ceremony at Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport

came four days after President Clinton lifted a 19-year trade embargo against Vietnam. Cray, head of the MIA office in Hanoi, said the ceremony had been planned three months ago to coincide with the completion of two major search operations in December and January.

Just the same, Cray acknowledged the significance of the ceremony.

"This is the first repatriation ceremony since the embargo has been lifted," he said. "I think that instead of hurting, it will in

fact enhance our process."

President Clinton had made the lifting of the embargo contingent on Hanoi's cooperation and progress in the fullest possible accounting of those missing since the Vietnam War.

U.S. veterans groups and families of MIAs opposed the end of the embargo, saying the United States would lose its leverage in forcing Vietnam to cooperate in accounting for the 2,238 American MIAs.

They charged that Hanoi was holding back remains to advance

its political agenda. Vietnam also seeks a resumption of diplomatic relations.

"We have no evidence that they're holding any warehouse full of remains as occurred in the past," said Cray. "Are there some Vietnamese villagers scattered throughout the provinces that may have individual sets or have knowledge of where American remains might be. Yes, I believe that."

"And in fact, we find that each time we have a large joint field activity and we reach to the

outer edges of some of the provinces, the people come forward and either turn over remains or guide us to where they think they recall many years ago a burial site. That's part of how we came to recovering these remains."

Addressing concerns by the

families of the MIAs and the veterans groups, Cray said the U.S. pressure has not let up.

The United States still has some leverage, mainly the restoration of diplomatic ties, broken when Communist North Vietnam defeated U.S.-backed South Vietnam in 1975.