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# U.S. Won't Concede Or Deny Fecteau Was on Spy Mission

Associated Press

U.S. officials yesterday declined to concede that one of the two Americans released by China was on an espionage mission when captured in 1952. But it was learned they no longer deny the charges.

Expressing reluctance yesterday to talk about "so darned sensitive a matter," government sources nevertheless said "we are not arguing" any more with the Chinese who insist that Richard Fecteau and John Thomas Downey were engaged in espionage when arrested.

Fecteau was released Monday after serving 19 years of a

20-year sentence. He was returned to the United States along with Mary Ann Harbert, an American from Menlo Park, Calif., who was arrested in 1968.

Downey remains in China, but his sentence was reduced from life to a term scheduled to end in about five years.

Speculation that Fecteau and Downey might have been dropping Nationalist Chinese agents on the mainland as charged was raised to a possibility Monday when Fecteau's former wife was reported by several newsmen as saying that "the Chinese haven't been lying."

She was said to have explained, "It's very involved and I'm not supposed to get into it. He was a civilian working for the U.S. government. I know what he was doing, but I can't say. Let me put it this way—the Chinese haven't been lying."

Mrs. Fecteau denied later that she said this, but she would not elaborate. Two reporters who interviewed Mrs. Fecteau quoted the same language in their Monday stories.

When asked about Mrs. Fecteau's reported assertion that she was employed by the State Department spokesman



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Miss Harbert fingers orchid at Valley Forge hospital.

Robert J. McCloskey said yesterday, "I don't see any useful basis on which I could, at this time, discuss his previous employment."

But other officials said pri-

vately that the administration no longer is following the original U.S. characterization that the charges against Fecteau and Downey were trumped up.

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