

# Soviets Visited S. Vietnam

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SAIGON — During a four-year ending in 1967, Russian agents landed by submarine in the Mekong Delta made a series of clandestine visits to Communist outposts in South Vietnam, a high-ranking Vietcong defector has told American officials.

The defector, Bui Cong Tuong, was for 10 years the National Liberation Front's chief of propaganda in Kienhoa Province—until recently the most secure Communist stronghold in South Vietnam and still a difficult area for government forces.

Tuong, who defected last September, said he was present when a Russian entourage of five persons toured the Communist-held hamlet of Chothom in April of 1967.

Chothom, in Mocay District of Kienhoa Province, is the home of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the chief Vietcong negotiator at the Paris talks. It has been in government hands since last October, and U.S. officials say other residents remember visits by light-skinned foreigners brought to the hamlet by the Vietcong.

Hamlet residents have told interviewers that they were ordered by Vietcong cadre to go about their business and pay no attention to the visitors. Some were told the foreigners were American prisoners, others that they were visiting American journalists.

Tuong, the defector, says these stories were circulated as a security cover for the Russians. He said he was told one of the Russians, an older man with white hair, was a general but he didn't learn his name.

Tuong said the Vietcong leadership in the province went to extraordinary lengths to show the Russians how secure Chothom hamlet was from American or South Vietnamese attacks.

A welcome, written in Russian, was painted on the

archway at the entrance to the town—where the visitors stopped before their motor launch. A Vietcong flag waved above the town.

Two old cars, broken down and nonfunctional anyway because all the roads into the hamlet were unsafe for travel were repaired and pushed into the road in front of Mrs. Binh's house as though they were still operative.

The Russians, according to Tuong, stayed in the hamlet four hours and were then taken off in their launch. As soon as they were gone, the welcome was whitewashed off the archway and the flag pulled down before it caught the attention of passing aircraft.

Today, the hamlet is in government hands and bustling. A new market is under construction. The roads are open, the South Vietnamese flag flies. A five-man American Mobile Advisory Team is living in the house said to belong to Mrs. Binh's family.

In a muddy compound nearby, recent Vietcong defectors undergo two weeks of indoctrination and questioning before they are resettled in other areas.

The team leader, Capt. Bernie Boward, told a recent visitor he believes the hamlet is genuinely secure—although the district capital frequently comes under Communist mortar attack and terrorism in the surrounding countryside continues virtually unabated.

Tuong and other former Vietcong interviewed by American officials have produced two other eyewitness accounts of Russian visits to Kienhoa Province. There are also less-authenticated accounts of Chinese visitors.

As far as can be determined, all the visits took place before the major Communist offensives of 1968.

the subsequent decline in Vietcong strength and gains in government pacification efforts.

According to American officials, the first account of a Russian submarine arriving in Kienhoa was in 1964, when a fisherman saw a submarine surface in a river at night, remain until just before dawn and then depart.

Other defectors tell of a 1966 visit to Kienhoa by Russians who came in a small motorboat launched from a submarine. They left the boat with the Vietcong for their own use, but according to several accounts the Communists sank it when they feared it had been spotted from the air.

Tuong said that in 1965 he was in Tay Ninh Province near the Cambodian border when a Russian who said he was a journalist was brought in for a visit at the local Communist headquarters.

To impress the visitor and at the same time preserve security, Tuong said, a completely bogus headquarters was set up, complete with telephones and messengers running in and out.

Whether Tuong's accounts, now several years old, are of anything more than historical interest is not yet clear. But as one American official said, "They make sort of fascinating reading."

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