

# Refugees Describe Life Under Vietcong

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 10—Refugees who fled from areas of South Vietnam lost by the Saigon Government in the last month report that the Communists have moved quickly to round up all ranking South Vietnamese Army and Government officers. But the refugees add that they know of only a few executions of Government officials.

According to the refugees, the Communists often appeared surprised by the speed of the local governmental collapse and, in many cases, were not prepared to assume the tasks of local administration fully.

But the Communists, usually led by small numbers of teen-aged North Vietnamese soldiers, have generally succeeded in restoring order, getting water and electricity running again and taking a census. In addition, the refugees say, the Communists have ordered students in occupied areas to go back to school, take political-indoctrination courses and report on family members or

neighbors who worked for the local Saigon Government structure.

This picture of life in the two-thirds of South Vietnam that has been yielded to the Communists since March 8 was pieced together from accounts of refugees who fled from such cities as Hue and Quang Ngai in the north, Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang on the central coast and Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku in the Central Highlands.

In almost every case, the refugees related, local people long associated with the Vietcong have been appointed to new jobs in Communist civil administrations, but the troops in charge are North Vietnamese. The refugees' accounts also suggested that the Communists were able to set up new governments most quickly where they had long had strong local sympathy and organized guerrilla movements.

For example, a functioning provisional Revolutionary

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Government—as the Vietcong's political branch is called—was in place almost immediately, in Tuy Hoa, the capital of Phu Yen Province, for years a Vietcong stronghold. But in Nha Trang, a prosperous port and resort, 62 miles south, the Communists had still not sent representatives around to houses or reopened schools after a week in control.

## A Lieutenant's Account

A South Vietnamese lieutenant, 26-year-old Nguyen Van Phu, escaped Ban Me Thuot after two weeks of living under the Communists. Ban Me Thuot, where there are many nonethnic-Vietnamese mountaineers, was the first city taken by the North Vietnamese during a sudden attack on March 10.

As recounted by Lieutenant Phu, the Communists' first act was to set up a "military and administrative committee" near a Ban Me Thuot Pagoda. On the first day of the occupation, soundtrucks drove around the city broadcasting an order for all Saigon Government officials, army officers and soldiers to report to the committee—the lieutenant recalled.

"They also ordered all the men to soak the bodies of the dead with gas and burn them while the women were to dig air-raid shelters," he said in an interview today.

"Communist cadres came around to each house distributing Vietcong flags and pictures of Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Huu Tho and Huynh Tan Phat"—the late North Vietnamese leader and two top officers of the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

## Seizures and Handouts

Lieutenant Phu, who had been in charge of paying death benefits to widows of dead soldiers under Saigon rule, said that the cadres had issued small amounts of rice and that they confiscated all the rice in the Saigon Government storehouse and shipped it off in trucks.

The cadres also commandeered all cars, Honda motorcycles and trucks, issuing signed slips of paper in exchange, the officer said.

"All the students were told to go back to school where they were given propaganda lessons and taught to sing Vietcong songs," Lieutenant Phu went on. "There were no real classes and it was very scary for me because they were told to report anyone in the family or neighbors who had served with the Government."

A sergeant in whose house Lieutenant Phu was staying followed the Communists' orders and reported to the new administrative committee. He was told to write a "self-confession," listing everything he had done for the "American-Thieu clique." But the Communists were so unprepared to govern Ban Me Thuot, Lieutenant Phu said, that they did not have any paper and the sergeant had to buy some of his own.

## Some Were Taken Away

The sergeant was released after completing his confession, but other officers and higher-level civil servants were visited in the middle of the night by Communist who took them off for what they termed special courses. "They did not come back," the lieutenant added.

He is a thin, boyish-looking man whose weight dropped from 116 pounds to 105 during his time under the Communists.

The North Vietnamese, he said, set up their own headquarters in the compound once occupied by a unit of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, the body created by the Paris Peace agreement of 1973 to monitor the cease-fire.

Though there have been rumors in Saigon that the Communists have executed a number of South Vietnamese officials, few refugees interviewed over the last few days could offer confirmation.

A major who escaped from Hue, where a grave containing 3,000 bodies was found after the Communists' lunar new year offensive of 1968, said that as far as he knew there had been no similar reprisals there this time.

The VC have not bothered anyone, but everyone is very

scared and the people go outside only to buy food in the morning," the man said.

However, a school principal from Tuy Hos, on the central coast, said that friends of his had witnessed the public execution of the deputy police chief of Phu Yen Province, a Major Lan. The refugee could not remember the rest of the officer's name. He asked that his own not be used.

The principal said that the police major and two other Saigon officers had been shot in the market place in Hieu Kuong, a district town just south of Tuy Hoa where they had been conducting an operation. An American official who had been at Tuy Hoa said he had heard the same report.

The principal also related that within a day of the arrival of North Vietnamese troops in Tuy Hoa, on April 1, the Com-





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Refugees who escaped from cities (names in panels) that fell to Communists described take-overs.

munists set up numerous checkpoints and stopped all passersby to make them register their names and jobs.

"They classified them into categories," said the principal, a slight, balding, nervous man. "If the person was a private in the army or a secretary from a Government office they let him go. If it was an officer or important civil servant, they led him away."

In Tuy Hoa, he went on, the Communists also ordered students back to school, gave them indoctrination in Marxism and told them to report on their families and neighbors.

#### Slower at Nha Trang

In Nha Trang, the next city down the coast from Tuy Hoa, and reportedly abandoned by South Vietnamese troops on April 2 without a fight, the Communists moved very slowly to set up a government.

According to a refugee who arrived here in Saigon yesterday, the Communists limited their effort at Nha Trang to going around the half-deserted beachfront city in soundtrucks appealing to the people to clean the streets.

"They promised to get the water and electricity back on too," the refugee related. "They did get the water on, after all the Government administrators had vanished. But they could not get full electric power because there was no gas for the generators."

"There were only a handful of very young North Vietnamese soldiers, no more than 16 or 17 years old," he added. "We kept hoping the army would come back. It would have only taken a battalion to retake the city."

#### New Flags and Leaders

"On the first day the North Vietnamese came, I went out and got a Vietcong flag from a street vender, though no one ordered us to do it," the refugee said. "Some people put up Vietcong flags but others flew North Vietnamese flags from their houses or cars."

The new Communist province chief, the refugee from Nha Trang reported, was a local Vietcong leader named Le Trung, who had been assigned to Hanoi in 1954 after the French Indochina war, and later fought in the jungles. His mother has sold rice cakes in a nearby village.

Other refugees from Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot in the highlands said the new Communist province chiefs there were montagnards, the first two of whom had been a bicycle repairman and a male nurse at a hospital. They were both believed to be figureheads.

A 30-year-old disabled soldier from Quang Ngai told of fleeing along Route 1 from Quang Ngai city toward the former American base at Chu Lai with a huge column of civilian and military refugees. He came upon a North Vietnamese platoon leader standing by the side of the road.

"I asked him why he was just standing there watching us," the soldier, Le Thanh Hiep, recalled in an interview. "He told me 'I just saw all you people walking, there was no fighting. So I came down from the hills to see what was going on.'"