

CLOSING OF PORTS CONCEDED IN HANOI

MAY 23 1972

Foreign Observers Now Feel Mining by U.S. Effectively Blocks Ship Movements

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Special to The New York Times

HANOI, North Vietnam, May 22—The consensus of foreign observers here now is that American mining has effectively closed North Vietnam's ports.

In Haiphong last week officials said mines were being cleared as they were dropped and ships were moving in and out of the port. In Washington, the Pentagon termed such assertions categorically false.

Direct evidence remains extremely difficult to obtain. But from the shreds that are available, diplomats and others here believe it highly unlikely that ships are able to enter or leave the major harbors. This view agrees with the Pentagon position.

Some sources are convinced that the North Vietnamese are sweeping Haiphong's inner harbor at night. But the North Vietnamese themselves say the Americans are continuing to drop more mines in Haiphong Harbor, though it is not clear exactly where.

The East German ship Frieden, whose arrival after the mining was reported here but was de-

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nied by the Pentagon, may merely have come in from the distant outer harbor. But that would still not explain how she got past any mines in the inner harbor.

Recent visitors to Haiphong have identified at least one ship that is effectively immobilized. That is the Soviet vessel Babushkin, which is said to have orders to remain tied up at the quay because of the danger of mines. The Babushkin is a freighter, 511 feet long and with a gross tonnage of 11,205.

A North Vietnamese official here was asked yesterday to clarify the situation in Haiphong Harbor. He gave an ambiguous reply.

"In Haiphong we Vietnamese cannot sit idle with our hands folded," the official said, "so the people there have done a number of things to insure that port activity continues."

"As to how, we cannot tell you," he went on. "Whether they can clear all the mines and how they do it, it is difficult to say."

Firm Resolution Stressed

"In any case, if the mines have been cleared the Americans will drop more. If more are dropped we will try our best to clear them. If we were not able to do so, the resistance for the defense of our country would have been a failure."

In that last phrase the official was echoing the consistent line here that all past predictions of insuperable war obstacles for North Vietnam have failed to be borne out and that future ones will too.

"The whole process of our resistance against American aggression has proved we are able to face the new war escalation," the North Vietnamese official said.

Yesterday, on the eve of President Nixon's arrival in Moscow, the North Vietnamese called renewed attention to American bombing of Soviet ships here in what might be taken as a call for a firm Soviet line.

The Vietnamese press agency published news of a posthumous award of honor to a Soviet boatswain killed by bombing. He was Yuri Sergeevich Yotov of the ship Grisha Akopyan. He was awarded North Vietnam's Labor Order First Class.

The Grisha Akopyan was reported to have been hit May 10 in the harbor at Campha in Quangninh Province. In addition to the one fatality, according to North Vietnam, the captain and a deputy captain were injured.

Ship's Crew Interviewed

In another item, the press agency reported in an interview with crew members of the Grisha Akopyan in which they condemned United States "imperialists." It quoted a woman crew member, Valentina Vlasova, as saying that the Americans had deliberately tried to

kill the crew members by using steel pellet bombs.

Another crew member, Edward Konovalev, was quoted as saying, "we'll soon leave for home, but if need be we are ready to come back, shipping aid to the brother Vietnamese people."

Nhan Dan, the Communist party's daily newspaper, carried an article referring to the posthumous medal for the Soviet seaman and lavishing praise on the Soviet Union for past help. The article was headed "Noble Internationalist Sentiments."

"True to their international duty," Nhan Dan said, "the Communist party, the Government and the people have accorded to our people great assistance. Soviet sailors have eagerly shipped goods from the heroic Soviet land to Vietnam's ports blazing with the flame of struggle."

The strong implication seemed to be that the Soviet Union should continue its aid efforts despite the American blockade.

Soviet Ship Said to Have Sailed

SINGAPORE, May 22 (UPI)—A Soviet cargo ship left Haiphong Harbor and sailed unmolested through the United States blockade of the port, according to the skipper and local shipping agents.

Capt. V. Belov told Singapore newsmen on Saturday that he had sailed the 1,200-ton freighter Zeya out of Haiphong Harbor on May 13 "without trouble." The United States has said that mines laid at Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports were activated on May 11, halting all ship movements in and out.

The Zeya sailed from Singapore on Saturday night before the reports of the local newsmen could be further checked.

But the reports were corroborated by agents for the vessel in Singapore. C. Y. Tan, an executive officer for the agents, Guan Guan Shipping, Ltd., said company records showed that the ship left Haiphong on May 13. He said the

date was that given by the captain from the ship's log.

Reports appearing in one English and two Chinese newspapers said the Soviet skipper had given a shipboard news conference in which he told of having left Haiphong "without trouble."

"There were times when we came close to American gunboats but nothing happened," the captain said, according to a report in the Straits Times.

U.S. Denies Ship Crossed Mines

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 22—The Defense Department denied today that the Soviet cargo ship Zeya had crossed the minefield in Haiphong Harbor.

"It was not within the minefield when the minefield was activated," the Pentagon spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, told reporters. He said the vessel "was outside of Haiphong Harbor—near Haiphong but outside the harbor"—when the mines became active.

Mr. Friedheim said the vessel left dockside "on or about the 10th" of the month, or one day before the mines were activated, and did not "transit" the field.

The Pentagon also reiterated today that the mines at the entrances to seven North Vietnamese harbors remained active. A report in The New York Times last week quoted responsible informants as having said that the mines were set to deactivate themselves by the time President Nixon reached the Soviet Union. Mr. Friedheim said at the time that the story was not accurate.