

Shoplifting?

UC Russian Quits the U.S.

NEW YORK — (AP) — A Russian exchange student from Berkeley, Calif., who slashed his throat and wrists at Kennedy Airport last Sunday flew home today after a six-hour diplomatic tug-of-war ended with U.S. officials convinced that he was leaving of his own accord.

"It is my judgment that he is going of his own free will," said Samuel Zutty, investigator for the U.S. Immigration Service, after he and other U.S. officials interviewed Merab Kurashvily, 36, at the airport early today.

The U.S. authorities had delayed departure of the Soviet Aeroflot airliner for six hours while insisting they be allowed to talk to Kurashvily. Soviet officials said the plane would not depart without the student.

Minutes after the interview was completed Kurashvily, a tall man wearing a brown sheepskin coat with a brown scarf pulled high to cover a bandage on his throat, walked to the departure gate accompanied by security personnel.

Remains Silent

With his hands thrust deep in his pocket and his head down, Kurashvily made no reply to the shouted questions from a crowd of newsmen as he moved toward the plane.

After he slashed himself on Sunday, Kurashvily was taken to Jamaica Hospital in Queens by Port Authority police. He reportedly told them he did not want asylum but had slashed himself "because I did not like myself at the time."

Kurashvily and another Russian student had left Berkeley, where they were attending the University of California, after a food store manager accused them of shoplifting. The charges were later dropped, but they said they were humiliated.



MERAB KURASHVILY
Leaves for Russia
—AP Photo

nesses to the theft and said charges were not pressed because the market did not want to jeopardize the exchange program. The store said the students took packages of salami, cod, salmon, steak and sardines.

Lucia Dunn, a UC graduate student and a friend of Kurashvily, said that the shoplifting charge was "hard to believe. It's so out of character."

She described her friend as "a person of high character, very honest and very proud."

Hurried Departure

Kurashvily left Berkeley hurriedly on Saturday. On Sunday he jumped out of a van that was taking him to Kennedy International Airport to catch a flight to Moscow.

Soviet officials picked up Kurashvily after he was treated at the hospital and took him to the Soviet mission to the United Nations. When U.S. officials set up a hearing Tuesday to determine if Kurashvily wanted to go home, the Soviets said he was too ill to attend.

Diplomatic sources in Washington reported that the Soviets had accused the United States of harassing Kurashvily but the administration denied the charges.

The U.S. concern stemmed from the 1970 incident in which a Lithuanian sailor escaped from a Soviet fishing vessel off Martha's Vineyard and sought political asylum aboard a Coast Guard ship. He was refused and returned to the Soviet ship.

This week the government announced new policy guidelines instructing various agencies on how to deal with requests for asylum by foreign nationals.

Officials stressed that if Kurashvily had "not wanted to go, we would have moved in and grabbed him."

Both Professors

The Russians, both associate professors of engineering at Soviet universities, were engaged in post doctoral studies at UC Berkeley.

They claimed they were the victims of a misunderstanding — that they had actually paid for the \$5.71 worth of food they were accused of stealing from the Park and Shop Market.

They said they had paid for the groceries but the paper bag had broken and that was why they were carrying the food out under their clothes.

But a store official insisted that there were several wit-