

The CIA spies America has disowned

By Alan Dawson
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BANGKOK, Thailand — A group of spies trained by the CIA and employed by the Saigon government want to come in out of the cold. No one will have them.

The spies, most of them employed by the CIA as long as 25 years ago, charge they have been abandoned by the government they felt they were working for all along — the U.S. government.

There are at least 30 of these men and women living in Thailand with their families who view with fear the Thai government's detente with Vietnam. Establishment of a Hanoi embassy here last month fueled their fears.

"We are afraid," said one of them, who has lived and spied in Thailand against the Communist Vietnamese for more than 20 years. "I want to leave here and go to the United States. My family will be safe there."

The few Americans who admit privately they know of the pro-Saigon spy ring, maintain the United States is not responsible for the spies or their families.

But the Vietnamese involved tell a different story. In 1954, when the Communists won the French Indochina war and took control of North Vietnam, the CIA recruited carefully chosen agents, the men say.

Some were employed directly in "dirty tricks" during the year before the country's doors were closed to foreigners. Even today, the spies will give no details.

But the 1971 Pentagon Papers said CIA operatives spread false propaganda and at one point tried to immobilize Hanoi transportation by putting sugar in bus gasoline tanks.

Sometimes sooner and sometimes later, the agents now petitioning to go to the United States were "inserted" into Thailand, and their employment was taken over technically by the American-backed Saigon government.

"Covers" were arranged, and the spies claim CIA personnel in Thailand arranged them. They assumed roles as shop owners in the Thai northeast and as Bangkok businessmen.

Primary duty was to watch and report on the 50,000 or more Vietnamese refugees, many of them pro-Communist, in Thailand's northeastern provinces. The spies reported through the Saigon Embassy in Bangkok, or directly to case officers in the Saigon Central Intelligence Organization.

But in a key move that was to become important later, the spies all were given legal Thai residency papers. These allow them to remain in Thailand forever, while technically retaining Vietnamese citizenship. They also make the Vietnamese eligible for the citizenship.

This, the spies claim, now is being used against them.

"We have been told by American officials that so long as we have Thai residency we cannot be immigrants to the United States and we cannot be refugees," said one agent involved in the Catch-22 problem.

He said an American official had told him to get to Hong Kong, where,

because he was not a resident, he could be classified as a Vietnamese refugee and sent to the United States. He and his family are ineligible for visas to Hong Kong, however, and hesitate to sail there in a small fishing boat and enter the colony illegally.

"We're asking for the same treatment the Americans gave their agents and Saigon agents in the evacuation" from Saigon in 1975, the man said. "We worked for the CIA. We don't want to stay here with the Vietnamese embassy in Bangkok. The Communists know who we are."