

IN THE ENEMY'S NET

Memoirs from the Revolution

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

HANOI - 1962

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The true stories collected in this booklet cover various episodes of underground activity of the Vietnamese revolutionaries which led to the triumph of our August 1945 Revolution.

The authors who are now assuming high functions in the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam have no other ambition than to depict by some aspects of their clandestine life, the hard struggle waged by the Vietnamese people to win freedom and independence. But the significance of the recalled facts is beyond the scope of Viet Nam's national history. They are part and parcel of the irresistible world movement for the liberation of oppressed peoples.

Living testimony of this shame of mankind, which is colonialism, these revolutionaries' memoirs bear out, besides their authors' heroism and self-abnegation, the masses' optimism in the darkest hours of repression and their decisive role under the leadership of a vanguard Party whose members are ready to offer up their lives for the victory of a sacred cause.

We hope that in these pages which do not claim to be literary, the reader will find again the noble spirit which animates these stories, sober and unadorned.

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HANOI

A HIGHLIGHT OF THE MOVEMENT

by NGUYEN DUY TRINH *

I was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment **. As my detention awaiting trial covered the same period, the imperialists were compelled to release me. Krautheimer, Governor of Cochin-China, signed a decree sending me back to my native land.

I thought to myself, "All the better. To despatch me back to Nghe An is to send me to the cradle of the movement."

Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces were generally considered as taking the lead in all revolutionary movements. From the period the Scholars fought the French to the widespread mass movements waged later, Nghe An and Ha Tinh were always among the most famous revolutionary centres of the country; especially since the founding of our Party, they have highlighted our brilliant revolutionary traditions.

From 1930 onwards, reports of struggle which reached us from every part of the country, gave us,

* Now member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers' Party and Vice-Premier of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

** Nguyen Duy Trinh was arrested in the premises of the Tan Viet Party in Saigon at the end of 1928, and tried in July 1930 by a Criminal Court.

in jail, the sensation that we grew in strength with the movement. The Yen Bay insurrection was followed by the struggle waged in the Phu Rieng rubber plantation, the huge strike organised at the Nam Dinh weaving mill, various demonstrations staged by the peasants in the South, in the North and in Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces; the situation reached its boiling point with the May Day demonstration in which the blood of the workers of the Truong Thi railway workshops and that of the peasants of various villages mixed together, and with the destruction of the Ky Vien plantation by thousands of peasants in Hanh Lam. I thought eagerly of the red banners raised aloft, followed by thousands and thousands of peasants advancing powerfully. The echoes of widespread stubborn struggles which reached us from outside, stimulated the fighting spirit of all of us, men in the twenties, full of revolutionary optimism.

Released together with me at that time was Nguyen Van Nguyen, a comrade of my age. The night before we left the jail, we shook hands with other comrades, the ones sentenced to death, the others about to be sent to Poulo Condore penal settlement. Then Nguyen and I said to each other in a corner, "They will certainly transfer us to our native villages. Now the movement is rising everywhere, and everywhere we can establish contacts to resume our activities. We will set up bases of struggle wherever they do not exist."

The other said, "Of course ! Since the time we took part in the revolution and during our spell in jail, we have done nothing except study. Our work of rousing

the masses is still insignificant. Our release is decidedly an occasion for us to go among the masses, to engage in practical work and struggle against the enemy."

We kept ourselves awake talking about the way to establish relations in our respective regions, about our means of living and our future activities. The next morning, Nguyen Dinh Kien, a native of Ha Tinh, and I, were led to Tan Dao jail, at Saint Jacques Cape, where were confined rubber plantation workers who had been caught by the French when attempting to escape to return to their native land in the North. Realising that it was dangerous to leave us among these workers, the French immediately embarked us on board s/s Chantilly bound for the North. As soon as the steamer called at Tourane, they despatched us straight away to Hue prison.

At that time arrests were taking place at Hue. The victims were students of the Practical Industrial School and Royal College or members of the International Relief Association. Meeting us in the jail, they immediately asked, "Are they transferring you to North Central Viet Nam ? There the situation is very tense. The strike of the workers of Truong Thi workshop is at a boiling point. The Ben Thuy match factory is closed. It is said that only the power station is in operation. They are sending a lot of soldiers there."

Jailed together with us were Vu Tung and Dang Canh Thuyen who had been arrested by the Thai authorities and handed over to the French imperialists.

As I was young, they liked me very much. Thuyen frequently told me in jest, "You will have a chance of serving in the workers-peasants' red army."

Receiving orders from Sogny, a cunning security police chief, the gendarme who escorted us to our native villages, threatened us with his revolver, "When you are back in your village, work peacefully. If you are arrested again you will be shot on the spot without trial."

We only smiled. It was in October 1930, the eve of the flaming days in Nghe An and Ha Tinh. The widespread movement launched by the Party among the worker-peasant masses would soon reach its climax.

As soon as I arrived at Vinh station, Nghe An province, I saw that the streets had an unusual look; an atmosphere of white terror was looming over the town; the streets swarmed with soldiers — apart from the blue-belt guards * who were permanently stationed in the town and the green-belt guards under command of an officer of the Royal Court, there were a great number of French troops, red-belt tirailleurs ** and armoured cars which patrolled up and down the streets and honked loudly to bully and browbeat the inhabitants. At the airfield one or two obsolete scouting-planes took off and taxied down from time to time to reconnoitre the countryside of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces.

Compared with other towns of Central Viet Nam, Vinh was a relatively important industrial centre. The

* Vietnamese militiamen (under command of French officers) whose duty was mainly to guard posts, blockhouses, etc.

** Vietnamese troops serving in the French colonial army.

biggest enterprise was the Truong Thi railway workshop*, then came the match factory and Ben Thuy port where the revolutionary movement was most powerful. In addition, there were the sawmill, the power station, the ice-making factory, the Van Te cannery, the Vinh railway section and a few joiners' workshops and hand-sawers' workshops. Except for the power station, all these enterprises were shut down. Most of the strikes of the match factory at Ben Thuy and Truong Thi railway workshop went to the countryside to take part in the revolutionary movement organised in various villages. The French imperialists intended to employ the peasants to work in their enterprises but no one accepted. The workshops were left idle. French soldiers and tirailleurs mounted guard at entrance gates surrounded with barbed wire. The troops were stationed at the Pham Van Phi mechanical repair workshop and the National College. All schools were closed and transformed into barracks. Passing in front of the Vinh primary school, I remembered my former school-mates and teachers, many of whom had been animated with high spirits and enthusiasm such as Tran Phu** who taught us in 1924. In that school was quartered about one platoon of French legionaries, and in its courtyard, some machine-guns pointed their dark muzzles to the sky.

When I arrived home, my father told me, "It seems that the French are determined to exterminate us this

* Workshop for repair and overhaul of locomotives and carriages.

** The first Secretary of the Indochinese Communist Party, who died in 1931, during his detention by the French colonialists.

time. It is advisable that you stay at home and lead a peaceful life, the more so since you are a former convict, they will surely follow close on your heels. It is better for you to keep in the background, for the time being."

As I had a plan of my own, I asked my father for permission to go to my village and do farming work to live on. I heard that in Nghi Loc, my own district, the movement was rising. Since May Day 1930, the peasants of Nghi Loc district had staged many demonstrations in support of Ben Thuy. In Dong Hai, my native village, a Party branch had been set up with a dozen members who were all relatives and friends of mine. I got in touch with these comrades and took part in the meetings of the Party branch. Later on, I was elected to the Party Committee. My village was closely led by the Party, partly because, like Hung Nguyen district, Nghi Loc was the seat of the Regional Committee and was directly led by it.

I returned to my village just at a time when the fiercest struggles broke out. Our blood was shed. On September 12, 1930, tens of thousands of peasants in Hung Nguyen district organised a huge demonstration in an attempt to march to the town of Vinh but were bombed by the imperialists' airplanes, thus causing over two hundred deaths and one hundred wounded. However, the explosions of French bombs in these terrorist raids only whetted the deep hatred which was boiling in our hearts. Like a dyke which gives way under pressure of water, the struggle of the masses broke out in successive waves. The Party branches in

various localities launched a campaign urging the broad masses to rise up and co-ordinate with Hung Nguyen district to fight against white terror.

Great indeed were the days in which the movement in Nghe An and Ha Tinh reached a high tide ! Day and night, in scorching sun or in pelting rain, as soon as drumbeats and rattlings were heard, the inhabitants swarmed from all sides into the street. Then, in rows of five abreast, they staged a parade and were joined by the inhabitants of the villages situated along the road, making the column sometimes as long as a kilometre. The demonstrators shouted the slogans, "Down with imperialism!", "Down with the Royal Court!", "Oppose White Terror!", "Workshops to the Workers!", "Land to the Tillers!", "For the establishment of the Worker-Peasant-Soldier Soviet Power!", "Support the Soviet Union!", as well as slogans demanding other social improvements. Arriving at a large field the demonstrators, in good order, listened to the speakers, members of the Party, who popularised the doctrine, explained the policies, roused the minds of the masses, stirred up hatred and called for action. In each struggle there were about a dozen speeches delivered by speakers until their voices became husky, while tens of thousands of people listened in complete silence and with rapt attention. Sometimes the struggle lasted all night; at times it was so exciting that it went from one day to the other without the demonstrators showing signs of tiredness. In Thanh Chuong, the peasants marched to the district

town and demolished the district office ; in Nam Dan, the district chief was compelled to sign and affix his red stamp on the petition lodged by the demonstrators.

In face of this seething mass movement which rose like swirling waves, the village notables kept a passive attitude or in the background ; but there were people who sided with the revolution. In line with the Regional Committee's decision, the village Party branch and Peasants' Association confiscated the stamp, wooden rattle, books and papers of the notables and held a mass rally to appoint new village authorities. The most energetic youths were enrolled in red guard units to defend the revolutionary power. A new order was set up in the countryside. Throughout that period there were no cases of evil-doing ; bad habits in funerals and on social and religious occasions were abolished ; gambling and superstitions also disappeared. During the Lunar New Year festival the villagers' life was more merry than usual ; each evening, there was animation in the communal house ; people went enthusiastically to meetings, listened to the articles of the Party's newspaper and comments on the implementation of the Party policies. In debates on public affairs every one was allowed to speak.

Notwithstanding the infantile character of some of our methods of mass agitation at that time, our Party launched a far-reaching propaganda and education campaign among the peasant masses. In the movement waged in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, the peasants, ideologically roused, rose up and followed the Party with confidence. Everywhere, at meetings or in demonstrations, the inhabitants raised aloft the Hammer