

Ogden's account of "The Coup"

1963

November 4, 1963

What Happened to Ngo dinh Diem and Ngo dinh Nhu

The following is the most reliable account to date of what happened to the Ngo brothers. Further details may be revealed later.

At about 8 p.m. on November 1, 1963, when the coup was already well under way, Diem and Nhu left Gia Long Palace in a simple civilian "camionette" and were driven to a villa in Cholon. At this time it was still easy for civilian cars to circulate in Saigon. Thus Diem and Nhu were not caught in the attack on Gia Long Palace, which began at about 9 p.m. and lasted until 6:45 a.m. on November 2. Whether the defenders of the Palace knew that the Ngos had left and resisted under orders, or whether the Ngos had pulled out quietly and left their men to be destroyed is not yet known to me.

Diem and Nhu spent the night in safety in Cholon. In the early morning their whereabouts was discovered. When it became known that they were not in the Palace, all villas of their acquaintances or supporters were checked. When Diem and Nhu were found, they were told to get in an armored vehicle which would drive them to military headquarters. Nhu protested that they should be taken in an appropriate civilian car rather than in the dirty and undignified military vehicle, whereupon a soldier kicked Nhu in the seat of the pants and told him to get in. Nhu turned on the soldier with stinging verbal insults and abuse, and the enraged soldier shot him down. At this the other soldiers became excited and opened fire too, killing Diem as well. The bodies were then placed in the vehicle and taken to Army Headquarters. After remaining in the military morgue there during Saturday, on Sunday the bodies were transferred to the morgue at the Clinique Saint Paul, one block from USOM, where they were placed at the disposition of relatives.

It is believed that no one mourns the death of Nhu. There are undoubtedly conflicting feelings about the President's death. He did not project the image of a bad man; only a misguided, politically stupid and fatally obstinate man. Whereas Nhu was an operator whose last operation misfired, there are elements of Greek tragedy in the career of Diem. But lest one become too sentimental, one must remember that he tolerated a police state in which thousands were murdered, including the young men who gave their lives for the continuance of his power on the night of November 1-2, 1963.

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