

From: Tieng Chuong, Saigon, 14-7-56

We witnessed the execution at its dreadful moment!

BA-CUT, FAINT, SLOWLY WENT UP THE GUILLOTINE, his arms tied over his back, he was pushed lying flat, face down, on the movable board, his head over the frame ... then, the executioner pushed a button, and flop! BA-CUT's head fell off in the wooden-case containing saw-dust, his body rolled over and blood jetted from the throat...

(Report by our correspondents, Nguyen-kien-Giang and Quoc-Phuong)

On July 12, at 16:30 hours, Ba-Cut's attorneys Dinh-van-Cac and Pham-ngoc-Thu, received the following note from the President of the Court of the Justice of the Peace with extended jurisdiction in Can-Tho:

Can-tho, 12th July 1956

The President,
The Court of the Justice of the Peace
with extended jurisdiction,
to Mr. Dinh-van-Cac, attorney, Can-tho
and Mr. Pham-ngoc-Thu, attorney, Can-tho.

I have the honor to inform you that to-morrow, 13th July 1956, at 05:00 hours, the death sentence imposed upon Le-quang-Vinh, alias Ba-Cut, will be carried out.

Therefore, I request you to be so kind as to join us at the Court-house of Can-tho at 04:00 hours on the above mentioned date, in order to proceed with us to the prison, in accordance with Art. 26 of the reformed Penal Code.

Yours sincerely;
(signature)

Immediately after this, attorney Dinh-van-Cac, upon recommendation of Mr. Cao-thien-Du, Ba-Cut's father-in-law, came to the Court and requested that, after the execution, Ba-Cut's body be handed over to his family. At 07:00 p.m. there was still no response to attorney Dinh-van-Cac's request. Only at the last moment was it known that his request was not granted.

04:00 a.m., at the Tribunal of Can-tho

It was then only 03:00 a.m., but there was already a crowd of reporters and cameramen in front of the Tribunal premises. But they were all disappointed when a security officer announced:

—"Photographs are prohibited to be taken. Cameras will be confiscated from those who do not obey. It's an order of the Court".

03:00 a.m. A jeep ran in and stopped at the gate; two priests alighted. Some minutes later, two Buddhist priests arrived in a Citroen.

Nearly 04:00 a.m. attorneys Dinh-van-Cac and Pham-ngoc-Thu, dressed in plain clothes, got there in a car.

Five minutes later, while photographers and reporters wandered in the yard of the Tribunal, officials, with President of the Court Huynh-Hiep-Thanh leading the way, went out of the Tribunal and got in cars which headed towards the Prison of Can-tho, heavily guarded by policemen.

The street in front of the gate of the Prison was crowded with officials cars, military trucks and jeeps.

BA-CUT WAS DEEPLY ASLEEP

4:15 a.m. a group, comprising the President of the Court Huynh-Hiep-Thanh, the Justice's clerk Pham-van-Bo, fathers Huynh Tan-Hoa and Nguyen-quan-Toan, the head of Buu-lien Pagoda and a monk, the personnel of the Military Police and Gendarmerie, and photographers of the operation "Nguyen Hue", entered the Prison. Passing the prison's gate, they turned around a meter-high barbed-wire fence to the right and proceeded along an alley to the cell of Ba-Cut, a room two meters long and one meter and 20 centimeters wide.

The place was brightly lighted. Ba-Cut was deeply asleep on a small bed standing by the side of a wooden couch. The bed was covered with a green mosquito net and Ba-Cut had folded a blanket to rest his head on.

Hearing the President of the Court call his name, Ba-Cut got up. He wore a short white coat and black pants. His hands and feet were handcuffed. Although his eyes were still heavy with sleepiness, noticing such a crowd, Ba-Cut realized what fate was waiting for him, but while his face grew very pale, he tried to keep his composure.

- I DID NOT EXPECT THAT MY APPEAL WOULD BE TURNED DOWN.

The President of the Court, in plain clothes, started to say:

"In the name of the Court and the Minister of Justice, I am here to notify you that your appeal for pardon has been rejected by the President of the Republic and your appeal to the Court of Cassation has also been turned down. You now have one hour to express your ultimate wishes."

Then the President proceeded to read to Ba-Cut the President's ordinance which rejected his appeal. Ba-Cut bowing his head kept silent for a minute, and then looked up and said rather loudly:

"I have nothing to say. Really, I didn't expect that I would not obtain pardon".

As Ba-Cut wanted to say more, the President stopped him:

"At this point, he said, I think you'd better not speak of the Government and the Court. You had better tell your last wishes."

"I ONLY REGRET ONE THING, WHEN I DIE THERE'S NO ONE TO TAKE CARE OF MY CHILDREN".

Ba-Cut remained very calm and replied:

"No, I don't have any intention to traduce the Government and the President of the Republic. I just wonder why there ~~were~~ two of Bao-Dai's followers who fought against the Government and now there is only I who have to die."

The President of the Court: "That is none of our business. We are only concerned with executing orders about your case."

Ba-Cut, lowering his voice: "I regret only that when I die there will be no one to rear my children."

The President handed the record of the sentence to Ba-Cut for his signature. Ba-Cut signed it and said:

"A military man has to die in one way or another, but I beg you to let me use poisoning so that I can die quietly and avoid the frenzy of public opinion."

"It is a decision of the Court of Saigon. You had better obey."

Not being aware that he would be guillotined, Ba-Cut requested that the firing-squad would spare his head intact and that his body would be turned over to his relatives so that they could bury it at Mount "Nui Sam", by the side of "The Master's Grave" at Tay-an.

He went on saying:

"At this moment, I have nothing to deny, but it is an injustice to apply the civil sentence to me. I have nothing to say as to the military sentence.

SINCE MY CHILDHOOD I HAVE BEEN A BUDDHIST.

When the President Huynh-hiep-Thanh retired, Father Huynh-tân-Hoà, who had known Ba-Cut before, came in and taking Ba-Cut's arm, he softly said:

"Dear Ba, now you are living your last minutes. You had better join the Catholic Church to save your soul. Your mistakes are punished in this world, but you will be forgiven by the Lord and accepted to Heaven if you are converted."

Ba-Cut seemed to have lost his head, for he agreed to everything Father Hoa told him, as well as to what was told him later on by the chief monk of Buu-lien pagoda.

Right then, the President of the Court ordered Ba-Cut to be taken to the office of the Prison, situated on the left side of the Prison's gate.

Ba-Cut put on a black goat over his white one. The black clothes he had on him presently had been made by his wife Cao-thi-Nguyet, which he always wore during "important moments" of his life to have a moral comfort.

Attorney Dinh-ván-Cao asked Ba-Cut if he wished to have a glass of rum to help his morale.

Ba-Cut shook his head and replied:

"Thank you, attorney. I don't think I need it. I never drink or smoke so far".

When walking out of his cell and past the cells where his subordinates were being imprisoned, Ba-Cut, perceiving the eyes that were peeping out through holes in the wooden doors, shouted:

"I am going to die today, folks!"

In the office of the Prison, officials tried to comfort Ba-Cut.

Once more, Father Huynh-tân-Hoa approached Ba-Cut and touched his shoulder while saying:

"Dear Ba, I counsel you to turn to the Christian Faith".

Ba-Cut slowly replied:

"Since my childhood I have been a buddhist, so I want to remain buddhist. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that high in Heaven there is the Lord, that is the Christ, and under him, there is Buddha, that is to say that there is a God up above and a Buddha right under him. Since I have been a Buddhist worshipper, I wish to remain buddhist."

However, Father Hoa kept on trying:

"The way you understand is right, but let me bestow the extreme unction and I hope that at the last minute of your life, you will utter out just these words "O our Lord."

Ba-Cut nodded and agreed to be anointed. Father Hoa took out a bottle of Holy water that he had brought with him, and poured it on Ba-Cut's forehead while saying in a low voice:

"I anoint thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost."

The Holy water fell on Ba-Cut's coat and wet it.

During all this time, the two monks also tried to console Ba-Cut and kept on praying and striking their wooden tocsin.

Then President Huynh-Hiệp-Thanh gave the order to break up. The group went out of the Prison and got in cars and drove to the place of execution, the military cemetery, which lies opposite the gate of Can-tho Hospital.

THE PLACE OF EXECUTION AT THE DREADFUL MOMENT

Although it was past 5:00 a.m., the cemetery was still in darkness.

Officials in Can-tho: Colonel Nguyen văn Quang, chief of the Can-tho's province; Major Hiệp, commander of the Regional Battalion; Captain Thói, were conversing with deputies of the National Assembly headed by Mr. Nguyen văn Đức, representing also, the political parties.

Over there, we can see the silhouette of the guillotine standing in the middle of a multitude of white wooden crosses, under two flagpoles.

Some minutes later Sergeant Phuoc arrived, his hair short cut and gray, wearing white mauresque pajamas over his well built body. People were surprised to see walking by Sergeant Phuoc's side another man who seemed to be showing Sergeant Phuoc his way.

The place of execution was heavily guarded by soldiers standing only a meter apart. On the other side of the street, there was a big crowd.

Coming from the radio-car, the voice of the speaker, from time to time, recalled the order of General Duong văn Minh to the Public.

"It is requested that newspaper reporters, photographers, movie cameramen not bring any cameras inside the forbidden area by order of the General Commanding Operation Thoai-ngoc-Hâu."

As the result of that order, pressmen sadly made up their minds to leave their cameras in their cars.

To compensate for his order, General Duong văn Minh had pressmmn invited to approach the guillotine machine as near as 20 meters to witness the important event that would take place in a moment.

The sun was rising little by little, and for the last time for Ba-Cut.

THE STEEL BLADE DROPPED DOWN AND BA-CUT'S HEAD FELL AWAY FROM HIS NECK.

15 to 6 a.m. While people were waiting in silence, a 4 X 4 truck - very familiar to us - which carried Ba-Cut, approached.

Ba-Cut was guarded by four gendarmes like when he was brought to Tribunal. He was dressed in black mauresque pajamas. His face was pale. He walked resignedly escorted by two gendarmes.

An atmosphere of intense emotion surrounded the crowd. Hearts were beating. The sun was high up in the sky. Ba-Cut silently walked towards the guillotine 10 meters 5 meters. His eyes were lifelessly looking at the machine which was standing right there in the middle of a fence, then he turned his head to look backwards as --- for a last salute.

Just two meters more Sergeant Phuoc stepped ahead. Holding Ba-Cut's arm, he threw him lying flat on the movable board.

Ba-Cut's face was turned down against the board. His body was motionless. Sergeant Phuoc pushed the frame that keeps the neck still and then ... the button commanding the blade A sound "FLOP" was heard and the head of Ba-Cut fell into the sawdust case. His body rolled over while blood jetted from the throat.

People who were so curious as to stay and watch this dreadful moment were so scared that they almost fainted.

Our sight was blinded by emotion.

"Let's go," was heard. And about ten soldiers, who were assigned to the packing of Ba-Cut's corpse jumped ahead and picked up from the sawdust case the bloody head, put it into a large canvas, and rolled up the beheaded body in the middle of the canvas; then they hastily sprinkled the whole with sawdust and wrapped it up.

The public was still bewildered when the loudspeaker announced: "Please break up in good order."

WHERE WAS BA-CUT'S BODY TAKEN

As we said formerly, Ba-Cut's family was not allowed to get his body.

All we know for sure is that, after Ba-Cut's body had been tied up in a canvas, it was immediately brought back to the Prison in a car for burial, and a red hearse had been taken into the

Prison at 5 a.m. long before the execution of Ba-Cut.

As to the place of burial, it is still unknown.