

INTRIGUE: The 1963 Viet Coup

By FATHER PATRICK O'CONNOR (NC News Service)

We were standing on a Saigon street, near the battered Gia Long palace, some hours after the fighting ceased on Nov. 2, 1963. The nine-year-old government of Ngo Dinh Diem, first president of the Republic of Vietnam, had been overthrown. And, though neither of us knew it yet, he and his brother had been murdered.

The American embassy official's comment on a casual remark of mine confirmed what I already had reason to suspect. "You don't seem to know," he said, "this is our work. We did this."

Later, I telephoned the embassy. Was it making any statement on the situation?

"No," I was told. "This is an entirely Vietnamese affair, as you know."

"I know," I said, with as much irony as I could put into two words. Then I asked, "Is there any news about Ngo Dinh Diem?"

"Haven't you heard? The radio has announced that he and Nhu committed suicide."

There was more than irony in what I said then.

That afternoon my radioed dispatch, passed by the censors after slight hesitation, said that the suicide story was doubted in Saigon. Next afternoon, a friendly traveler to Hong Kong secretly carried another dispatch, to be radioed from there. In it I saw, from certain knowledge, that Diem and Nhu had not committed suicide. They had been shot, and Nhu had been stabbed as well.

Since then I have gleaned more information about this somber event, the fifth anniversary of which fell on Nov. 2.

Six months of agitation, skillfully fomented by a political faction of Buddhists, had led up to the coup of Nov. 1-3, 1963. The campaign was directed, chiefly, and obviously, at American public opinion. The impression was created, and was fostered by inaccurate and one-sided reports, that the Vietnamese government, headed by a Catholic, was persecuting the Buddhist religion.

High-ranking officials in Washington panicked. In July and August they suggested that President Diem should send his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, head of the security apparatus, and Madame Nhu abroad; that Diem should become a mere figurehead and hand over power to a prime minister acceptable to the Buddhists and other dissidents; and, finally, that the army should revolt.

The Vietnamese generals, who had backed the government in its actions, declined. But when Washington, in an openly anti-Diem gesture, announced the suspension of some of the financial aid to South Vietnam,

some military leaders changed their minds.

In early October they began to plot in earnest. The U.S. embassy knew it. An American official, a civilian, kept in touch with the plotters.

On the morning of All Saints' Day, Nov. 1, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge accompanied Admiral Harry Felt, who was paying a farewell call on the President after a short visit to Vietnam. They left, and at 11 a.m. Diem assisted at Mass in a room in Gia Long palace. The celebrant was the chief Catholic chaplain of the Vietnamese armed forces. The president received Holy Communion. It was to be his vaticum.

Admiral Felt, due to leave about noon, met the press in the VIP lounge in the airport. I observed that the ambassador did not come. Gen. Paul D. Harkins, who headed the Military Assistance Command and wanted no coup, was there to see the admiral off. So was Gen. Tran van Don, representing the Vietnamese armed forces. He was one of the leaders in the coup that was to start in an hour's time. (He has since been obliged to retire from the army and is now a senator.)

At 1:20 p.m., when most of Saigon subsidies into its sista, I heard the first burst of machine-gun fire in my neighborhood, about half a mile from the palace. The revolt, led by most of the military leaders in the Saigon area, had begun.

About 8 p.m. the president and his brother, with a young officer and a civilian, left the palace by the rear gate. Taking the small "camionette," used for bringing supplies from the market, they drove through the streets to the Cholon side of the city. There they spent the night in a house belonging to a Chinese. They had telephone connections with the palace, where the generals presumed they still were. Word came that all avenues of exit from the city were blocked.

Shortly after 6 a.m. on Nov. 2 the small garrison in the palace surrendered. The radio announced untruthfully that Diem had yielded his powers to the insurgent generals. Later, toward 8 a.m., the president telephoned, or had a message telephoned, to the military headquarters, saying that he and his brother would be in St. Francis Xavier's Church, Cholon.

Eight of the coup leaders, generals and colonels, were in the headquarters. They held a hasty consultation. One wanted to have Diem and Nhu killed. Seven voted for putting Diem on a U.S. plane and having him flown out of the country. Nhu, they decided, they would hold for "investigation."

A convoy, which included an armored personnel carrier (APC) was formed. Before it left for the church, one of the coup leaders made a sign to an officer who was to ride in the convoy. The sign meant "kill."

Two other leaders concurred, in a swift agreement of which the rest claim they knew nothing. The man who had voted for the death of Diem and Nhu was not one of the three.

Diem, Nhu and the two young men arrived at the church, in a car belonging to the Chinese, at about 8:40 a.m. The 8 o'clock Mass, last of the All Souls' Day Masses, was over; some church and yard. The president was recognized when the four entered the church, but there was no commotion. Someone hurried to tell the French priests in their one-story house, in the same yard, that the President was in the church. The priests did not believe it.

Soon a jeep halted outside. Two officers entered the yard. Nhu, followed by Diem, came out. There was a short conversation in the yard, near the Lourdes grotto. The armored personnel carrier was now at the gate, backed, with its ramp lowered. Diem and Nhu entered it. There was no altercation, no struggle. The convoy started on its return journey to the headquarters, about three miles away.

When it arrived, some of the military leaders were outside to meet it. They saw the ramp of the APC lowered and the dead bodies of Diem and Nhu carried out on stretchers. Both had been shot in the back of the neck. Nhu had also been bayoneted.

Most of the generals and colonels were aghast, according to one of them. They did not want to appear before the world as assassins. And already some of their colleagues had broken an agreement, in a matter of life and death, behind their backs.

(I am sure that the U.S. embassy, while it certainly promoted the coup, did not intend or seek the deaths of Diem and Nhu.)

Four days later, the victorious generals held a formal press conference attended by a large body of correspondents and diplomatic representatives. The chief military men met beforehand to discuss what they would say. One of their number urged them to decide on an explanation for the deaths of Diem and Nhu. It was common knowledge that the two were Catholics and that suicide is contrary to Catholic principles.

One man proposed saying that the deaths were the result of an accident. This was rejected, because such an accident inside an armored car did

SUN HEATS CHURCH

Munich — (NC)—The first church to use the sun to power its heating system has been completed in Waging in upper Bavaria. The church, St. Simeon's, will be consecrated soon.

A tent-like copper roof on the octagonal building attracts the sun's warmth. By means of a fan, warm air is sucked from the church roof and pressed under the floor where clay tiles accumulate the heat for about three days.

not seem likely. Finally, the generals agreed on a compromise. They would call the deaths "accidental suicide."

After dark, on the night of Nov. 8, the pair were buried in the grounds. A French priest said the burial prayers. Diem's niece and her husband were present.

About two years later, as a result of a fortune-teller's warnings, the bodies were secretly moved from the headquarters grounds and buried in the municipal cemetery. There they rest in a trim grave that bears no names.



'Russians, Go Home!'

Young demonstrators climb the gates at Prague Castle, where leaders of Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia were meeting to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the nation's founding. Three thousand students shouted out "Russians, go home!" and "Long live freedom!" as they marched to the castle.

Czech Refugees in U.S.

By DORIS R. PETERS (NC News Service)

New York — Some came with bundles, bags and suitcases. Others came only with the clothes they were wearing.

They were the first group of Czechoslovak refugees to arrive in the United States since the Soviet invasion in August. The 168 refugees, mostly in family groups and including 36 children, had been in Vienna for more than two months before boarding the commercial jet which arrived (Oct. 26) in Kennedy airport.

The plane had been chartered by the Intergovernmental Committee for

European Migration. The refugees were met here by representatives of the Division of Migration and Refugee Services, United States Catholic Conference, and other sponsoring agencies.

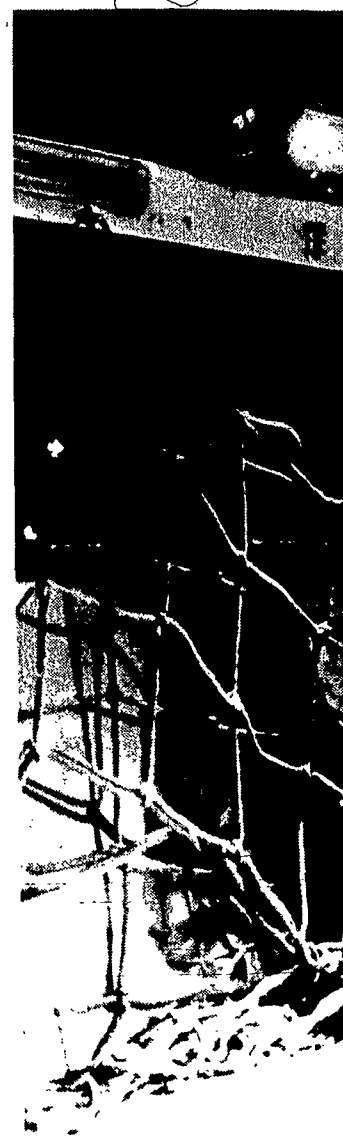
This first group was made up mostly of professional people including archivists, engineers, and physicians.

Although expressing some concern about having to make such a great change at this time of their lives and careers, Dr. Jiri Syrový said he and his family were "very happy to be here. We don't know what is ahead, but we are willing to work. We want to be free people."

Chilean Archbishop Donates Farm Land

Concepcion, Chile — (RNS)— Archbishop Manuel Sanchez Beguiristain of Concepcion has given more than 5,000 acres suitable for farming to the Corporation for Agrarian Reform for redistribution to poor families.

The archbishop said that his gift was intended as a concrete reply to the directives of the Second Vatican Council and as a part of a massive program for the redistribution of wealth undertaken by the Chilean hierarchy.



Father Dermot Doran, C.S. bound for Biafra from the nating relief airlifts to Bi.

Biafra:

By JOHN R. SULLIVAN (NC News Service)

Umuahia, Biafra — In a land ready familiar with the specter of starvation, the people are prepa for a famine which could make the country's gruesome past look the "good old days."

They are resigned, because know that new hunger is inevitable that many more thousands will die.

They are hopeful that the wo relief agencies — U.S. Catholic lief Services, Vatican-based Ca Internationalis, the World Counc Churches, and the Red Cross — be able, somehow, to stave off coming threat.

They know that the agencies which now pour some 150 ton protein-rich food into Biafra night — have helped in the past, that the help has stemmed the of infant deaths among the nat two million refugees.

But they know now that the must be doubled, perhaps quadrupled; a new wave of starvation deat not to sweep Biafra in the co months.

If in the spirit of Thanksgi ing for our land of plenty yo wish to contribute funds t help Biafrans they may be se to Bishop Swanstrom, Cathol Relief Services, U.S. Cathol Conference, 358 Fifth Ave, Ne York, N.Y., 10001.

The problems are these:

- Kwashiorkor, the often-fatal tein deficiency which has its disastrous effects on children, is being seen in adults.
- Yams and garri, Biafra's st foods which give bulk and starr

Schweitzer Hospital To Serve Biafrans

New York — (RNS) — The h tal at Lambarene, Gabon, founde the late Dr. Albert Schweitze being opened to children from Bi the daughter of the famed misso said here.

Mrs. Rhena Eckert-Schweitzer, ministrator of the hospital, here: ing financial aid for young victin the war involving federal Nij and Biafra, estimated that 1,500 dren had arrived, and held that n were enormous. In addition to pr ing the hospital to receive the dren, Mrs. Eckert-Schweitzer said home, near the medical facility, w be used for the young refugees.

Funds for the work were t c h ann eled through the Al Schweitzer Fellowship, a New agency which seeks support for hospital founded in the early 3 of the century. The hospital's no capacity for patients is 400.

U.S. Urges On Natural

United Nations — (RNS) — United States, with an eye to es the horror of natural disasters, proposed an agenda for action o international scale to the U.N. omic and Social Council.

Instead of relying on emerg relief as heretofore, the U.S. v have the U.N. place emphasis on ordinative arrangements" to maximum effectiveness to comb international relief efforts of U.N., individual governments pertinent voluntary organizations

The U.N. budgetary allowance natural disasters stands at \$100 a year.

The United States has alloc for the same purpose abroad— million over the last four years.

Walter M. Kotschnig, the U.S. 4 gate to the Economic and S Council, offered the following ture of recorded natural disas and the agenda for action:

The responsibilities and the p of the U.N. system of orga

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