

### Suspicious of Diem and Nhu

The list of generals suspected by President Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu of plotting a coup included Tran Van Don, Duong Van Minh, Mai Huu Xuan... However, Nhu chuckled and added: "They're not worth worrying about; they don't have any troops."

Diary of Do Tho, page 18

### Who Ordered the Assassination?

Dalat General Tran Van Don was the second-ranking military leader of the Revolution of November 1, 1963, standing immediately behind General Duong Van Minh. In all documents shedding light on the mystery surrounding the death of President Ngo Dinh Diem, General Tran Van Don is ranked among the instigators--"nine for death, one for mercy." When he received news that President Ngo Dinh Diem was dead, General Tran Van Don, who was at JGS, became very taciturn and his actions difficult to understand. Many people at JGS say that when the body of President Ngo Dinh Diem was brought there, General Duong Van Minh received from Captain Nhung and Major Duong Hieu Nghia, the two officers who had shot President Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu in the head, a report that the task had been carried out. General Duong Van Minh shook their hands in the manner of victors. General Tran Van Don quietly slipped off to some other place. The taciturn manner of General Tran Van Don was the symptom of an accomplice.

Dalat General Tran Van Don must accept responsibility before history, along with General Duong Van Minh, for the suspicious death of President Ngo Dinh Diem. General Le Van Kim himself cried out at JGS when he learned that President Diem had been killed. General Kim shouted: "What are we to do now? What are we to tell the people? We're finished!" At the same time, General Mai Huu Xuan was running after General Duong Van Minh saying: "Keep quiet. Don't worry about it."

The indifference of General Tran Van Don caused many people at JGS to understand immediately his complicity in the death of President Diem.

On November 2, 1963, before bringing President Ngo Dinh Diem from the Cha Tam Church to JGS, the Council of Generals opened a meeting to decide the fate of President Diem. During the meeting, some generals proposed sending President Diem to Con Son or detaining him in Dalat.

*With no restriction. Oct 4, 1977*

General Tran Van Don did not agree, saying that support for President Diem would well up among the people.

In the end, it was agreed by everyone on the Council of Generals to solve the problem by exiling President Diem. The meeting broke up. A group of generals, Duong Van Minh, Mai Huu Xuan, Tran Van Don, Nguyen Ngoc Le, and Tran Tu Oai, who had been waiting for the Council to agree on exiling President Diem, opened a private discussion. It was this group which decided to have President Ngo Dinh Diem killed.

Le Tu Hung, Four Dalat Generals, pp. 74-76

The Fate of Major Nhung

During that night January 29-30, 1964, Major Nhung, personal bodyguard of General Duong Van Minh and one of the two persons who killed President Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu, was captured and taken away.

Le Tu Hung, Four Dalat Generals, p. 9

In their afternoon of detention at Camp Hoang Hoa Tham, the four Dalat Generals came close to death. It was also there, in a nearby room, that "Readjustment" troops killed Major Nhung, the person who shot President Diem, and strung him up in a toilet. Then, it was announced that Major Nhung had hanged himself with a bootlace.

Le Tu Hung, Four Dalat Generals, p. 64



There Was An Order to Kill Diem

Colonel Duong Hieu Nghia, Vinh Long Province Chief and one of the best-informed witnesses of the Revolution of November 1, 1963, yesterday affirmed, in an exclusive interview with Hoa Binh, that "there was a meeting of generals to decide the fate of President Diem and his brother."

According to Colonel Nghia, this meeting took place between two and four o'clock in the morning of November 2, and it ended with a decision to kill. Colonel Nghia stressed: "I won't say who proposed killing them and how many people attended the meeting. I am only certain of one thing, that Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu was not present at that meeting."

It will be recalled that at the time Colonel Nghia was a major in the armored branch.

Regarding accounts carried in the press about men who took a direct part in the killing of President Diem and his brother Nhu in the M-113 armored personnel carrier and which also assert that Major Nghia himself fired the coup de grace, Colonel Nghia smiled and said: "I am the only one who knows much about that, but I dare not say anything. The Vietnamese press has revealed many 'top secret' secrets with which men involved in the coup are not familiar. As I have said, details about the Revolution of November 1 are national secrets. They shouldn't be made public for another ten years. So I will remain silent, although the press blames me. I will only confirm that I was not present aboard the M-113 and did not participate in the murder of President Diem and his brother."

Colonel Nghia confided: "Thieu and Minh are my superiors. Any disclosures of mine would reflect on one or the other. Wouldn't silence be best?"

Recalling the M-113 and the death of President Diem and his brother, Colonel Nghia said: "The press adapted so well. Today, all the soldiers involved with that vehicle are dead except for one first sergeant. This NCO cannot be found. So from what source are memoirs coming?" In closing, Colonel Nghia promised he would publish his memoirs about the November 1 Revolution, illustrated with photographs, on this day in 1981.

from Hoa Binh, July 27, 1971  
(story datelined July 26)



*A. Burnett*

24 March 1981

9.30 pm

DINNER WITH GENERAL TRAN VAN DON

Let us start at the very end. As we ~~were~~ were about to finish the evening (at 'Daniels') Gene suddenly asked a question about Conein's presence during the actual coup against Diem.

Conein had arrived at the HQ at about 3 and stayed until six, Don said, when it was clear from the phone call that Diem had given himself up and would be collected. Then it was over and he went home. That is why I was very ~~xx~~ surprised about his saying that there was a vote, Don stated. Then he added, of course, there might have been when I was out, or away for a period. That I don't know. He was visibly sweating, and had patted his forehead once with ~~xxx~~ his napkin.

Just prior to that ~~he~~ I had asked him "were you a member of the Can Lao Party, did you follow it?", "Follow it, yes," he said, with t e emphasis on the ~~xxxx~~ "yes". Then he described ~~a~~ how members from the northern ~~n~~ section under Ngo Dinh Can would be arrested if they went to Nhu's southern section. whilsy those from the south were not allowed to the North. Ie, there was a major split within the Ngo family between Can and Nhu, with "Diem trying to hold the balance in between". Those may not be the exact words of Don, but they are very close.

(It follows, therefore, that the Buddist crisis was in part a 'competition' between the two younger brothers and not at all the singular work of Nhu...)

Then he pointed out that if they had been kept alive well perhaps after three months the Americans would have replaced him and the Generals by x bringing back the Nhus. An absurd idea, of course, given the actual reputation they had gained in the world media. But it was very striking that even today Don still could consider this to have been on the cards. (what he would not be able to say, given his closeness to the Ngo's, was the fear they undoubtedly instilled)

However, as a throwaway remark, it threw away a lot of his book perhaps!

The notes which follow are not in order of the discussion.

### The Ngo family

It emerged much more closely from dinner than from his book how close he was to the family. They stayed in his father's houses in both Dalat and Saigon (father then Mayor?). He knew where the brothers were, and at the seminar said, when asked about ~~Ngaxhix~~ Nhu being in France, that no, he had been there in 1949 for one month only. A man with that sort of information at his fingertips, it was said without hesitation, was clearly someone intimately ~~and~~ involved in the Ngo family ambitions from early on.

He was clearly trusted. He said that Diem was honest and did not know about practical things. He did not know what a table cost, he said, gripping the table. ~~was~~ One saw the proprietor of a Washington restaurant!

The Ngos would talk to each other in French, on political matters! Deracinated, I said (a bit stupid as he did also). No, French is a much more precise language in such topics, he responded. Tell it to the Russian aristocracy!

Between 1955 and 1957 Diem gradually became a man of the state, a President. He began to demand that generals wear their ties and that people dress well before him. Don compared this to the change Reagan introduced into Washington life!!

Diem, he said, never offered him (Don) money. He made it clear that he was not adverse to taking ~~x~~ money (just as in his book he admits that he ~~en~~ enjoys the good life).

### The CIA, & Conein

Don said three times that he was not in the pay of the CIA or did not work for them. Each time it became less (or more) convincing. The best was when he said that he had asked Colby to write the into ~~x~~ to his book to make it clear that he was not a CIA man. He looked fed up, and was clearly annoyed by the into. In all prob. Colby explained to him that he had been especially hard on him "so that it would not appear that you worked for the the Agency". In that way veracity and pragmatism were married... doubtless. He said that he did not know Colby was a Catholic.

Note, on Sukarno he said, in the car that he was wrong to ~~p~~ get involved with Chinese Communists, but not with pretty girls.

*5m restriction - permission only March 20, 1975  
With no restriction. Oct 4, 1977*



Cambodia

He was disappointing here. There was no way 'into' the question, and he was remarkably guarded. ~~Af~~ It was as if he had taken ~~the~~ over the country! He went to the same lycee in Saigon as Sihanouk, 5 yrs his junior. Knew him as King in Saigon in 47. Said a nice man, did not talk politics - probably womanized. Met Son N Thanh as PM in PPhn. He had a low estimate of him. Also, said he was like a Vietnamese although was a pure Khmer. Was guarded about the probably fact that his family farm - the 2,700 acres acquired by his father from his medical practice, in the lush lands of Long Xuan, was near Khmer Krom areas. ~~He~~ Said that they mistreated Si, who was clearly not a Communist, and that they could have gained a settlement with him. Blamed ~~K~~ Diem for a bad ambassador sent to PPhn. Said should have sent a school companion of Si's there to rep Saigon.

The most interesting thing was that he went to visit Angkor as a boy with his parents. A measure of the French, Indochinese consciousness of his childhood, I've no doubt. He said he could not recall how he felt about it.

He was very sensitive to the fact that ~~the~~ the French were there in Cambodia, "active" was his word. in a way they were not in Vietnam. In Vn, the Fr were allowed to stay, had good conditions, but were marginal. Aware that Fr advisors to Si and in the military. Then said: "it was a conflict between the Americans and the French, not a conflict between us at all". (I refrained from informing him that this was a Marxist theory of inter-imperialist contradictions...)

Communist strength & Tet

When the Saigon forces surrendered to the other side, they cried. They were only thin boys. We could have defeated them. They had taken such losses. We overestimated their strength.

But asked what would have happened in 63 to 64 if the Communists had thrown themselves into the cities, he said that they would have been defeated. It takes a lot, need weapons, they did not have enough strength. He seemed unhesitatingly clear on this. Yet to be convinced.

On 68, he was very impressed with what the North did, as he put it, and with their infiltration of the Army in the South. But the ~~the~~ people did not follow them. And the NLF people got lost as well. (I think the story about the command centre in Dalat,

5/11/68. Destruction - permission only. 4/11/68, 17/1/68



in his book is probably very important here, and what he is really referring to. Why did it go wrong. because "we", meaning the South Vietnamese just say what is pleasing, yes everything is OK, when it is not. Even in my own family I have to follow things up. My 14 year old son does not ~~say what~~ do what I say. In command I had to follow everything. The Southerners are unreliable....all too true of Vietnam, and other countries of course.

#### 1945, and before

When at Tay Son, had freedom to move and local people, Sino-Vietnamese told him not to worry and that he would be the liaison man for the Viet Minh. After he escaped and went south under the J, said he was one of the first there to know about the Viet Minh. Said he was lucky to have been refused by the Viet Minh when they called for all officers from the Fr ~~army~~ army (he was refused as a Fr citizen). He and Kim welcomed by the Fr and treated v well. Those who fought were captured by the Gurkas and handed over to the Fr where it was not so nice for them. Implied clearly that the military struggle in the South was a wipe out for the locals, again the experienced Gurkas.

#### PRESENT Present period

How did he feel about the Chinese invasion: gleeful, patriotic? "I felt nothing", he said. Need not to fall under the Chinese after the great struggle for independence. But waiting for something to happen. Says that some officers have defected from N to Chi, and mentioned the few 100 from S Vn into Thai. Exemplified the way the Can Lao party just fell away to nothing, overnight. This obviously surprised and impressed him. ~~And~~ Anything can happen in Vn., he concluded. True!

#### The Koreans

Were very ruthless. Used terrible levels of artillery, until even we had to ask that they stop. Yes, My Lies there, but "these were covered up". Then they went over to social things, building roads. But also buying US PX and sending the stuff by the boat load to S Korea. Same with Thais, forces ~~xxx~~ would have 3 month tour duty, and each lot would have to be entirely re-equipped. Tremendously expensive, but did not go into fighting the enemy.

#### Westmoreland

talked 3 hours, Jan 28 about our pacification, how work, he said now first time understand. Next day, arrested, no more. waved

Assassination

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waved hand to make clear that he thought of Wmland as a featherweight. Did not think he knew what Harkins was up to in the Kx Khanh coup.

His fellow Generals

George asked a lot of questions on the various figures in the 'team', which I could not follow x the wretched difficulty of Vn names and the ignorance of that set of conflicts (weakness of interest from other side...). Thieu now in Surry. Long description of how he sold his house in Wimbledon to an Am woman x with an Egyptian wife. Thieu very brilliant at 'presentations', really wowed Nixon in 1969, and clearly Don also as he made his way up the promotion ladder. Very clever about hinking for his won advantage. x But in the end believed that the US would not let him down.

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