

Thieu's Running Mate

Tran Van Huong

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 20 — Tran Van Huong, the unopposed vice presidential candidate in the October election, would clearly prefer to spend time with his books, birds and plants.

Seventy years old and often troubled by rheumatism, Mr. Huong acknowledges that he is now a politician with "little vigor." But, he said, he had to accept President Nguyen

Man
in the
News

Van Thieu's offer to be his running mate because "the country is in danger and I want to help."

Like men elsewhere who face the prospect of becoming a vice president, Mr. Huong is beset by the question of whether he will have enough to do. He said he would not mind taking on the anticorruption fight, but added that he would need "much more power" than the vice president usually gets.

"President Thieu has told me he would be giving me a series of jobs to do," the former teacher said in an interview in his modest Saigon villa. "And if he does, I'm sure he knows that I will need power to carry out these duties."

Thieu Will Be Happier

President Thieu undoubtedly will be happier sharing the presidential palace with Mr. Huong than with the incumbent, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky. Thieu has said "If a vice president can't help a president then he should do nothing to disturb the president."

Unlike Mr. Ky, Mr. Huong has no intention of challenging Mr. Thieu for power. Mr. Huong, twice premier, sought the presidency four years ago and ran fourth to President Thieu, though he attracted more votes in Saigon

than any of the eleven other candidates.

It was not a surprising showing for a politician who is known respectfully as "Uncle" by the Vietnamese and who enjoys the rare reputation of being honest. For that reason among others, his former supporters expressed surprise when they learned that Uncle Huong had teamed up with President Thieu.

Sitting in the living room of his villa as his canaries sang, the somewhat paunchy candidate said he was well aware of the distress over his decision. But in May, he said, he spent four hours with President Thieu and agreed to run because "I can't relax while the country is in danger."

Mr. Thieu, a Roman Catholic, at the time faced opposition in the election and wanted to balance his ticket with Mr. Huong, a civilian, a Confucian and a native of the Mekong Delta.

He Denounced Diem

Not a popular man in the cities, Mr. Thieu was also aware of the political pull Mr. Huong might still enjoy in Saigon where as mayor, he bicycled to work. First appointed mayor in 1954 by President Ngo Dinh Diem, Mr. Huong quit after four months and later joined other intellectuals in signing an open letter condemning the Diem regime.

Although Mr. Huong campaigned four years ago for the presidency saying he favored a negotiated settlement of the war, he said there was now no difference between his own views and those of President Thieu, who is placing greater stress on military victory.

Mr. Huong once before joined up with President Thieu: During the 1967 revolution, he said he would



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Worried if he will have enough to do

never take a role in the military government of General Thieu but he changed his mind.

15 Months as Premier

In May, 1968, he accepted the Thieu offer to become premier and explained that South Vietnam was "like a boat about to capsize and I must come out of retirement to help bail out the water." After 15 months he was back in retirement.

Mr. Thieu's aides said that he was an inefficient administrator and that the President preferred to have a military man in the post for the next political stage. Last year, Mr. Huong emerged again to

run successfully for a Senate seat.

The drive Mr. Huong has displayed carried him from humble peasant surroundings in his birthplace in Vinhlong in the delta to top offices in Saigon. His father was a poor farmer, his mother sold soup in the market.

As a young man, he went through French schools on scholarships and to Hanoi's School of Pedagogy, where he graduated in 1926. He returned to the delta and taught school, later marrying Luu Thi Thieu, also from a poor peasant family. The couple—separated for the last 20 years—had two sons, one who has been missing since he joined the Vietminh insurgency against the French in 1946, and another who has worked here for the United States Government and Esso.

Imprisoned by Diem

Mr. Huong served twice briefly as mayor of Saigon, twice as Premier, the first from November, 1964, until January, 1965, and again from May, 1968, until September, 1969. Twice he was briefly imprisoned under the Diem regime, writing a few poems he later published under the title "Poems Written in Jail."

"I'll spend much of my time until the elections right here in the villa," he said with a smile. "At my age, I enjoy my books, my birds and my plants."