

Fatal Battle In Saigon Is Disclosed

Saigon

Three persons were killed in a battle last week between security forces and a group opposed to the South Vietnamese Communist government, official sources said yesterday.

The clash was Saigon's most violent incident since the Communists defeated the Nguyen Van Thieu government and took control of South Vietnam last April. Only sketchy information had leaked out before yesterday.

The battle took place last Thursday night at the Roman Catholic church of Vinh Son in a poor district of northern Saigon.

The rebels occupying the church included seven persons armed with an automatic rifle and revolvers.

Two members of the group — a woman and a former non-commissioned officer — were killed. The third person killed was a member of the security force.

The five members of the group who survived, including the church's priest, were arrested.

Officials said the attack broke up "a political plot carefully planned by persons linked with the CIA (the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency)."

At a press conference Saturday, the assistant chief of the municipal security services, Nguyen Vo Danh, said that the group in the church belonged to a clandestine organization called the Organization of the People and Army for National Restoration, or the Anti-Communist Popular Front.

The press conference was a full-dress affair, with high-ranking officials attending.

After a visit to the church, the press conference ended with a parade of the alleged leaders.

One was the priest, the Rev. Nguyen Quang Minh, a small, plump man of about 60 with a round face and gray beard. The second was former Major Nguyen Ngoc Thiep, about 20 years younger than the priest.

The five prisoners will be charged with "sabotaging the national economy" because security forces discovered equipment for making counterfeit banknotes in the church basement.

They will also be charged with operating clandestine radio transmitters and receivers. In an attic in the church where the group made its last stand, officials said, American-made radio equipment was found.

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