

Madame Nhu's Normal Life

Rome

The country residence is small, nestling behind a protective, stucco-covered stone wall. The black iron gate rarely opens. Visitors to the quiet neighborhood are cautioned to watch out for the snakes, and they are seldom disturbed.

Next to the house, inside the wall, is a well-tended vegetable garden. So someone does live there. But who?

"Madame Nhu?" said a farmer who lives nearby. "I've never heard the name before, but I've been told there is somebody from Vietnam around here."

Mme. Nguo Dinh Nhu, the once-powerful First Lady of Vietnam, lives in seclusion in the unpretentious villa. Two

years ago she toured the United States talking to as many audiences as she could gather for as long as they would listen. Now she sees no one. The few Italians who have met her say she believes she will return to Saigon one day, the policies of her husband and brother-in-law vindicated.

COUP

Mme. Ngo-Dinh Nhu, the ed States during the coup that brought violent death to her husband, Ngo Dinh Nhu, the head of Vietnam's secret police, and to her brother-in-law, President Ngo Dinh Diem.

She left the United States and moved to Paris. Her self-imposed exile there was not

so strict, and occasionally she visited Rome. Later she moved to the relatively modest villa where she now lives, and rarely goes out. Many of her neighbors have only a vague idea who she is.

The community is a pastoral area of green farms about 15 miles southwest of Rome, not far from the seaside resort of Ostia Beach. At one time it was a malarial marsh, but fascist dictator Benito Mussolini had it reclaimed. Today vipers still abound in the fields off the main roads.

SERVANTS

Apparently Mme. Nhu does not lack money. A villager who occasionally has worked inside her villa says she has

a household staff of two maids, a cook, a part-time gardener, a secretary and a French nurse-tutor for her two younger children.

These two—Quynh, a 13-year-old boy, and Le Quyen, a 6-year-old girl—live in the villa and seldom leave it. Mme. Nhu's older children—Le Thuy, a 20-year-old daughter, and Trac, a 17-year-old son—are staying in Paris, according to the Italian National Police.

RECLUSE

Mme. Nhu herself is reported to spend almost all her time in her study in the villa, working at a typewriter on her memoirs and occasional statements that she mails to newspapers.

Mme. Nhu apparently avoids official contacts. Sources at the South Vietnamese Embassy in Rome say they have never seen her. They assume she is still using the same diplomatic passport she had when she left Saigon in 1963 just before the coup that overthrew the Diem regime.

The National Police say Mme. Nhu is no trouble.

"When she first came here, several months ago, we had a man patrol the villa," they reported. "We were not afraid for her life, but we worried about the curious. Now we have no one there because no one seems interested in bothering her. Life is just normal."

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