

## MAN WHO HID DIEM RECOUNTS EPISODE

After 8 Years, He Tells of  
President's Flight

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3—"When I got a call from a secretary in the palace saying that President Ngo Dinh Diem wanted to come to my house to hide, I was very surprised," said Ma Tuyen, a leathery-faced businessman who was once head of Saigon's large and powerful Chinese community. "One does not expect such visitors."

Mr. Ma spoke slowly and with difficulty, recalling that tumultuous night, Nov. 1, 1963, when President Diem, the Presidential Palace under attack by rebel troops, fled to his house in Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon.

He has never discussed that night's events before, Mr. Ma said, because for hiding President Diem overnight he was thrown in prison and his property was confiscated. After being released from prison, he was kept under house arrest until recently.

### Feels Freer to Talk

But now, with nostalgia for President Diem growing in Saigon, and with a Government-approved memorial service yesterday on the eighth anniversary of his death—he was arrested and shot shortly after leaving the Mas' house—Mr. Ma feels freer to talk.

"When the President arrived around 8 o'clock he was very tired and nervous," Mr. Ma said in Chinese. "He kept pacing the floor and chain-smoking cigarettes. I took him and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, upstairs and served them tea. They were too agitated to eat."

Mr. Ma recalled that the President had escaped from the palace, not by a secret tunnel as has been previously thought, but by a black Citroën car that simply drove out the back gate. Rebel troops under Colonel, now President, Nguyen Van Thieu were supposed to surround the palace, but apparently arrived late.

"The President stayed in his room all night, making many telephone calls and not sleeping," Mr. Ma related. "But we did not discuss his political problems. It did not seem like the thing to do."

Mr. Ma recalled that as the head of the five congregations or associations that ruled Saigon's 700,000 Chinese, he had worked closely with President Diem since he assumed office in 1954. They had cooperated especially in trying to root out Communists among Saigon's Chinese community.

### 'There Was No Emotion'

Mr. Ma, who bears a striking resemblance to the late President, first came to Saigon as a penniless deck hand on a freighter but gradually built up a lucrative import-export business.

"The next morning the president had arranged to surrender, I believe, and I sent him in my car to the Chinese Catholic church nearby," Mr. Ma added. "When we parted the President merely said 'Thank you.' That was all, there was no emotion."

At the St. Francis Xavier Church, a yellow and white stucco building, Father Fernand Billaud also recalled that morning's events. "It was a Sunday morning, about 8 o'clock, and the parishioners were coming to mass," he said.

"Several of the parishioners recognized President Diem and came to tell me, but I said, that is impossible, the Presidential Palace is under siege and Diem is inside."

Father Billaud, a stocky man with white crew-cut hair, steel-blue eyes and a goatee, said that he believed it was Diem only when a former palace servant who had gone to mass that morning ran up to the President and embraced him.

### The Mystery Deepens

"President Diem, the servant cried, I want to live or die with you," Father Billaud recalled, "Diem, only replied, 'have courage, we face difficult times.'"

At that point, Father Billaud related, troops began pulling up in front of the church. "Two officers came to the shrine in front of the church and saluted the President," he said. "He left without saying anything."