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Thieu Seems Well in Control Despite Palace Attack

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, April 9—In the aftermath of an air attack on the presidential palace yesterday by a renegade fighter pilot, President Nguyen Van Thieu appeared as much in control as ever, and even his political opponents denounced the assassination attempt.

The attack was carried out at 8:30 A.M. yesterday by a single Northrup F-5 fighter with South Vietnamese Air Force markings. The plane made three passes over its target, dropping several homes.

A palace spokesman said two persons were killed and three wounded, and a witness inside the palace said there had been damage to a palace stairwell and other parts of the large modern building.

President Thieu, his family and his staff were not hurt. The President broadcast a speech soon afterward to inform the people that there had been no coup and that the attack had been the work of a single pilot.

Landing Place Unknown

Where he landed after his attack is one of several unanswered questions.

Western sources said they did not believe he had flown north to some Communist field, and it seemed unlikely that he had returned to the Bien Hoa air base from which he had taken off or that he had landed at Saigon, where he would presumably have been arrested.

Speculation last night centered on Udon air base in Thailand as the most likely possibility.

It was also unclear whether there was tangible evidence that the pilot had acted with others as part of a plot or had flown his mission on his own initiative.

Government sources disclosed that the pilot was Lieut. Nguyen Thanh Trung, whose fighter was among those based at Bien Hoa air base 12 miles from Saigon. Lieutenant Trung had reportedly been sent on a mission against Communist targets

in the Phan Thiet area with two other F-5's, but broke away from his group to attack the palace.

South Vietnamese Air Force sources said that both his parents had been left behind in Da Nang when that northern city was abandoned by Saigon forces to the Communists two weeks ago.

Some statements broadcast over the Saigon radio last night by Government leaders suggested that others besides the pilot had been involved in the incident, but no group was identified.

President Thieu described the bombing as the work of a faction, and the recently appointed Premier, Nguyen Ba Can, referred to the attack as the "traitorous act of those people who plotted to overthrow the legal and constitutional government of the Republic of Vietnam."

But a speech by the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, Gen. Cao Van Vien, referred only to "the separate, blind action of an individual" not related to any wide move against the President.

Lieut. Gen Tran Van Minh, commander of the air force, said that "preliminary investigation indicates that this was

only an irresponsible and individual action by a young pilot who let himself be misguided and bought off."

The bombing was also denounced by Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, a former air force commander, Premier and Vice President, who since 1971 has been one of President Thieu's main political opponents.

He said in an interview that he had known nothing about the raid until an aide woke him with the news yesterday. He said he had warned the Government that the armed forces had become so disaffected that such attempts must be expected.

Arrests Are Feared

Marshal Ky reiterated earlier calls on President Thieu to step down and allow a government of reconciliation to assume power.

Opposition groups generally expressed fears that the palace bombing may result in a new wave of arrests ordered by President Thieu. The National Salvation Action Committee, whose members include Marshal Ky, various Roman Catholic and Buddhist leaders and a number of opposition mem-

bers of the National Assembly, issued a statement last night.

Arrests had been made on March 27 and again at the end of last week, and the Interior Ministry had announced in each instance that a coup plot had been uncovered and foiled.

One opposition Assembly member, Nguyen Van Binh, charged that the bombing had been staged as a pretext for arrests. Others felt that all opponents would be blamed.

Despite the bombing, it appeared clear that President Thieu faced no immediate threat of being overthrown. Although the President is now publicly opposed by Buddhist and Catholic leaders, politicians, the National Assembly and military leaders, no group seems to have the power or inclination to remove him.

Saigon was in panic for a while yesterday after the bombing. In several crowded, poor neighborhoods, people were heard yelling, "The North Vietnamese are coming."

Soon after the attack the Government declared a 24-hour curfew, and shops and businesses throughout the city closed. But the curfew lasted only four hours, and at 3 P.M. life began to return to normal.



A roadblock being set up yesterday in downtown Saigon, South Vietnam, on a street