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Saigon Kills Thieves by Rifle Squad

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, May 27—Two thieves have been executed by firing squads, one of them before a crowd of 30,000 onlookers, and a third has been sentenced to death in a crackdown on violence in Saigon, the official newspaper of South Vietnam's new Communist government reported today.

Government officials said the three condemned men had all been caught in acts of armed violence and were sentenced by a vote of residents of the area in which the crimes occurred.

The newspaper Saigon Liberation Daily reported the executions in a front-page story that included a picture of troops shooting a thief in the Chinese section, Cholon, Sunday.

The executions were the first confirmed in Saigon since the new government took over the capital April 30, although rumors of thieves' being shot down have been making the rounds since the day after the victory.

Communist officials and the new Saigon press have complained of a wave of crime in the city, attributing it to the corrupting effects of the U.S. presence there over the past decade.

Saigon Liberation said the first man killed under the newest crackdown was a 22-year-old former soldier who "foolhardily hid his weapon and used it to rob the people." The newspaper said the man was caught after he stole a watch at gunpoint.

A crowd estimated by officials at 30,000 watched the man tied spreadeagled to a fence gate in Cholon and executed by a kneeling firing squad Sunday.

The same day another people's court in suburban Saigon condemned an armed robber to death and a firing squad

immediately executed him. Two companions were taken away for "re-education for a long period," the newspaper said.

Another armed robber whose victim died last week also was sentenced to death by a people's court, but the newspaper did not say whether he was executed. Earlier sources reported a people's court session in Laithieu, eight miles north of Saigon, on May 18, which resulted in an execution on the spot.

Several hundred students marched through the streets of Saigon today, exhorting residents to discard their copies of Playboy and Oui and all other items identified with the "decadent culture" of the departing Americans.

The students carried big banners saying: "Students and youth are determined not to read, not to keep at home, not to distribute books and magazines, pictures, and tapes which are reactionary and decadent."

It was the second such demonstration in five days.

Saigon Liberation Daily today reported a huge bonfire in a downtown residential section Sunday. It said residents tossed books, tapes and magazines onto the fire.

"The crowd applauded as a girl threw her hippie clothes onto the fire," the official newspaper said.

There were still about 30 foreign journalists, here today—two-thirds of them Japanese or French—after a second group of newsmen flew out yesterday.

There were also six Americans, two Britons, two Italians, a German, an Indian and an Australian. All four international news agencies had correspondents here.

South Vietnamese authorities have launched a "back to the land" campaign involving up to 3 million people who fled their villages for the cities.

In its editorial today, the Saigon newspaper said war had forced hundreds of thousands from their ricefields and into Saigon.

It said Saigon is full of unproductive people. But refugee repatriation committees are already at work in Saigon's 11 districts to provide transport, rations and passes to those returning to their lands, it said.