

Thieu: Comfortable Seclusion in Taipei

By Don Oberdorfer

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TAIPEI, June 8 — A plain-clothed policeman with a walkie-talkie hidden in a rolled newspaper stands outside a bright red gate and high wall in the foreigners' housing area of Tien Mou (Heavenly Mother). Inside, former South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu is enjoying well-guarded seclusion in a five-bedroom house with a spacious garden, swimming pool and a garage with two Mercedes.

Thieu has had nothing to say publicly and little to do since arriving here April 26, four days before the fall of Saigon. A month before that he had assured his people there by television and radio that "in any capacity, I will continue to live or die in this beloved native land."

Taiwan, which is run by exiles from the Chinese mainland, is probably the most comfortable, compatible and secure place Thieu could find right now for the "rest and relaxation" that family members say is his goal. Thieu's major irritation in the first few weeks was from journalists unsuccessfully asking to see him. His greatest danger may be from embittered Saigon exiles who hold him responsible for the collapse and have vowed to kill him if they see him.

"He is a very considerate man," said Taiwanese Vice Foreign Minister H. K. Yang of the former chief of state whom he greeted at the airport. When the late President Chiang Kai-shek's resting place in the countryside was opened to foreign visitors, Thieu was the first to visit the spot to pay his respects. Later

he paid a condolence call on Madame Chiang.

Though a Mercedes under police protection occasionally is spotted leaving the Thieu compound, only two other outings have been identified in the past six weeks. Once he and his wife took a drive to buy oriental figurines and have lunch, and on another occasion they traveled to downtown Taipei to buy kitchenware. In the latter case a local newspaper photographer was tipped off by a store patron but was stopped from taking pictures and roughed up by Thieu's nephew.

A knowledgeable source said Thieu appealed to the Foreign Ministry here for help in keeping the press away. The reply was a suggestion to "say nothing, and eventually they'll go away." The former Vietnamese leader has scrupulously heeded the advice, turning down requests for his views from newspapers, magazines and television networks in Taiwan, the United States and Europe.

There are reports that Thieu is writing his version of the Saigon story, but family members profess to know nothing about it.

The compound where Thieu resides is the former official residence of Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Van Kieu, his older brother. The rented villa appears to be a bit crowded with Thieu, his wife, Kieu and his wife and several other relatives and servants reported in residence. The Vietnamese exiles have taken over another house just behind the compound and an apartment across the street. The house next door is also being vacated, presumably for their use.

Former Vietnamese Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem, who was dismissed by Thieu a few weeks before Saigon's fall, lives in another suburban section a mile or two away. Khiem reportedly acquired his house several years ago, perhaps at the time he served here as Vietnamese ambassador. Another prominent member of the exile colony is Gen. Praphas Charusathien, the former Thai strongman who was ousted in 1973.

Nationalist Chinese Premier Chiang Ching-kuo sent a basket of fruit to Thieu on his arrival and described him in his recently published diary as "an anti-Communist leader who deserves our sympathy and courtesy."



NGUYEN VAN THIEU
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