

Three Vietnamese

WE ARE PEASANTS, basically," he said almost a year ago. He had arrived in this country just after the fall of Saigon, virtually penniless and supporting a family of eight. But he had one advantage: he was the former premier of his country.

Nguyen Cao Ky, one of South Vietnam's few major political figures to immigrate to the United States, moved to a \$400-a-month house in Fairfax County. A month later he was on the college lecture circuit, pulling down \$2,500 for each of 50 scheduled appearances.

Ky's basic message contained a defense of American involvement in the Vietnam war; he said this country's only mistake was "to go in with a no-win policy." Some college groups protested his appearances, saying he was not qualified to give an objective account of his country's last days.

Now Ky is on another cross-country tour. He is traveling the talk show circuit to plug his book "Twenty Years

and Twenty Days," which will be published tomorrow by Stein and Day. According to the publisher, it contains some harsh criticisms of America's dealings with the Vietnamese people, its inability to understand them, its complicity in corruption.

"The mind boggles at the corruption," says Ky. "You could buy a tank or a helicopter or a general."

In contrast to the public Ky is the private, almost reclusive Nguyen Van Thieu, South Vietnam's former president.

After the fall, Thieu went into seclusion in Taiwan, then quietly moved to London to be near his son who is studying there. He took up residence in a quiet neighborhood near Hampton Court Palace, according to the few stories that have been written about him.

Thieu has had virtually nothing to say publicly during the entire year, although he has let it be known through friends that he is bitter toward the United States and has no intention of seeking asylum here.

Another who has dropped from sight is Duong Van (Big) Minh, the one-time third-force opposition leader and, during the last few days before the collapse of South Vietnam, president.

While others who stayed suffered the indignity of being forced to take part in political "re-education" courses, Minh was left alone. A recent visitor to Saigon says Minh has been quietly tending his flowers.

after/words
