

= Ngô Đình Cẩn =

Ngô Đình Cẩn (1911 - 9 May 1964) was a younger brother and confidant of South Vietnam 's first president , Ngô Đình Diệm , and an important member of the Diệm government . Diệm put Cẩn in charge of central Vietnam , stretching from Phan Thiêt in the south to the border at the 17th parallel , with Cẩn ruling the region as a virtual dictator . Based in the former imperial capital of Huế , Cẩn operated private armies and secret police that controlled the central region and earned himself a reputation as the most oppressive of the Ngô brothers .

In his youth , Cẩn was a follower of the nationalist Phan Bội Châu . In the late 1940s and early 1950s , he worked to organise support for Diệm as various Vietnamese groups and international powers sought to stamp their authority over Vietnam . Cẩn , who succeeded in eliminating alternative nationalist opposition in central Vietnam , became the warlord of the region when his brother became president of the southern half of the partitioned nation in 1955 . He became notorious for his involvement in smuggling and corruption , as well as his autocratic rule . Cẩn was regarded as an effective leader against the Viet Cong communist insurgency , which was much weaker in central Vietnam than in other parts of South Vietnam . His Popular Force militia was regarded by US officials in central Vietnam as a successful counter to the communists .

Cẩn 's influence began to wane after his elder brother Ngô Đình Thúc was appointed the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Huế . Thúc overshadowed Cẩn and aggressively promoted Catholicism , which led to the banning of the Buddhist flag in 1963 during Vesak , the celebration of the birthday of Gautama Buddha . Cẩn 's forces opened fire on a crowd who were protesting the ban , killing nine and precipitating the Buddhist crisis . Ongoing demonstrations intensified throughout the summer as the regime responded with increased brutality , sparking the toppling of the Diem regime in a November 1963 coup . Cẩn had been offered asylum by the US Department of State , but ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge , Jr. had CIA agent Lucien Conein arrest the fallen Ngô in Saigon . Cẩn was turned over to the military junta , which tried and executed him in 1964 .

= = Early years = =

Cẩn was the fifth of six sons born to Ngô Đình Khá , who was a mandarin in the imperial court of Emperor Thành Thái , who was ruling under French control .

Khá retired from the court in protest at French interference , taking up farming . Cẩn 's first and third brothers - Ngô Đình Khôi and Diệm - rose to become provincial governors under French rule . Diệm , like his father , resigned in protest in 1933 , while Khôi was assassinated in 1945 by Hô Chí Minh 's cadres . The second brother , Pierre Martin Ngô Đình Thúc , was appointed as the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Huế . A fourth brother Ngô Đình Nhu became the family 's chief political strategist , while the youngest , Ngô Đình Luyễn was a diplomat when the family held power in South Vietnam . Of the Ngô brothers , only Thúc and Luyễn avoided being executed or assassinated during Vietnam 's political upheavals .

Details about Cẩn 's early life are scarce . In his youth , he had studied the writings and opinions of the renowned anti - French Vietnamese nationalist Phan Bội Châu , who spent his last years in Huế . Regarded as the leading revolutionary of his time , Châu had been captured and sentenced to death , before having his sentence reduced to house arrest . Cẩn regularly traveled to Châu 's sampan on the Perfume River with gifts of food and listened to Châu 's political lectures . Regarded as the least educated of his family , Cẩn had never traveled outside Vietnam and was the only Ngô brother not to have studied at a European - run institution .

Vietnam was in chaos after the Japanese invaded the country during World War II and displaced the French colonial administration . At the end of the war , the Japanese left the country and France , severely weakened by political turmoil within the Vichy regime , was unable to exert control . Hô Chí Minh 's Viet Minh declared independence as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and battled other Vietnamese nationalist groups as well as French forces for control of the nation . During this time , Cẩn organised a clandestine support base for Diệm in central Vietnam . At the time , Diệm was one of many nationalists who were attempting to stake a claim to national leadership , having

spent a decade in self-imposed exile from public affairs. C?n helped weaken other anti-communist nationalist groups, such as the Vi?t Nam Qu?c Dân ??ng (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and the ??i Vi?t Qu?c Dân ??ng (Nationalist Party of Greater Vietnam), which competed with Di?m for support. On 23 October 1955, Di?m toppled B?o ??i in a fraud-ridden referendum orchestrated by Nhu. Di?m declared himself President of the newly proclaimed Republic of Vietnam three days later.

C?n's men helped to cow the populace into voting for his brother. Those who disobeyed were often chased down and beaten, with pepper sauce and water often forced down their nostrils. The violations were particularly flagrant in C?n's area, which was the home of the Nguy?n Dynasty and a source of sympathy towards B?o ??i. C?n ordered the police to arrest 1 @, @ 200 people for political reasons in the week leading up to the vote. In H?i An, some people were killed in election day violence.

= = Rule = =

With Di?m's ascent to the leadership of South Vietnam in 1955, C?n's stock rose. C?n had no formal position in the government but was effectively regarded as the warlord of central Vietnam. He had almost unlimited power in the region, often interfering with army operations against the Vi?t C?ng in a style described as "feudal". Robert Scigliano, a journalist and academic from the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, asserted that C?n, along with Nhu, Madame Nhu and eldest brother Archbishop Pierre Martin Ngô ?inh Th?c formed "an extralegal elite which, with Di?m, directs the destiny of Vietnam". C?n sometimes vetoed government-appointed officials posted to central Vietnam from Saigon.

C?n ran his own personal army and secret police, which fought the Vi?t C?ng and imprisoned other anti-communist political opponents. C?n accumulated great wealth through corrupt practices such as graft in awarding foreign aid contracts from the United States governments of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy to Vietnamese businessmen. He required the businessmen to pay a fee to the National Revolutionary Movement – the official party of the regime – in return for the processing of applications for foreign aid contracts and import licenses. C?n was believed to be organising the trafficking of opium throughout Asia via Laos, and monopolising the cinnamon trade.

He was often in conflict with his brothers regarding internal matters, with Nhu, Di?m's most influential adviser, controlling the southern part of the country. The brothers often competed with each other for U.S. aid contracts and the rice trade, but did not interfere with matters in one another's territorial zone. C?n had once tried to set up an office for his secret police in Saigon (which was in Nhu's southern region) by showing Di?m his long list of detained political opponents, but insisted that he not have to report to Nhu. Referring to his autocratic style, a Vietnamese critic said that unlike Di?m, C?n was consistent and left his followers in no doubt as to what he wanted: "They are not confused by double talk about democratic ideals and institutions". His creation of a well-defined system of incentives and deterrence has been cited as one reason for his success.

= = Anti @-@ communism = =

In spite of his autocracy and iron rule, C?n earned praise from Hu? @-@ based US officials for his relatively high levels of success against the Vi?t C?ng insurgency. C?n's central region was much more peaceful than the restive areas near Saigon and the Mekong Delta. C?n created the Popular Force organisation to operate in central Vietnam. The Popular Force was an alternative to the Strategic Hamlet Program which was used on a much larger scale in the south by Nhu, who moved peasants into fortified camps in an attempt to isolate Vietcong cadres from accessing the rural populace and intimidating or otherwise gaining their support. C?n assumed a third or so of the rural peasantry were Vi?t C?ng sympathisers, significant enough to render the hamlets ineffective by intimidating other villagers from within. C?n's Popular Force were a group of volunteers who

underwent rigorous training similar to United States Marine Corps Recruit Training . Those who passed the training were put into units of 150 men and assigned to live and work in the villages by day . At night , they did defense patrols , using hit @-@ and @-@ run tactics against the Vi?t C?ng . According to the report by US officials in central Vietnam , the program aroused popular support because of the integration of the Popular Force 's personnel into the daily life of the village and the sense of security that the force provided . The units were generally regarded as being successful in their six @-@ month deployments , allowing them to be deployed to the next trouble spot . Officials in Washington disagreed with the assessment of their subordinates in central Vietnam , alleging that C?n was mainly using the Popular Force for repressing dissidents .

= = Buddhist crisis = =

C?n was considered the most secular of the four Ngô brothers who controlled Vietnam 's domestic affairs . With the appointment of elder brother Th?c as the Archbishop of Hu? in 1961 , C?n became less influential as Th?c aggressively blurred the distinction between church and state . In early 1963 , Nhu sent an emissary from Saigon telling C?n to retire and leave for Japan . Unrest erupted in the summer of 1963 . After the flying of Vatican flags was permitted at a celebration for the anniversary of Th?c 's consecration as a bishop , the flying of Buddhist flags on 8 May to commemorate Vesak ? the birth of Gautama Buddha ? was banned . C?n 's subordinates ordered government forces to fire on the unarmed Buddhist crowd protesting the ban , killing nine . C?n believed the United States , whose relations with South Vietnam had become strained , caused an explosion during the Vesak shootings , to destabilise his family 's regime .

= = Downfall and arrest = =

Sparked by the killings in Hu? on Vesak , the Buddhists organised nationwide mass protests against the religious bias of the Di?m regime throughout the summer of 1963 , demanding religious equality . The protests were met with brutal crackdowns , including ARVN Special Forces attacks on Buddhist pagodas which left hundreds missing , presumed dead . As public discontent heightened , a group of ARVN officers planned and carried out a US @-@ backed coup in November . This came about after C?n 's protégé Tôn Th?t ?ính , a 37 @-@ year @-@ old who became the youngest ever general in the ARVN due to his loyalty to the Di?m regime , switched sides and helped the coup when his corps was expected to remain loyal . Di?m and Nhu were executed at the conclusion of the coup .

Following the downfall of the Ngô family , the White House came under pressure from the South Vietnamese public to take a hard line against C?n . Mass graves containing 200 bodies were found on his land . The US consul in Hu? , John Helble , confirmed the existence of rows of 18th @-@ century style dungeons with filthy , dark cells in an old French arsenal . Although junta member General Tr?n V?n ?ôn asserted that the compound predated the Di?m era , the town 's citizens saw C?n as a mass murderer . On 4 November , two days after the coup ended , thousands of irate townspeople walked three kilometres to C?n 's house on the city 's southern outskirts ? where he lived with his aged mother ? demanding vengeance . The junta had ringed the home with barbed wire and armoured cars , sensing that the populace would riot and attack C?n . By this time , C?n had escaped to a Catholic seminary , but was considering applying to the Americans for political asylum . The U.S. State Department was faced with a dilemma : sheltering C?n would associate them with the protection of a corrupt and authoritarian regime that had killed and tortured hundreds of thousands of its own people . Allowing C?n to be attacked by angry mobs would damage the reputation of the new American @-@ backed junta . The State Department instructed :

asylum should be granted to Ngô ?ính C?n if he is in physical danger from any source . If asylum granted explain to Hu? authorities further violence would harm international reputation new regime . Also recall to them that U.S. took similar action to protect Thích Trí Quang from the Di?m government and can do no less in Can case .

The White House sent a cable to the US Embassy , Saigon on November 4 agreeing that C?n and

his mother needed evacuation . General ?? Cao Trí , the commander of the ARVN I Corps , who had repressed the Buddhists in Hu? , privately told C?n that the junta would allow him safe passage out of Vietnam . On 5 November , C?n sought refuge at the US consulate with a suitcase crammed with US currency . Trí was then told that C?n was not safe in Hu? and that he was to send C?n to Saigon , immediately for his own protection . Trí would only promise safe passage in an American plane to Saigon , where embassy officials would meet C?n . On the journey to the capital , C?n was accompanied by four Americans : a vice @-@ consul , two military policemen and a lieutenant colonel . He had intended to seek asylum in Japan .

U.S. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge , Jr. had other ideas . Instead of sending embassy officials to Tân S?n Nh?t airport , Lodge sent CIA agent Lucien Conein , who had helped the Vietnamese generals to plan the coup . Conein turned C?n over to the junta . Lodge said that General ?ôn had promised that C?n would be dealt with " legally and judicially " . The ambassador told Washington that asylum was unnecessary , saying " It seems to me that our reason for giving him asylum therefore no longer exists " . He said that the U.S. could not interfere with justice , since C?n was " undoubtedly a reprehensible figure who deserves all the loathing which he now receives " . Lodge reasoned that since C?n would not be killed , protecting him would give the impression that the U.S. backed his activities . Lodge said that General D??ng V?n Minh , who was the President , implied that C?n would receive clemency even if sentenced to death . This contradicted Conein 's assertion that the ARVN officer corps felt that C?n should be executed . C?n 's case was damaged by the release of tens of thousands of political prisoners , who recounted tales of torture at the hands of the Ngô brothers .

= = Trial and execution = =

It was reported that General Nguy?n Khánh ? who had deposed Minh in a January 1964 coup ? offered C?n exile if he handed over his foreign bank deposits . C?n protested , saying that he had no money . ?ôn later claimed that Khánh would have executed C?n anyway , as C?n would have known of the corruption that the generals were party to . During the Ngô era , Khánh commanded the ARVN II Corps , which had operated in the Central Highlands under C?n 's supervision . Despite having helped to arrest C?n , Lodge advised Khánh to be restrained in his handling of the case for fear of stoking religious resentment or upsetting international opinion with a death penalty .

Lodge later claimed the South Vietnamese prosecutors failed to make any case against C?n . The Vietnamese leader also had to contend with the other side of the arguments , from those who considered themselves to be victims of the Di?m regime . During the trial , Thích Trí Quang , along with other opponents of the old regime , lobbied for a death sentence for C?n . He argued that if C?n lived , he could regain power along with his late brothers ' supporters . He told Lodge that if the Americans did not support a tough sentence , then the Vietnamese Buddhist community 's opinion of Washington would fall . Lodge was initially critical of Quang 's campaigning against C?n . C?n was sentenced to death . He appealed to the head of state for clemency ; his lawyers used a provision in the legal code to make the appeal . This placed Minh ? who was still the titular head of state ? in the position of approving a third death in the Ngô family , having already ordered his bodyguard Nguy?n V?n Nhung to execute Di?m and Nhu during the coup .

C?n 's diabetes worsened during the course of the trial , and by the time he was executed , his elderly mother had died . He suffered a heart attack while in custody . On 9 May 1964 , was carried on a stretcher into the prison courtyard and assisted by guards and two Catholic priests to stand alongside the post to which he was tied . He was blindfolded against his request and shot in front of approximately 200 spectators . Lodge defended his actions , claiming the United States did all it could to prevent the execution . The ambassador claimed C?n would have been allowed to seek refuge at the U.S. embassy , despite the fact that he had ordered Conein to intercept C?n at the airport . Rev. Cao V?n Luân , Catholic rector of Hu? University who had been fired for falling afoul of the powerful Archbishop Th?c , asked Lodge that C?n not be executed . According to Luân , Lodge reportedly assured the rector the execution would not take place . C?n left his personal fortune , which had indeed been deposited in foreign banks , to Catholic charities .

