

= 1962 South Vietnamese Independence Palace bombing =

The 1962 South Vietnamese Independence Palace bombing in Saigon was an aerial attack on 27 February 1962 by two dissident Vietnam Air Force pilots , Second Lieutenant Nguyễn Văn Cự and First Lieutenant Phạm Phú Quốc . The pilots targeted the Independence Palace , the official residence of the President of South Vietnam , with the aim of assassinating President Ngô Đình Diệm and his immediate family , who acted as his political advisors .

The pilots later said they attempted the assassination in response to Diệm 's autocratic rule , in which he focused more on remaining in power than on confronting the Vietcong , a Marxist ? Leninist guerilla army who were threatening to overthrow the South Vietnamese government . Cự and Quốc hoped that the airstrike would expose Diệm 's vulnerability and trigger a general uprising , but this failed to materialise .

One bomb penetrated a room in the western wing where Diệm was reading but failed to detonate , leading the president to claim that he had " divine " protection . With the exception of Diệm 's sister @-@ in @-@ law Madame Nhu , who suffered minor injuries , the Ngô family were unscathed . However , three palace staff died and 30 were injured . Afterwards , Cự escaped to Cambodia , but Quốc was arrested and imprisoned .

In the wake of the airstrike , Diệm became hostile towards the American presence in South Vietnam . Diệm claimed that the American media was seeking to bring him down and he introduced new restrictions on press freedom and political association . The media speculated that the United States would use the incident to justify the deployment of combat troops to South Vietnam in the event the U.S. remained circumspect . Domestically , the incident was reported to have increased plotting against Diệm by his officers .

= = Planning = =

Cự was the second son of Nguyễn Văn Lộc , a leader of the VNQDD ( Vietnamese : Vietnamese Nationalist Party ) , which opposed the Diệm regime . In 1960 , Diệm had jailed Lộc for one month for engaging in " anti @-@ government activities " . The VNQDD planned that Cự and Quốc , another pilot from the same squadron , would attack the Independence Palace on 27 February . Quốc had recently been personally commended by Diệm for his achievements in combat , having been honoured as one of the best pilots in the Vietnam Air Force ( VNAF ) . Quốc had relatives who were involved with the VNQDD . Cự recruited Quốc by claiming the Vietnamese armed services and the United States were aware of the plot , showing him a Newsweek article critical of Diệm as evidence .

Quốc had more subordinates but was not sure of their loyalty , so he did not try to recruit them for the attack on the palace . Years later , Cự blamed Diệm 's treatment of opposition parties as the motivation for his attack . He believed that Diệm had prioritised remaining in power over fighting the VC and that , for six years , Cự had been denied promotion because of Diệm 's obsession with hindering political opponents . Cự criticised the Americans for having supported Diệm , saying : " the Americans had slammed the door on those of us who really wanted the fight against the communists " .

= = Attack = =

Quốc and Cự , who were trained in France and the United States , respectively , were given orders to fly from Saigon to the Mekong Delta in an early morning mission against the Vietcong ( VC ) , an armed Marxist guerilla army who wished to overthrow the government and who had backing from the Marxist government of North Vietnam . The communists had been involved in attacks on Army of the Republic of Vietnam units 60 km ( 37 mi ) south of the capital and had inflicted heavy damage . Instead of proceeding south as ordered , they changed course to attack the Independence Palace , the official presidential residence . This meant that two companies of communist guerrillas were able to retreat after their attack without counter @-@ attack .

At around 07 : 00 , the deer on the expansive lawns of the French colonial @-@ era palace were frightened off as Qu?c and C? ? flying American @-@ built A @-@ 1 Skyraiders ( A1H / AD @-@ 6 variant ) single @-@ seater ground attack planes ? flew low over their target to inspect the ruling family 's residence . On their second run , they dropped bombs and napalm before firing rockets and strafing the presidential compound with machine @-@ gun fire . The two continued their runs for 30 minutes before units loyal to the president arrived and launched a counter @-@ attack .

Taking advantage of poor weather and low cloud cover , the two pilots circled the palace at altitudes of around 150 m ( 490 ft ) , periodically diving out of the clouds to re @-@ attack before darting back into them . The airstrike caught the Saigon garrison off guard and , in the confusion , they were unable to determine whether the aircraft were acting alone or with ground forces . Loyalist tanks and armoured personnel carriers rushed to their battle stations and anti @-@ aircraft batteries opened fire , nearly hitting the loyalist aircraft from Bien Hoa Air Base in pursuit of the two rebel planes . Two tanks and a number of jeeps armed with 50 @-@ calibre machine guns patrolled the smoke @-@ filled streets as a precaution .

The first 500 lb ( 230 kg ) bomb penetrated a room in the western wing where Di?m was reading a biography of George Washington . The bomb failed to detonate , which gave Di?m enough time to seek shelter in a cellar in the eastern wing . He was joined there by his elder brother Archbishop Pierre Martin Ngô ?inh Th?c , younger brother Ngô ?inh Nhu , Madame Nhu ? who sustained an arm fracture while running toward the cellar ? and their children .

Elsewhere within the palace , three servants and guards were killed , and about thirty more staff were injured . Outside the palace grounds , an American contractor died after falling from a rooftop where he had been watching the bombing . Despite the confusion , most of the city 's inhabitants went about their usual business , indifferent to the chaos . The attack lasted 30 minutes and though they carried enough bombs to level the palace , the pilots did not expend all their munitions .

Qu?c 's aircraft was damaged by naval fire from a minesweeper , forcing him to eject over the Saigon River and land in Nhà Bè , suffering minor facial injuries in the landing . He was arrested by a nearby naval patrol , and before being taken away for interrogation reportedly asked , " [ d ] id I kill that filthy character ? " C? believed the attack had been successful and managed to safely flee to Cambodia . Commenting on the attack , a US Air Force officer opined : " [ w ] ith that weather , they did a hell of a job . "

= = Aftermath = =

In a brief radio address after order was restored , Di?m dismissed the attack as an " isolated act " and attributed his escape to " divine " protection . He visited the soldiers wounded in the attacks , and also promised the rebel pilots ' colleagues that they would not bear any responsibility for the bombing .

American President John F. Kennedy promptly sent a message denouncing the attack as a " destructive and vicious act , " and expressed relief that Di?m was " safe and unharmed . " US ambassador Frederick Nolting determined that the attack had been the result of " two isolated cases " and opined that the incident did not represent widespread dissatisfaction with the regime .

The absence of a Vietcong reaction led Nolting to label the bombing as a " limited scope , anti @-@ Communist assassination attempt " . The National Assembly , Di?m 's rubber stamp legislative body , urged the president to " take drastic measures against irresponsible elements " . General Minh , the presidential military advisor , attributed the assault to " disgruntled pilots " , and noted that no hostile troop movements had occurred .

The Civil Guard had remained loyal , and its commander ordered his airborne forces to take over Tan Son Nhut Air Base . A spokesperson for Di?m also denied that napalm had been used against the palace . This was widely believed because the government was sensitive to the ramifications of the air force being revealed to have such weapons in their stocks . He claimed the situation was under " complete control " .

The VNAF reacted to the two pilots ' actions by sending a resolution to Di?m , saying that the attack was an " absolutely isolated and foolish " event that " impaired the prestige of the air force " and was

" detrimental to the national effort in the present struggle and is profitable to the Communists in their work of subversion " . The National Revolutionary Movement , an organization used by the Ngô family to stage orchestrated mass demonstrations in support of themselves , called for the death penalty against the two pilots and further asked Di?m to enact the " strictest measures to insure discipline in the military " .

As a result of the attack , Di?m ordered that all VNAF aircraft be grounded , and all aerial combat missions suspended while his security officials investigated fighter pilots for any possible anti @-@ regime tendencies . This was achieved by placing tanks on the runway at Bien Hoa Air Base . Without assistance from accompanying fighter craft , the U.S. deemed it too risky for American helicopters to operate in the jungles against the communists .

On 2 March , three days after the attack , Di?m allowed the air force to resume combat operations , having concluded that C? and Qu?c 's sentiments were not representative of the air force . For a few days after the attack , the areas around the palace were cordoned off and tanks were stationed at prominent streets in the capital .

Qu?c was imprisoned for his actions , while C? remained in exile in Cambodia where he worked as a language teacher . Di?m asked Cambodia to extradite C? , but this request was refused . Cambodia 's Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Di?m had extremely hostile relations , and the Ngô family had tried to depose him in the past by funding coup attempts .

In 1959 , Nhu tried to assassinate Sihanouk by sending him a parcel bomb . As a result , Sihanouk routinely gave asylum to political refugees who had tried to depose or kill Di?m . In November 1960 , he had given asylum to a group of paratroopers who tried to depose Di?m .

In the meantime , Di?m 's police sought to track down C? 's father , who had gone into hiding following the assassination attempt . After Di?m 's assassination in November 1963 , Qu?c was released from prison and C? returned from exile on 16 November , and they resumed their service in the air force . Qu?c advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 18 months before being killed in an air raid over North Vietnam on 20 April 1965 .

= = = Di?m reaction = = =

During Nolting 's first meeting with Di?m after the assassination attempt , the president adamantly asserted that the media was responsible for the bombing . He pointed to the Newsweek article and other " derogatory articles in the press " , using them to justify his claim that " the Americans were supporting the revolution " . Di?m declared that while some journalists were portraying the bombing as a wake @-@ up call he saw it as " a warning to them ? an indicator of the danger of their irresponsibility [ in fomenting disorder ] " .

In a later meeting with General Paul D. Harkins , head of the US military mission to Vietnam , Di?m joked : " I shouldn 't have put him in the air force , because I had put his father in jail years ago " . Di?m went on to predict that " sometime I 'm going to get shot right in the back of the neck . Sometime they 'll get me that way " . ( He and Nhu were deposed and shot dead during the November 1963 coup . ) Di?m reacted to the assassination attempt by cracking down on political dissidents and further tightening control of the press . Off the record , one official admitted that " [ w ] e don 't even talk about freedom of the press or ask for other liberties any more ... [ Di?m ] had completely surrounded himself in a protective oligarchy " . Nhu justified further anti @-@ opposition restrictions , remarking that " [ t ] here 's always going to be an opposition . If we take these people in , there will be another opposition springing up , because they are controversial men . " Madame Nhu added , " [ y ] ou open a window to let in light and air , not bullets . We want freedom , but we don 't want to be exploited by it . "

= = = U.S. reaction = = =

The attack generated speculation that the US would respond by deploying combat troops in South Vietnam . At that time , US military personnel officially held only advisory capacities . In the response to media concerns about the stability of the Di?m government , US Secretary of State

Dean Rusk denied that the US had plans to deploy combat forces . He also ruled out negotiations with the Vietcong , saying " the root of the trouble " was communist violations of the Geneva Accords .

United States Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith lobbied Kennedy against the deployment of combat troops , believing that it would lead to endless South Vietnamese requests for more troops . Galbraith further believed that wasting US resources in the jungles of Vietnam would be playing into the hands of the Soviet Union . According to one US observer , the palace bombing provoked " full scale plotting against Di?m " . Galbraith noted that " [ w ] hen the man in power is on the way down , anything is better " and considered that any change in South Vietnamese leadership would bring an improvement .