

= Ph?m Ng?c Th?o =

Colonel Ph?m Ng?c Th?o (IPA : Hanoi : [fâ?m ?o?k t?a ? ?] , Saigon : [f? ? ?m ?o?k t?? ? ?]) , also known as Albert Th?o (1922 ? 1965) , was a communist sleeper agent of the Viet Minh (and , later , of the Vietnam People 's Army) who infiltrated the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and also became a major provincial leader in South Vietnam . In 1962 , he was made overseer of Ngô ?nh Nhu 's Strategic Hamlet Program in South Vietnam and deliberately forced it forward at an unsustainable speed , causing the production of poorly equipped and poorly defended villages and the growth of rural resentment toward the regime of President Ngô ?nh Di?m , Nhu 's elder brother . In light of the failed " land reform " efforts in North Vietnam , the Hanoi government welcomed Thao 's efforts to undermine Diem .

During the First Indochina War , Th?o was a communist officer in the Vietminh and helped oversee various operations in the Mekong Delta in the far south , at one point commanding his future enemy Nguy?n Khánh , who briefly served the communist cause . After the French withdrawal and the partition of Vietnam , Th?o stayed in the south and made a show of renouncing communism . He became part of the military establishment in the anti @-@ communist southern regime and quickly rose through the ranks . Nominally Catholic , Th?o befriended Di?m 's elder brother , Archbishop Pierre Martin Ngô ?nh Th?c ? the devoutly Roman Catholic Ngô family strongly favored co @-@ religionists and had great trust in Th?o , unaware that he was still loyal to the communists . He went on to serve as the chief of B?n Tre Province , and gained fame after the area ? traditionally a communist stronghold ? suddenly became peaceful and prosperous . Vietnamese and US officials , as well as journalists hostile to or supportive of Saigon , misinterpreted this as a testament to Th?o 's great ability , and he was promoted to a more powerful position where he could further his sabotage . Th?o and the communists in the local area had simply stopped fighting , so that the communists could quietly recuperate , while Th?o would appear to be very skillful and be given a more important job where he could do more damage .

Through intrigue , Th?o also helped destabilise and ultimately unseat two South Vietnamese regimes ? Diem 's and the military junta of Khánh . As the Di?m regime began to unravel in 1963 , Th?o was one of the officers planning a coup . His plot was ultimately integrated into the successful plot and his activities promoted infighting which weakened the government and distracted the military from fighting the Viet Cong insurgency . Throughout 1964 and 1965 , as South Vietnam was struggling to establish a stable state after the ouster of Di?m , Th?o was involved in several intrigues and coup plots which diverted the government from implementing its programs . In 1965 , he went into hiding after a failed attempt to seize power from Khánh and was sentenced to death in absentia . Although this coup also failed , the subsequent chaos forced Khánh 's junta to collapse . Th?o died the same year he was forced into hiding ; it is believed that he was murdered after a bounty was placed on his head . After Vietnam was reunified at the end of the Vietnam War , the victorious communists claimed Th?o as one of their own and posthumously made him a one @-@ star general .

= = Early Vietminh years = =

Born Ph?m Ng?c Thu?n , Th?o was one of eleven children of a northern Vietnamese Roman Catholic family . At the time , Vietnam was a French colony . The family held French citizenship but opposed French colonialism . His father , an engineer , once headed an underground communist organisation in Paris , which assisted the Viet Minh 's anti @-@ French pro @-@ independence activities outside Vietnam . After attending French schools in Saigon , Thu?n changed his name to Th?o and renounced his French citizenship . In his high school years at the Lycée Chasseloup @-@ Laubat , Th?o met Tr??ng Nh? T?ng , who later became a high @-@ ranking member of the Viet Cong , a communist guerrilla organisation in South Vietnam . T?ng described Th?o as " my dearest friend " and recalled that they had " spent endless hours talking about everything under the sun . We were closer than brothers . "

Th?o spent his teenage years obsessed with his motorcycle . Despite being educated at an upper

@-@ class school that served children of French colonial administrators and privileged Vietnamese ? French was the medium of instruction and Gallic culture and history a major part of the curriculum ? Th?o was attracted to nationalist politics . He participated in H? Chí Minh 's revolutionary campaigns for Vietnamese independence and joined the Vietminh .

In September 1945 , H? declared independence under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) following the withdrawal of Imperial Japan , which had seized control of the country from France during the Second World War . At the time , there was a power vacuum , as both Japan and France had been decimated by the war . There was an outbreak of nationalist fervour in Vietnam ; T?ng and Th?o joined the Vanguard Youth , an impromptu independence militia . T?ng was assigned to be the leader of the local unit , but he left the movement soon after , leaving Th?o in command . During this period , Saigon was regularly engulfed in riots .

In 1946 , France attempted to reassert control over its colony and conventional military fighting broke out . Th?o served with the Vietminh in the Mekong Delta in the far south of Vietnam during the war against French rule from 1946 ? 54 . He almost met his end before he had started ; he was apprehended by the local communists in M? Tho , who saw his French @-@ style dress and mistook him for a colonial agent . They tied him up and chained him to a block of stone before throwing him into a river to drown . However , Th?o broke free of the weight and swam to safety . Th?o proceeded further south and deeper into the Mekong Delta to the town of V?nh Long , where he was again arrested by the local Vietminh . Just as Th?o was about to be executed by drowning , one of the communists realised he was a brother of one of their comrades . Th?o was released and rejoined his family , who lived in the region .

As a leader of the resistance , Th?o was allocated the responsibility of indoctrinating the 1947 batch of recruits with Vietminh ideology . One of Th?o 's students was his future enemy , South Vietnamese General and President Nguy?n Khánh . This group became the 410th Battalion and went on to fight near Cà Mau , the southernmost part of Vietnam . By 1949 , Th?o was in charge of the Vietminh espionage apparatus around Saigon and organised the guerrilla companies in the countryside . Th?o was also involved in procuring arms . Filipino traders brought arms into southern Vietnam in return for rice , shrimp , pork , gold and banknotes . Following the French defeat in 1954 at ?i?n Biên Ph? , Th?o helped evacuate communist fighters from South Vietnam and Cambodia in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Conference . Under these Accords , Vietnam was to be temporarily divided at the 17th parallel pending national elections to reunify the country in 1956 , and military personnel were to be evacuated to their respective sides of the border . In the meantime , H? Chí Minh 's Vietminh controlled the north under the DRV while the south was under the French @-@ sponsored State of Vietnam .

However , Th?o remained in the anti @-@ communist south when Vietnam was partitioned and made a show of renouncing communism . He became a schoolteacher and later worked in a bank , as well as the Department of Transport . He consistently refused to turn in the names of his former comrades , claiming that they were merely patriots fighting against the French and were not communists . At the same time , one of Th?o 's brothers had been appointed as North Vietnam 's ambassador to East Germany , having served as vice chairman of the Vietminh 's Resistance Committee for the South during the war against the French . In October 1955 , Prime Minister Di?m ousted Emperor B?o ??i in a referendum to determine the form of government of the State of Vietnam . " Republic " received almost 99 % of the vote and " monarchy " received a little over 1 % . Di?m declared himself president of the newly proclaimed Republic of Vietnam . He scrapped the national elections , citing the fact that South Vietnam was not a signatory to the Accords of the Geneva Conference .

= = Undercover communist in the South Vietnamese army = =

The U.S.-backed Di?m was passionately anti @-@ communist . In 1957 , He initiated an " Anti @-@ Communist Denunciation Campaign " to root out Vietminh members and their sympathisers . Thousands of people were killed or jailed , and in time Di?m 's campaigns created more sympathy for the Vietminh . Before 1960 , various small @-@ scale pro @-@ Communist uprisings were

taking place in the countryside . Th?o went on the run and hid in V?nh Long , worried that Di?m 's men were after him . In December 1960 , North Vietnam 's Politburo authorised the creation of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam , popularly known as the Viet Cong . The Vietcong were dominated by communists , but portrayed itself as a nationalist militant organisation , stating its aim to be the " reunification of the fatherland " with the overthrow of the " disguised colonial regime of the U.S. imperialists and the dictatorial Ngo Dinh Diem administration " . The creation of the Vietcong marked an escalation in the scale and organisation of the insurgency that developed into the Vietnam War .

Th?o 's Catholic background helped him to avoid detection as a communist . He and his brother were the only members of the family who were not anti @-@ communist . The remainder of the relatives were followers of Di?m 's brother , Archbishop Th?c , who had been Bishop of V?nh Long during the war against France . Th?o was known to have a face that revealed nothing of his inner feelings . Th?c 's intervention helped Th?o rise in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) . Th?c put Th?o in touch with Tr?n Kim Tuy?n , who was in charge of intelligence operations under Di?m 's younger brother Nhu , who was the head of the secret police and controlled the ARVN Special Forces . Th?o began as a propagandist for various units of the army and for the secret Catholic C?n lao Party , whose system of informants and secret cells helped create the atmosphere of a police state and maintained the Ngô family 's grip on power .

T?ng believed that Th?c " undoubtedly considered that Th?o 's Catholic and family loyalties were stronger and more durable than his youthful enthusiasm for revolution " . He felt that Th?o had tricked Th?c into believing that he was no longer a communist , and that his inside knowledge would be useful to the Ngô family . Th?o started by training the Civil Guard . As a result of his family 's Catholic connections , Th?o rose steadily in the ARVN , since Di?m 's regime had always promoted officers primarily on religious preference and loyalty . Nhu sent him to Malaysia to study counterinsurgency techniques , and upon his return , Th?o became a vital part of Nhu 's efforts to purge the army of disloyal officers . As Th?o kept a close watch on those who commanded troops , lest they use their personnel in a coup , the leading officers were keen to maintain a good relationship with him , which increased his effectiveness as a spy . Th?o rose even further when the troops he commanded helped put down the November 1960 coup attempt against Di?m . Th?o assisted Khánh and Tr?n Thi?n Khiêm to put down the revolt . All three were promoted , with the latter pair gaining the leadership of the ARVN and of the combined forces , respectively . This cemented the trio 's close ties .

Th?o was promoted to the post of chief of B?n Tre Province . He covertly worked with the cadres of Nguy?n Th? ??nh , a Vietcong leader who later became the highest ranking female communist in post @-@ war reunified Vietnam . The area was a traditional communist stronghold , and anti @-@ government attacks had increased in recent times , but it suddenly became peaceful when Th?o arrived . There were rumours that Th?o and the communists had decided to cease fighting for their mutual benefit ; the guerrillas could quietly strengthen themselves , while Th?o would appear to be successful and he would be promoted to a more powerful position where he could cause more damage to Di?m . The lack of fighting between Th?o 's forces and the Vietcong proved to be beneficial to the communist cause . In a three @-@ month period in 1963 , the Vietcong were able to recruit 2 @, @ 000 men in B?n Tre and formed two more battalions . Th?o was praised by the Ngô family and U.S. military advisors , unaware of his ruse . He received another promotion , and with it , more influence and contacts among the officer corps .

The US ambassador , Elbridge Durbrow , described B?n Tre Province as an " agricultural showplace " and advised journalists to travel there to see Th?o 's successful administration . The influential American journalist Joe Alsop changed his plans so that he could spend more time in B?n Tre , saying that the province " particularly inspires hope " . In one operation by Th?o 's ARVN forces , American field journalists covering the battle saw their hours @-@ long attempt to box in a Vietcong battalion yield only one farmer who lived in a hut with antigovernment slogans . Despite this , the American journalists and Vietnamese officers remained unaware that Th?o was a double agent . In fact , the Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning journalist David Halberstam misinterpreted the lack of attacks in B?n Tre , while other provinces were being ravaged , as proof that Th?o was one of the

few capable government officials in the Mekong Delta . Journalist Robert Shaplen wrote : " In all respects , Thao is one of the most remarkable Vietnamese around , being a conspiratorial revolutionary figure straight out of a Malraux novel and , at the same time , a highly sophisticated and astute man , whose talents , if only they were properly channeled , could profitably be used right now . " As Th?o was a former leader of the Vietminh , outsiders thought that his apparent success was due his first @-@ hand knowledge of communist tactics . During his period as the province chief , Th?o set up the Council of Elders , a consultative body of 20 ? 200 men and women , who were allowed to criticise local officials . He advocated the creation of the Council of Patrons , a philanthropic body to raise money for community projects .

= = Strategic Hamlet Program = =

In 1962 , Nhu began work on the ambitious Strategic Hamlet Program , an attempt to build fortified villages that would be secure zones for rural Vietnamese . The objective was to lock the Vietcong out so that they could not operate among the villagers . Th?o supervised these efforts , and when told that the peasants resented being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands and put into forts that they were forced to build , he advised Nhu and Tuy?n that it was imperative to build as many hamlets as fast as possible . This pleased the Vietcong , who felt that Th?o 's efforts were turning the rural populace against Saigon . Th?o specifically had villages built in areas that he knew had a strong Vietcong presence . This increased the number of communist sympathisers who were placed inside the hamlets and given identification cards . As a result , the Vietcong were able to more effectively penetrate the villages to access supplies and personnel .

Later in 1962 , United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara visited South Vietnam and was taken on an inspection tour of the country , accompanied by Di?m and Th?o . Perhaps because Th?o divulged the tour details to Vietcong guerrillas , each of McNamara 's stopovers was punctuated by bloody attacks on nearby ARVN installations . For example , when McNamara was in Binh D??ng Province , five government soldiers were killed . As he flew from ?à L?t north to ?à N?ng near the Demilitarized Zone , he was greeted by a Vietcong bombing of a southbound troop train , which killed 27 and wounded 30 Civil Guard members .

= = The fall of Di?m = =

In 1963 , the Di?m regime began to lose its tight control over the country as civil unrest spread as a result of the Buddhist crisis . Large scale demonstrations by the Buddhist majority erupted in response to the government shootings of nine Buddhists in Hu? who were protesting against a ban on the flying of the Buddhist flag during Vesak , the birthday of Gautama Buddha . With Di?m remaining intransigent in the face of Buddhist demands for religious equality , sections of society began calling for his removal from power . Th?o was part of the many plots that engulfed Saigon , destabilising the regime . Aiming for a 15 July coup , Tuy?n consulted with Th?o regarding his plans , but Tuy?n was too closely associated with Nhu to recruit the necessary military aid and he was subsequently exiled by Nhu .

Tuyen 's group ended up being led by Th?o but his initial coup plans were shelved when American CIA agent Lucien Conein instructed Th?o 's superior , General Khiêm , to stop the coup on the grounds that it was premature . Th?o 's motivation for involvement in the plotting is generally attributed to communist instructions for him to cause infighting within the ARVN whenever possible . He resumed plotting , intending to stage the coup on 24 October . He had recruited various infantry , marine and paratroop units for his scheme , totalling 3 @, @ 000 men . Th?o 's group did not carry out the coup after senior generals persuaded him to integrate his forces into their larger group , which was more likely to succeed . Th?o reasoned that aligning himself with a group of officers that were likely to be successful would yield more influence in the resulting junta . The coup was successfully executed on 1 November 1963 under the leadership of Generals D??ng V?n Minh and Tr?n V?n ?ôn .

Th?o commanded around two dozen tanks , which formed a column in the streets surrounding the

Presidential Palace at midnight , and helped launch the full @-@ scale attack at 03 : 30 on 2 November . The rebels eventually gained control of the building , and at daybreak Th?o 's forces stormed the palace , but found it empty ; Di?m and Nhu had escaped . A captured officer of the Presidential Guard revealed the brothers ' hiding place and under the orders of Khiêm , Th?o went after them . Khiêm ordered Th?o to ensure the brothers were not physically harmed . Th?o arrived at the house in Cholon where the brothers were purportedly hiding and phoned the rebels back at the palace . Di?m and Nhu were apparently listening in on an extension in another room and escaped . The brothers subsequently surrendered to an ARVN convoy led by General Mai H?u Xuân at a nearby Catholic church and were executed en route to military headquarters despite being promised safe exile .

The US media 's links to Th?o have been the source of historical debate . The journalists ' reporting of Di?m 's authoritarian rule , military failures , and attacks on Buddhists shifted American public opinion and put pressure on Washington to withdraw support for the Ngô family and seek a change of leadership . William Prochnau felt that the fall of Di?m was the biggest influence of the media on American foreign policy in over six decades . Th?o and Ph?m Xuân ?n had been the source of much of the media 's information . Conservative revisionist historians have accused the media of bringing down Di?m by publishing reports that , according to them , were based on false data disseminated by communist propagandists to unfairly malign Di?m 's rule , which they claim was effective and fair towards the Buddhist majority .

= = Participation in military junta = =

After the fall of the Di?m regime , Th?o was designated by the head of state Minh and the civilian Prime Minister Nguy?n Ng?c Th? to create the nucleus of a group called the Council of Notables , and promote it to the public. which , as an interim body of prominent civilians , would advise the military junta before it handed over power to an elected legislature under civilian rule . The Council of 60 people , 58 men and 2 women , held its first meeting on 1 January 1964 in Saigon . The council was composed almost entirely of well @-@ known professionals and academics and , as such , was hardly representative of South Vietnamese society ; there were no delegates from the agricultural or labour sectors of the economy . It gained a reputation for being a forum of debate , rather than a means of enacting policy change and government programs for the populace . Th? and Minh assigned Th?o with the task of encouraging a transition to democracy by facilitating the formation of a few political parties . This was ineffective , as many political parties with only a handful of members sprang up and squabbled . Within 45 days of the coup , 62 parties had formed but nothing meaningful resulted . In the end , these efforts proved to be irrelevant as Minh 's junta and the accompanying Council of Notables were overthrown before the end of the month . During this period , Th?o served as the head of military security and played a role in replacing Colonel ?? Kh?c Mai with Nguy?n Cao K? as the head of the Vietnam Air Force . In the aftermath of the coup , Vietcong attacks increased markedly amid infighting among the Saigon leadership , which Th?o had helped to stir up .

The generals sent Th?o to Fort Leavenworth in the United States for six months to learn conventional warfare tactics . He also spent a month in England before returning to Vietnam . By this time , Minh 's junta had been replaced in a 1964 January coup by Khánh . It is suspected that one of the generals ' motives for deploying Th?o overseas was his continual involvement in plotting . Khánh appointed Th?o as his press officer as well as an unofficial political adviser .

Later that same year , Khánh became involved in a power struggle with his deputy Khiêm as well as Minh , who had been retained as the titular head of state . Th?o was a close friend of Khiêm , so when Khánh prevailed in the power struggle , Khánh despatched Khiêm to Washington as the ambassador with Th?o as his press attaché . In August 1964 , Khánh 's leadership became increasingly troubled after he tried to augment his powers by declaring a state of emergency . This only provoked large @-@ scale protests and riots calling for an end to military rule , with Buddhist activists at the forefront . Fearful of losing power , Khánh began making concessions to the protesters and promised democracy in the near future , which encouraged more groups to demand

changes , and Khánh demoted certain Catholic pro @-@ Di?m supporters . On 13 September , a Catholic @-@ dominated group led by Generals Lâm V?n Ph?t and D??ng V?n ??c , both of whom had been demoted , moved troops into Saigon but then withdrew after it became obvious they did not have the numbers to remove Khánh . Khi?m and Th?o were implicated in helping to plot Ph?t and ??c 's attempted putsch ; both were sent abroad by Khánh .

= = 1965 attempted coup = =

In late December 1964 , Th?o was summoned back to Saigon by Khánh , who correctly suspected him and Khi?m of plotting together with Washington . Th?o suspected Khánh was attempting to have him killed , so he went underground upon returning to Saigon , and began plotting in earnest , having been threatened with being charged for desertion . He sheltered in a house belonging to a friend of Tr??ng Nh? T?ng . The ruling junta appealed to Th?o in newspaper advertisements and broadcasts to follow orders to report , but he ignored them . In mid @-@ January 1965 , the regime called for him to report to his superiors in the ARVN , warning that he would be " considered guilty of abandoning his post with all the consequences of such a situation " if he failed to do so .

Due to his Catholic background , Th?o was able to recruit Di?m loyalists such as Ph?t . With Khánh 's grip on power shaky , an anonymous source said that Th?o was worried about how he would be treated if someone else took over : " Thao acted first , out of fear that if he did not , the other generals would overthrow Khanh and get rid of him as well . He knew that if the others overthrew Khanh his fate would be worse than Khanh 's . " During this time , Th?o kept in touch with elements of the CIA in an attempt to get American backing . Meanwhile , Khi?m had been putting pressure on Khánh for over two months by charging him and the Buddhists of seeking a " neutralist solution " and " negotiating with the communists " . At the same time , Khánh 's relationship with the Americans ? particularly Ambassador and retired General Maxwell Taylor ? had broken down over a series of policy disputes and personal arguments , and the Americans were trying to encourage Khánh 's colleagues to overthrow him so that more hawkish policies could be enacted . The other generals wanted to overthrow Khánh and were aware that Th?o ? who was widely distrusted ? was planning to make a move . They anticipated trouble in trying to keep their subordinates , who were becoming impatient with Khánh 's ongoing tenure , from joining Th?o . Between January and February , Th?o continued to finalize the details of his own counter @-@ coup , using the contacts he had cultivated over the past decades .

Ph?t and other pro @-@ Di?m officers opposed the Buddhist influence being exerted on Khánh . Th?o consulted K? ? who wanted to seize power for himself ? before the plot , and exhorted him to join the coup , but the air force chief claimed that he was remaining neutral . Th?o thus believed K? would not intervene against him , but K? was strongly opposed to Th?o and Ph?t . American intelligence analysts had believed that General Don was involved in the coup with Ph?t and Th?o , but this was proven false when the action started . Eight months after the coup was over , Don told the American historian George McTurnan Kahin that he had been plotting with Th?o , who had planned for him to become Defense Minister and Chief of Staff of the military , but that the ??i Vi?t and Th?o 's Catholic civilian allies had insisted on installing Khi?m , a Catholic . A month before the coup , American intelligence analysts had believed that Th?o was planning to replace Khánh as commander @-@ in @-@ chief with Don .

Shortly before noon on 19 February , he used around fifty tanks , their crew and a mixture of infantry battalions to seize control of the military headquarters , the post office and the radio station of Saigon . He surrounded the home of General Khánh and Gia Long Palace , the residence of head of state Phan Kh?c S?u . The tanks were led by Colonel D??ng Hi?u Ngh?a , a Catholic member of the ??i Vi?t . The country was still trying to find stability , with Phan Huy Qu?t being appointed prime minister just three days earlier . Khánh managed to escape and flee to V?ng Tàu . His plane lifted off from Tan Son Nhut Air Base , the country 's military headquarters , just as rebel tanks were rolling in , attempting to block the runway . Th?o 's men tried to capture the Saigon base of the Republic of Vietnam Navy , and its commander , Admiral Chung T?n Cang , but were foiled , but they did capture a number of junta members at Tan Son Nhut .

Th?o made a radio announcement stating that the sole objective of his military operation was to get rid of Khánh , whom he described as a " dictator " . He said that he intended to recall Khiêm to Saigon to lead the Armed Forces Council in place of Khánh , but would retain the civilian cabinet that answered to the generals . In doing so , he caught Khiêm off guard , asleep in his Maryland home . When informed of what was happening , Khiêm sent a cable in which he pledged " total support " to the plot . The coup group made pro @-@ Di?m announcements , claiming then @-@ U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge , Jr . " was wrong in encouraging the coup against Diem rather than correcting mistakes " .

A Catholic rebel officer made a speech extolling Di?m , and mourning his loss . This gave the impression that the coup plotters wanted to roll back the country to a Di?m @-@ era position and punish those who had been involved in Di?m 's overthrow and execution . Th?o 's group also promised to aggressively fight the Vietcong and cooperate with the United States . Throughout the day , a series of anti @-@ Khánh speeches were broadcast on radio , and the rebels claimed to have the support of four divisions , something that was regarded as dubious . U.S. government analysts concluded that the rebellion was " primarily a move by die @-@ hard neo @-@ Diemists and Catholic military militants , disturbed at the rise of Buddhist influence , opposed to Gen. Khánh and ? in a vague , ill @-@ thought @-@ out way ? desirous of turning back the clock and undoing some of the results of the November 1963 ouster of Diem . " Among the civilians linked to Th?o 's plot were Catholic academics and a militant priest .

As Di?m had strongly discriminated along religious lines , the rebels ' commented caused a negative response among the Buddhist majority . The Buddhist activist monk Thich Tam Chau called on Buddhists to support the incumbent junta . The pro @-@ Di?m speeches also alarmed pro @-@ Buddhist and anti @-@ Di?m generals , such as Nguy?n Chánh Thi and Nguy?n H?u Có , who had been part of the failed 1960 and successful 1963 coups against Di?m respectively . They thought that Th?o and Phat might seek revenge , driving many anti @-@ Di?m officers who may have otherwise been neutral or sympathetic to the coup , to swing more towards Khánh .

Although Taylor and US military commander General William Westmoreland wanted Khánh out , the pro @-@ Di?m political ideology expressed by Th?o 's supporters alienated them , as they feared that the coup plotters would destabilize and polarize the country if they took power . The Americans worried that Phat and Th?o could galvanize support for Khánh through their extreme views , which had the potential to provoke large @-@ scale sectarian divisions , playing into the hands of the communists and hindering wider American objectives . They were also worried by Th?o 's intention to remove Quát and the civilian government , whom he saw was " too susceptible to Buddhist peacemongering " . The U.S. saw civilian participation in governance as a necessity . They worried that a Khánh victory would enhance his prestige , so they wanted to see some third force emerge and defeat both the Th?o and Khánh factions . Westmoreland and Taylor decided to work for the failure of both Th?o and Khánh , and helped organize US advisers for the purpose .

Phat was supposed to seize the Bien Hoa Air Base to prevent air force chief K? from mobilising air power against them , but he failed to reach the airfield before K? , who circled Tan Son Nhut and threatened to bomb the rebels . Most of the forces of the III and IV Corps surrounding the capital disliked both Khánh and the rebels , and took no action . However , as night came , senior military opinion began to turn against Th?o and Phát , although it was not clear at this stage whether the anti @-@ Th?o forces being organised and led by Thi were hostile to Khánh as well .

At 20 : 00 , Phát and Th?o met with K? , and insisted that Khánh be removed from power . The coup collapsed when , between midnight and dawn , anti @-@ Th?o forces swept into the city from the south along with some components of the 7th Airborne Brigade loyal to K? from Biên Hòa in the north . Whether the rebels were genuinely defeated by the overwhelming show of strength or whether a deal was struck with K? to end the revolt in exchange for Khánh 's removal is disputed , although a large majority support the latter . According to the latter version , Phát and Th?o agreed to free the members of the Armed Forces Council that they had arrested and withdraw in exchange for Khánh 's complete removal from power . Possibly as a means of saving face , Phát and Th?o were given an appointment with the figurehead chief of state S?u , who was under close control by the junta , to " order " him to sign a decree stripping Khánh of his military leadership , and organizing

a meeting of the junta and Prime Minister Quát 's civilian cabinet . During the early morning , while the radio station was still in the hands of Th?o 's men , a message attributed to S?u was read out ; it claimed that the chief of state had sacked Khánh . However , the authenticity of the announcement was put into doubt when loyalists took control of the station and S?u spoke in person , claiming otherwise . There were no injuries or deaths in the coup .

Before fleeing , Th?o broadcast a premature message claiming the coup had been effective in removing Khánh , and the Armed Forces Council later adopted a vote of no confidence in Khánh later that day , and forced him into exile . Later in the morning , while on the run , Th?o made a broadcast using a military radio system to call for Khanh 's departure and defend his actions , which he described as being in the best interest of the nation . Phat and Th?o were stripped of their ranks , but nothing was initially done as far as prosecuting or sentencing them for their involvement in the coup .

= = In hiding , and death = =

While in hiding in Catholic villages , Th?o expressed his willingness to surrender and cooperate with Quát 's government , if he and approximately fifty officers involved in the coup were granted amnesty . He also offered to go into exile in the United States , where his family had moved when he was sent there for training in 1964 . In May 1965 , a military tribunal sentenced both Th?o and Phát to death in absentia . The death sentence was attributed to the influence of Thi , who had assigned hit squads to look for him . After the conclusion of the trial , it was announced that the Armed Forces Council would disband and give the civilians more control in running the government . Thi was believed to have agreed to the transfer of power to a civilian government in return for Th?o 's death . As a result , Th?o had little choice but to attempt to seize power in order to save himself and he and Thi began to manoeuvre against one another .

On 20 May , a half dozen officers and around forty civilians , most or all of whom were Catholic , were arrested on charges of attempting to assassinate Quát and kidnap Thi and K? . Several of the arrested were known supporters of Th?o and believed to be abetting him in evading the authorities . Despite this , Th?o himself managed to escape , even as a US \$ 30 @, @ 000 bounty was put on him by the junta . On 16 July 1965 , he was reported dead in unclear circumstances ; an official report claimed that he died of injuries while on a helicopter en route to Saigon , after being captured north of the city . However , it is generally assumed that he was murdered or tortured to death on the orders of some military officials . One report holds that a Catholic priest betrayed Th?o , while another claims General Nguy?n V?n Thi?u caught him . In his memoirs , K? claimed Th?o had been captured by police in Saigon and " died in jail a few weeks later , probably from a beating " . After the Fall of Saigon in 1975 , a conspiracy theory emerged , maintaining that Th?o went underground and worked in counterintelligence for the communist Central Office of South Vietnam , helping to hunt down Vietcong cadres who had defected to Saigon .

= = Legacy = =

Although Th?o 's last plot failed , his activities in 1965 and the resultant infighting led to a series of internal purges within the ARVN . Amid the instability , the Vietcong made strong gains across the country throughout the year . In response to the deteriorating military situation , the Americans began to deploy combat troops to South Vietnam in large numbers .

Th?o was posthumously promoted by the ARVN to the rank of one ? star general and awarded the title of Heroic war dead (Vietnamese : Li?t s?) . After the Fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War , the communist government awarded him the same title and paid war pensions to his family , claiming him as one of their own . In 1981 , the communists had his body exhumed and reburied in the " Patriots ' cemetery " in Ho Chi Minh City (previously Saigon) . T?ng believed Th?o " was a man who throughout his life fought single @-@ mindedly for Vietnam 's independence " . T?ng , who later abandoned communism , said that Th?o " was a nationalist , not an ideologue " , and credited him with turning the military tide towards the communists by helping to bring down Di?m

and fomenting chronic instability and infighting for 18 months . H? Chí Minh had reacted to Di?m 's death by saying " I can scarcely believe that the Americans would be so stupid " . A communist report written in March 1965 , soon after Th?o 's revolt had caused Khánh to depart , stated that " The balance of force ... has changed very rapidly in our favor The bulk of the enemy 's armed forces ... have disintegrated , and what is left continues to disintegrate " .