

= Tôn Th?t ?ính =

Lieutenant General Tôn Th?t ?ính (20 November 1926 ? 21 November 2013) was a retired officer who served in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) . He is best known as one of the key figures in the November 1963 coup that deposed and resulted in the assassination of Ngô ?ính Di?m , the first president of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) .

A favourite of the ruling Ngô family , ?ính received rapid promotions ahead of officers who were regarded as being more capable . He converted to Roman Catholicism to curry favour with Di?m , and headed the military wing of the C?n Lao party , a secret Catholic organisation that maintained the Ngôs ' grip on power . At the age of 32 , ?ính became the youngest ever ARVN general and the commander of the II Corps , but he was regarded as a dangerous , egotistical and impetuous figure with a weakness for alcohol and partying .

In 1962 , ?ính was appointed commander of the III Corps , which oversaw the region surrounding the capital Saigon . He was given the post because Di?m regarded him as one of his most loyal officers . This position meant that ?ính would be a critical factor in the success or failure of any coup . In late 1963 , with Di?m becoming increasingly unpopular , ?ính 's colleagues recruited him into a coup by playing on his ego . They convinced him to ask Di?m for a cabinet post , knowing that the president was adamantly opposed to military officers serving as ministers and would chastise him . Di?m promptly rebuffed ?ính , who became upset and was lured into the plot . Di?m and his brother and chief advisor Ngô ?ính Nhu were aware of a coup plot , but did not know of ?ính 's involvement . Nhu planned a fake coup of his own in an attempt to trap his opponents and generate positive publicity for his family 's regime . He put ?ính in charge of the fake coup , and the general promptly redeployed loyal units outside Saigon and rebel forces near the capital . On 1 November 1963 , the rebels ' actual coup proceeded , and the Ngô brothers were deposed and executed .

After the coup , ?ính became one of the 12 members of the Military Revolutionary Council (MRC) , serving as the interior minister . However , the MRC lasted only three months before being ousted in a bloodless coup by General Nguy?n Khánh . ?ính and his colleagues were put under house arrest by Khánh and falsely accused of promoting a neutralist plot . The subsequent military trial collapsed . The generals were convicted of " lax morality " , but were eventually allowed to resume their military service , albeit in meaningless desk jobs . Following Khánh 's exile by another group of generals , ?ính was appointed to command the I Corps in 1966 in order to put down the Buddhist Uprising , but Prime Minister Nguy?n Cao K? disapproved of his reconciliatory policies . K? launched a successful surprise attack against ?ính , who fled , but was later captured and briefly imprisoned by K? . After his release , ?ính worked in the media and was elected to the Senate in 1967 . He served in the upper house until the fall of Saigon in April 1975 , when he fled Vietnam .

= = Early years = =

A native of central Vietnam , ?ính enlisted in the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) of the French @-@ backed State of Vietnam at Phu Bai in 1949 and trained as a paratrooper in France . He became a protege of Ngô ?ính C?n , a younger brother of Prime Minister Di?m . C?n , who unofficially controlled the region of central Vietnam near Hu? , was impressed by what he considered to be an abundance of courage on the part of ?ính . Within six years of enlisting in the military , ?ính had risen to the rank of colonel and was made the inaugural commander of the newly formed 32nd Division based in Da Nang in the centre of the country on 1 January 1955 . ?ính led the unit until November 1956 , during which time it was renamed the 2nd Division .

Di?m deposed head of state B?o ??i in a fraudulent referendum in 1955 and proclaimed himself president of the newly created Republic of Vietnam (commonly known as South Vietnam) . The VNA thus became the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) . Born into a nominally Buddhist family , ?ính had converted to Catholicism in the hope of advancing his career . The change of religion was widely perceived to be a factor in his rapid promotion above more capable officers . A devout member of the Catholic minority , Di?m dedicated the country to the Virgin Mary and heavily disenfranchised and disadvantaged the Buddhist majority .

Ính once described himself as " fearless and arrogant " and Di?m 's adopted son ? the president was a lifelong bachelor . In August 1957 , he was appointed commander of the 1st Division based in Hu? , the old imperial capital and C?n 's base . Ính served there for one year , until he became a one @-@ star general and received a wider @-@ reaching command in August 1958 , making him the youngest ever ARVN general . Ính 's favour among the Ngô family saw him appointed in 1958 to head the military wing of the C?n Lao , the secret organisation of Vietnamese Catholics loyal to the Ngô family that maintained the family 's grip on power .

Despite the high regard in which the Ngô family held him , Ính had a poor reputation among his colleagues . Regarded by his peers as ambitious , vain and impulsive , he was known mainly for heavily drinking in Saigon 's nightclubs , and the Central Intelligence Agency labelled him a " basic opportunist " . He was known for always wearing a paratrooper 's uniform with a red beret at a steep angle , and being accompanied by a tall , uncommunicative Cambodian bodyguard . Senior Australian Army officer Ted Serong , who worked with Ính , called him " a young punk with a gun ? and dangerous " .

= = Xá L?i Pagoda = =

In August 1958 , Ính was made the commander of the II Corps , which oversaw the Central Highlands region mainly inhabited by indigenous tribes . He was based in the mountainous town of Pleiku and oversaw the surrounding region and the lowlands to the north of the capital of Saigon . This put him in control of the 5th , 22nd and 23rd Divisions , one third of the divisions in the country . At the time , the CIA had been training Montagnard tribesmen under the Village Defense Program (later to become the Civilian Irregular Defense Group) with the stated intention of resisting communist infiltration , but Ính regarded it was an attempt to divide and conquer and undermine him . He estimated that 18 @,@ 000 tribesmen had been armed , and said to Ngô Ính Nhu ? one of Di?m 's younger brothers and his chief adviser ? that " the Americans have put an army at my back " . CIA agent Lucien Conein admitted years afterwards that Ính 's claim was correct ; that Nhu and Di?m had no previous idea of what the Americans had been doing . Ính wrote to Di?m to complain that his units were being weakened by the policy of promoting officers for political reasons , despite having been a beneficiary himself of this non @-@ merit @-@ based policy .

The reorganisation of the corps boundaries in December 1962 created a fourth region . The entire region surrounding the capital , Saigon , came under the purview of the III Corps , whereas the previous arrangement saw two corps controlling the regions to the north and south of the capital . As a key supporter of Di?m , Ính was named commander of the III Corps , because the Ngô family trusted him to defend them in the face of any coup attempts . Under the III Corps were the 5th and the 25th Divisions .

In August 1963 , Nhu , who controlled the special forces and secret police , allowed Ính to have a hand in planning raids against Buddhist dissidents who had been organising at the Xá L?i pagoda , Saigon 's largest . The raids involved the deployment of the 5th Division , based in the town of Biên Hòa on Saigon 's northern outskirts , into the capital . Although the execution of the raids ? which left hundreds dead ? was primarily the responsibility of Colonel Lê Quang Tung , the special forces head , Ính privately took responsibility , stating to a journalist , " I have defeated Henry Cabot Lodge [the US ambassador to South Vietnam] . He came here to stage a coup d 'etat , but I , Tôn Th?t Ính , have conquered him and saved the country . " In the aftermath of the raids , Foreign Minister V? V?n M?u resigned in protest , shaved his head like a monk and sought to leave on a pilgrimage to India ; Nhu ordered Ính to jail him . At the urging of another general , Ính put M?u under house arrest instead .

During this period , Ính told a dinner guest that he had the pleasure of dining with a great national hero . When the guest asked Ính where the hero was , Ính said " it is me " and claimed to have defeated the Americans . Ính 's ego had been played upon by the Ngô brothers , who had themselves reiterated this point and paid him a large cash bonus after the pagoda raids . In the heady times after the attacks , Ính had a " somewhat incoherent " debate with his American advisor , claiming " he [Ính] was without doubt the greatest general officer in the ARVN , the saviour of

Saigon ... and soon he would be the top military man in the country . " In a press conference after the raids , ?ính claimed to have saved South Vietnam from Buddhists , communists and " foreign adventurers " , a euphemism for the United States .

After being questioned sharply , ?ính quickly became angry . Ray Herndon of United Press International asked him to name the country that he was referring to , but ?ính dodged the question . Herndon lampooned him by saying that a national hero should be able to identify the national enemy , and asked him to call Madame Nhu , the de facto First Lady known for her anti @-@ American comments , to get help in identifying the hostile country in question . After several reporters derisively laughed at these comments , ?ính stormed out of the conference .

= = Defection and coup = =

Embarrassed by the events at the press conference , ?ính returned to the officers ' mess at the Joint General Staff headquarters . His colleagues , led by General Tr?n V?n ?ôn , were plotting a coup against Di?m because of the Buddhist crisis , and attempted to play on ?ính 's ego to convince him to join them . They knew that without ?ính 's assistance , a coup would be difficult as his forces dominated the region surrounding the capital . In a series of meetings , the other generals assured ?ính that he was a national hero worthy of political authority , and claimed that Nhu had not realised how important he was in the future of the country . ?ính 's colleagues even bribed his soothsayer to predict his elevation to political power . The other generals told him that the people were dissatisfied with Di?m 's cabinet and that Vietnam needed dynamic young officers in politics , and that their presence would reverse the declining morale in the ARVN . They advised ?ính to ask Di?m to promote him to interior minister , D??ng V?n Minh to defence minister , and Tr?n V?n Minh to education minister . The other generals hoped that would reject ?ính and wound his pride . As a result , ?ính and his fellow generals met Di?m at the palace , where ?ính asked the president to promote him to the post of interior minister . Di?m bluntly chastised ?ính in front of his colleagues , and ordered him out of Saigon to the central highlands resort town of ?à L?t to rest . ?ính felt humiliated and embarrassed , having promised his colleagues that he would be successful . The Ngô brothers had been alarmed by ?ính 's request , and put him under surveillance . ?ính found out , further straining his relationship with the palace . ?ính agreed to join the coup , although with his ambitious nature , the other officers were skeptical and planned to have him assassinated if he tried to switch sides .

With ?ính and the Ngô family 's increasing focus on the political usage of the army , the military situation in the III Corps deteriorated badly in the second half of 1963 , as personnel were redeployed into the cities . In August , he moved a unit away from B?n T??ng , which had been portrayed as a model settlement in the Strategic Hamlet Program that was supposed to isolate peasants into fortified villages to keep the Viet Cong out . While the unit was in Saigon cracking down on the Buddhists , the communists overran B?n T??ng . A year earlier , the American media contingent had been invited to the opening ceremony of the settlement , which was supposed to be the flagship of the hamlet program . As ?ính spent most of October in the capital plotting instead of inspecting the countryside , the communists began to systematically dismantle the strategic hamlets .

= = = Plotting a fake coup = = =

By mid @-@ October , Di?m and Nhu knew of the coup plans , but did not know that ?ính was firmly among them , although they were wary of him . Nhu then decided to outwit the generals with a counter @-@ plot . The generals heard of this and decided to counteract him . The other generals were still suspicious of ?ính , fearing he would betray them . Having discovered that Nhu was trying to use him to trap them , and not sure which side he was really on , they promised to make him interior minister and offered other rewards if he helped to overthrow the Ngô brothers .

As part of the generals ' plot , ?ính sent Colonel Nguy?n H?u Có , his deputy corps commander , to M? Tho to talk to the 7th Division commander , Colonel B?i ?ính ??m , and two regimental

commanders , the armoured unit commander , both subordinate to Diem , and the chief of M? Tho province . Exhorting them to join the coup , he stated that all the generals were in the plot except the strongly loyalist Huynh Vn Cao , and that ?inh would soon join . According to one account , ?inh had intended that loyalists would report Có 's activities to Diem and Nhu so that it would give him an opportunity to orchestrate a stunt to ingratiate himself with the palace .

Nhu 's agents soon reported Có 's activities to the palace . When the Ngô brothers confronted ?inh with what occurred in M? Tho , ?inh feigned astonishment at his deputy 's behaviour . He began crying and said " This is my fault , because you have suspected me . I have not really gone to work for the last 15 days but have stayed at home because I was sad . But I am not against you . I was sad because I thought I was discredited with you . So Nguyen H?u Có profited from my absence to make trouble . " ?inh claimed to know nothing of Có 's activities and vowed to have his deputy killed . Nhu opposed this and stated that he wanted keep Có alive to catch the plotters , and tried to use ?inh to this end . Nhu ordered ?inh and Tung , both of whom took their orders directly from the palace instead of the ARVN command , to plan a fake coup against the government . One objective was to trick dissidents into joining the false uprising so that they could be identified and eliminated . Another aim of the public relations stunt was to give a false impression of the strength of the regime .

Codenamed Operation Bravo , the first stage of the scheme would involve some of ?inh and Tung 's loyalist soldiers , disguised as insurgents led by apparently renegade junior officers , faking a coup and vandalising the capital . Tung would then announce the formation of a " revolutionary government " consisting of opposition activists who had not consented to joining the new administration , while Diem and Nhu would pretend to be on the run . During the orchestrated chaos of the first coup , the disguised loyalists would riot and in the ensuing mayhem , kill the leading coup plotters , such as Generals Minh , ?ôn , Lê Vn Kim and junior officers that were helping them . The loyalists and some of Nhu 's underworld connections would also kill some figures who were assisting the conspirators , such as the titular but relatively powerless Vice President Nguyen Ng?c Th? , CIA agent Lucien Conein , who was on assignment in Vietnam as a military adviser , and Ambassador Lodge . These would then be blamed on " neutralist and pro @-@ communist elements " . A fake " counter @-@ coup " was to follow , whereupon Tung 's special forces , having left Saigon on the pretext of fighting communists , as well as ?inh 's regulars , would triumphantly re @-@ enter Saigon to reaffirm the Diem regime . Nhu would then exploit the scare to round up dissidents .

?inh was put in charge of the fake coup and was allowed the additional control of the 7th Division based in M? Tho , which was previously assigned to Diem loyalist Cao , who commanded the IV Corps in the Mekong Delta . The reassignment of the 7th Division gave ?inh and his III Corps complete encirclement of Saigon , and would prevent Cao from storming the capital to save Diem as he had done during the coup attempt in 1960 .

Nhu and Tung , however , were unaware that ?inh was part of the real coup plot . ?inh told Tung that the fake coup needed to employ an overwhelming amount of force . He said that tanks were required " because armour is dangerous " . In an attempt to outwit Tung , ?inh claimed fresh troops were needed , opining , " If we move reserves into the city , the Americans will be angry . They 'll complain that we 're not fighting the war . So we must camouflage our plan by sending the special forces out to the country . That will deceive them . " The loyalists were unaware that ?inh 's real intention was to engulf Saigon with his rebel divisions and lock Tung 's men in the countryside where they could not defend the president . Tung and the palace agreed to send all four Saigon @-@ based special forces companies out of the capital on 29 October .

Not trusting Có , Diem put a Catholic loyalist , Colonel Phat , in command of the 7th Division on 31 October . According to tradition , Phat had to pay the corps commander a courtesy visit before assuming control . ?inh refused to see Phat and told him to come back on Friday at 14 : 00 , by which time the coup had already been scheduled to start . In the meantime , ?inh had ?ôn sign a counter @-@ order transferring command of the 7th Division to Có . The next day , Có took the division 's incumbent officers prisoner and used the unit to block loyalists from storming the capital from the south .

= = = Di?m 's downfall = = =

On 1 November 1963 , the coup went ahead , with Cao 's troops isolated in the far south , and Tung 's forces outside Saigon , unable to rescue Di?m from the rebel encirclement . Tung was called to the Joint General Staff (JGS) headquarters at Tân S?n Nh?t Air Base under the pretense of a routine meeting , and was seized and executed . Attempts by Di?m and Nhu to make contact with ?ính were blocked by other generals , who claimed that ?ính was elsewhere . This led the Ngô brothers to think that ?ính had been captured , still unaware that he had rebelled . The following morning , ?ính was allowed to have the final word with Di?m before the brothers were arrested , allowing him to prove his loyalty to the rebel cause . ?ính subsequently shouted obscenities at the Ngô brothers .

?ính alleged that Nhu 's contacts with the communists and threats to make a peace deal with North Vietnam had motivated the coup . When Di?m and Nhu were shot dead by the arresting officers against the orders of the generals , ?ính claimed he " couldn 't sleep that night " . He boasted to the media that he and his troops were responsible for seizing broadcasting studios , the police headquarters , Tân S?n Nh?t Air Base , and the release of hundreds of political prisoners such as monks and students . He also claimed that he led the successful siege on Gia Long Palace , although the 5th Division of Colonel Nguy?n V?n Thi?u had actually carried it out .

?ính saved the life of Colonel Cao V?n Viên , the commander of the Airborne Brigade , who was a Di?m loyalist . Viên 's fate had been discussed during the planning phase . ?ính , who played mahjong with Viên 's wife , convinced Minh to spare the paratroop commander , saying that Viên would not oppose the coup . At the JGS meeting , Viên , who had not known of the plot , removed his insignia and resigned , and was arrested for refusing to join the coup . Viên was allowed to return to his command a month later , and later became the chief of JGS for eight years .

= = Post @-@ Di?m = =

Following the coup , a Military Revolutionary Council (MRC) was formed , comprising 12 generals including ?ính , each of whom had equal voting power . They appointed a cabinet mainly consisting of civilians led by Prime Minister Nguy?n Ng?c Th? , who had been the titular Vice President under Di?m . ?ính was initially made interior minister , but Th? was said to have personally opposed the appointment . Eventually Minh , the head of the military junta , struck a compromise whereby ?ính was made Security Minister and Administrative Affairs , which partially covered the interior ministry . He was the 2nd Deputy Chairman of the MRC behind Minh and ?ôn . However , tension persisted as Th? 's civilian government was plagued by infighting . According to Th? 's assistant , Nguy?n Ng?c Huy , the presence of ?ôn and ?ính in both the civilian cabinet and the MRC paralyzed the governance process . ?ính and ?ôn were subordinate to Th? in the civilian government , but as members of the MRC they were superior to him . When Th? gave a cabinet order with which the generals disagreed , they went to the MRC and gave a counter @-@ order . ?ính and the new national police chief , General Xuân , were accused of arresting people en masse , before releasing them in return for bribes and pledges of loyalty . The junta performed indecisively and was heavily criticised , especially Minh , who was viewed as being too apathetic towards his country 's situation . During the MRC 's tenure , South Vietnam suffered more and more losses to the Vietcong .

= = = Policies = = =

?ính was reported to have celebrated his new positions by making conspicuous appearances at Saigon nightclubs and dancing , having lifted Madame Nhu 's bans on such activities . He reportedly kissed the bar dancers and ordered champagne for all present . ?ính 's brash behavior caused public relations problems for the junta . In interviews with the Washington Post and The New York Times , he claimed that he took a leading role in the coup because " we would have lost the war under Di?m " and saying that he participated " not for personal ambition , but for the population , the

people and to get rid of Nhu " . He claimed to have been the " specialist ... [who] gave the orders in only thirty minutes " , keeping the plans " all in his head " . In an exclusive interview with Herndon , he said " You are the one who started it all , who drove me into making the coup . You are the hero of the revolution . " This was a reference to Herndon 's sarcastic reference to ?ính as a " great national hero " after the general took credit for the pagoda raids . He also courted controversy with anti @-@ American remarks , stating " On August 21 , I was governor of Saigon and loyal to Diem ; on November 1 , I was governor of Saigon and fighting Diem ; maybe in the future I 'll be governor of Saigon and fighting against the Americans . "

?ính and the leading generals in the MRC also had a secret plan to end the communist insurgency , which called itself the National Liberation Front (NLF) and claimed to be independent of the government of North Vietnam . They claimed that most of them were first and foremost southern nationalists opposed to foreign military intervention and U.S. involvement and support of Di?m . The generals agreed with this viewpoint and thought that an agreement to end the war within South Vietnam was possible . The government also rebuffed American proposals to bomb North Vietnam on the grounds that such actions would cede the moral high ground , which they claimed on the basis of fighting in a purely defensive manner . However , the plans to bring the NLF into the mainstream were never implemented to any degree before the government was deposed .

During his time on the MRC , ?ính persistently raised eyebrows with his volatile behaviour . The Americans and his colleagues found him difficult to control . General Paul Harkins , the head of the US military presence in Vietnam , advised ?ính to relinquish his control of the III Corps on the grounds that he was already serving as the interior minister and that a corps needed a full @-@ time leader , but ?ính refused . As the III Corps surrounded the capital , the most economically productive region in South Vietnam , it had the most scope for corruption and graft . ?ính told U.S. embassy officials in December 1963 he was preparing to " accommodate himself to a neutralist solution for Vietnam " . This reportedly perturbed the Americans and was interpreted as a threat to not cooperate with the anti @-@ communist struggle if his power was wound back . US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara criticised the arrangement , and in early January 1964 , ?ính was relieved by General Khi?m , who had been the head of the armed forces until being demoted after the coup against Di?m , and he set about overthrowing the MRC .

= = Deposed by Nguy?n Khánh = =

?ính 's political stay was brief , as General Nguy?n Khánh , who was disgruntled at not receiving a high position after Di?m 's removal , deposed the MRC with the support of Khi?m on 30 January 1964 , without firing a shot . Khánh used the coup to exact retribution against Generals ?ôn , ?ính , Xuan and Lê V?n Kim . Khánh had them arrested , claiming that they were part of a neutralist plot with the French government of President Charles de Gaulle to make a peace deal with North Vietnam that would not end communism . Khánh noted they had all served in the French @-@ backed VNA prior to 1955 , although he had as well . He also accused the four generals of discussing such a plan with some visiting politicians from de Gaulle 's party during a dinner , although ?ính and his accused colleagues denied that the meeting was anything more than social . The generals were flown to M? Khe beach , near ?à N?ng .

Khánh presided over their trial of ?ính and his colleagues on 28 May 1964 . The generals were interrogated for five and a half hours , mostly about details of their coup against Di?m , rather than the original charge of promoting neutralism . As all of the officers were involved in Di?m 's overthrow , the hearings did not reveal any new information . The court deliberated for over nine hours , and when it reconvened for the verdict , Khánh stated , " We ask that once you begin to serve again in the army , you do not take revenge on anybody " . The tribunal then " congratulated " the generals , but found that they were of " lax morality " and unqualified to command due to a " lack of a clear political concept " . They were chastised for being " inadequately aware of their heavy responsibility " and of letting " their subordinates take advantage of their positions " . ?ính 's quartet were allowed to remain in ?à L?t under surveillance .

The four generals were barred from commanding troops and offices were prepared so they could

participate in " research and planning " . Worried that the idle group would plot against him , Khánh made some preliminary arrangements to send them to the U.S. for military study , but this failed . When Khánh was himself deposed in 1965 , he handed over dossiers proving that ?ính and the other generals were innocent and that his charges were dishonest , before going into exile . Historian Robert Shaplen said that " the case ... continued to be one of Khánh 's biggest embarrassments . " During the period of house arrest , Khánh briefly released ?ính and Kim when the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races , known by its French acronym of FULRO , launched an uprising in the central highlands calling for autonomy for indigenous people . ?ính and Kim were sent to Ban Mê Thu?t in an attempt to end the standoff in September 1964 , but after negotiations stalled , they conferred with Khánh and decided to order ARVN troops to crush the rebellion , which was carried out successfully .

= = 1966 Buddhist protests and senate career = =

With the rise to power of Nguy?n Cao K? ? head of the Vietnam Air Force ? following Khánh 's departure , returned to a command role in the army . In April 1966 , he was appointed to lead the I Corps , based in central Vietnam . ?ính was the third commander of the corps within five weeks . This upheaval came about after the dismissal of Lieutenant General Nguy?n Chánh Thi due to his sympathies towards Buddhist activists and because K? viewed him as a personal threat . In response , Buddhist protesters brought the region to a standstill with anti @-@ American and anti @-@ war demonstrations , some of which descended into rioting . The protests were supported by groups of rebel I Corps soldiers and the mayor of ?à N?ng , Nguy?n V?n Man , who had been appointed by Thi . These anti @-@ K? groups formed a coalition known as the Struggle Movement . Thi 's replacement , General Nguy?n V?n Chuan , refused to confront the dissidents or shut them down . He was content to allow protests provided there was no insurrection .

Prime Minister K? disapproved of Chuan 's approach and replaced Chuan with ?ính . Prime Minister K? felt ?ính 's aggressive attitude following the Xá L?i Pagoda raids in 1963 indicated a willingness to suppress Buddhist dissidents . Moreover , ?ính was a native of central Vietnam and would have been popular with those who thought along parochial lines . ?ính arrived in Hu? on 15 April and , after a week , announced that he had restored Saigon 's authority over the region . He proclaimed that he had regained control of the radio stations in ?à N?ng and Hu? from the dissidents , and that he had convinced the mayor of ?à N?ng to remain loyal to Saigon . ?ính announced a deal whereby the Buddhists would have regular air time in return for relinquishing control of the radio station . This move was interpreted in different ways . Some felt that ?ính was attempting to gain favour with the Buddhists in anticipation of K? 's fall from power , while Frances FitzGerald felt it was the only sensible government action during the crisis . On 19 April , clashes erupted in Qu?ng Ngãi between the Buddhists and the VNQD? (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) , which supported the continuation of the anti @-@ communist war , prompting ?ính to forcibly restrain the two groups .

Soon after , K? made a surprise attack to assert government control over central Vietnam . He flew out to ?à N?ng with his own units , without consulting the Americans or officials in I Corps . At this time , ?ính was pursuing a policy of reconciliation ?à N?ng and negotiation with the dissident I Corps units , and making contact with the Struggle Movement . K? decided to attack and sent his forces to overrun Dinh 's headquarters on 15 May , forcing the latter to abandon his post and flee to the headquarters of U.S. General Lewis Walt . Fearing K? 's forces would kill him , ?ính asked Walt for help and was flown to Hu? , where the pro @-@ Thi and pro @-@ Buddhist elements were still in control . ?ính was then formally replaced by General Cao . Walt 's assistance to ?ính provoked a reaction from General William Westmoreland , the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam . Walt and Westmoreland were often in conflict , and the latter responded to his subordinate 's evacuation of ?ính by imploring K? to attack Hu? .

K? 's surprise attack led to conflict between the ARVN rebels and loyalists , with the American ground forces caught in the middle , effectively creating a civil war within a civil war . K? eventually quelled the rebellion and briefly jailed ?ính , who claimed he was incarcerated for refusing to back

up K? 's account of the conflict with the Buddhists . ?ính left the army and won election to the newly created Senate in 1967 , serving there until the fall of Saigon in 1975 , when he fled to the United States . In February 1968 , while serving in the Senate , ?ính founded a newspaper , Công Luan. while also serving as head of the Vietnamese Publishers Association . In 1998 , ?ính claimed he felt remorse for the deposal and assassinations of the Ngô brothers , and also claimed he had opposed their policies of religious discrimination against Buddhists , which had fomented national disunity and the eventual Communist victory .