

Diem's Secret Police Attack U.S. Newsmen

From Cable Dispatches
SAIGON.

Rock-wielding South Vietnamese secret police roughed up nine Western newsmen at a Buddhist memorial service yesterday. Seven American correspondents in the group appealed to President Kennedy to protest the incident.

The attack came at a service for Buddhist monk, the Rev. Quang Duc, who burned himself to death in Saigon June 11, in a sacrificial protest against alleged discrimination by President Ngo Dinh Diem's government, composed predominantly of Roman Catholics.

Mr. Diem, marking his ninth anniversary as head of the troubled Southeast Asian nation yesterday, declared that the Buddhist problem was settled. Nonetheless, he would not permit the public to attend the service. About 70 per cent of Vietnamese are Buddhists.

Growing Friction

The attack on the newsmen added to his problems. It emphasized growing friction with the United States, which has invested heavily in men and money to aid in his fight against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas.

The incident occurred when about 400 Buddhists were leaving a small pagoda in north Saigon after the memorial ceremony, police barred them from a formal procession, and when the western correspondents moved up close to observe the exchange, a group of about 20 secret policemen, dressed in plain clothes, attacked them.

Associated Press correspondent Peter Arnett was knocked to the ground, pummelled and kicked, and three photographers had their cameras broken or damaged by flying rocks. The other newsmen were shoved and pushed, while a group of armed Vietnamese policemen stood by making no effort to halt the

AT A SERVICE IN VIET NAM



Associated Press
Peter Arnett

assault. Mr. Arnett suffered cuts and bruises, the others were unhurt.

The Americans immediately protested to U.S. Embassy Charge d'Affaires William Truehart, acting in place of vacationing Ambassador Frederick Nolting Jr. However, Mr. Truehart said he would not make a formal protest because "I don't feel I have enough basis for making one. I can't conclude that it was a planned attack."

The correspondents then sent a cable to President Kennedy, charging the South Vietnamese government "has begun a campaign of open physical intimidation to prevent the covering of the news which we feel Americans have a right to know."

They urged Mr. Kennedy to obtain assurance that such incidents would not be repeated, lest a precedent be set for increased violence and obstruction.

In addition to Mr. Arnett, who is a New Zealand citi-

zen, the newsmen involved were Associated Press bureau chief Malcolm Browne, United Press International correspondent Neil Sheehan, New York Times correspondent David Halbertstam, AP photographer Horst Faas, CBS newsman Peter Kalischer, CBS cameraman Joseph Masrafy, and two other, not identified.

At Hyannis Port, Mass., Presidential Press Secretary Pierre Salinger said the newsmen's cable had been received and that the White House is "looking into it."

"Lost Their Heads"

Vietnamese authorities told the U. S. Embassy the attack occurred because one or two secret policemen "lost their heads." The newsmen claimed it was deliberate.

The incident came on the heels of a Vietnamese prosecutor's accusation that the U. S. aided a 1960 revolt against the Diem regime. The charge was made Friday at the trial of 19 Vietnamese paratroopers, admitted leaders of the revolt. The U. S. Embassy here and the State Department in Washington promptly and vigorously denied the claim. Americans in Saigon were privately stunned that Mr. Diem would allow such an assertion to be made when the U. S. is playing such a vital role in his country's defense.

Mr. Diem said yesterday in his anniversary speech that accord had been reached with Buddhist leaders over their grievances. He charged that unnamed "agents" were "surreptitiously seeking to revive and rekindle disunity at home while arousing public opinion against us abroad."

Mr. Diem became South Viet Nam's chief of state in 1954, after the partition of French Indo-China, in which North Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos were also created as independent states.