

Secret Police Beat Newsmen In Saigon Row

By Neil Sheehan

SAIGON, July 7 (UPI) — Plainclothes South Viet-Nam secret police, some of them armed with rocks, assaulted nine foreign correspondents today as they were covering a peaceful Buddhist religious ceremony.

Seven of the correspondents, Americans representing U. S. news media, appealed to President Kennedy to lodge a strong protest with the Vietnamese government after the U. S. embassy in Saigon refused to make a formal protest.

About 20 secret police took part in the assault. Newsmen were jostled, shoved and struck by rocks thrown by the secret police while about 60 uniformed policemen and a squad of riot police stood by without making an effort to halt the attack.

Four police knocked Associated Press correspondent Peter Arnett to the ground and kicked and pummeled him. He suffered slight cuts and bruises.

Summonses Sent

Arnett, a New Zealand citizen, and his bureau chief, Malcolm Browne, later received summonses to report to a Vietnamese police station for questioning on Monday. Both asked that they be accompanied by diplomatic representatives.

U. S. embassy charge d'affaires William Trueheart, said he would not make a formal protest to the government because "I don't feel I have enough basis for making one. I can't conclude that it was a planned attack."

The newsmen insisted to Trueheart that the attack was planned because of the manner in which it was carried out. They said police under the authoritarian regime of South Viet-Nam President Ngo Dinh Diem do not attack foreign newsmen unless ordered to.

Vietnamese authorities told U. S. embassy the newsmen were attacked because one or two secret policemen "lost their heads."

Earlier, embassy sources said they believed the government aimed to crack down on Buddhists demonstrating against government religious discrimination and on Western newsmen covering such incidents because the government does not want its handling of the politico-religious crisis reported abroad.

Intimidation Cited

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

The cable said the newsmen believed a precedent had been set for increasing obstruction and violence and asked President Kennedy to obtain assurances from the Diem government that the attack would not be repeated.

In their talks with Trueheart the newsmen said that if the U. S. embassy did not protest, the Diem government would take it as a sign of weakness and order further attacks on them. They maintained that a foreign correspondent could be seriously injured or even killed as a result.

The attack on the newsmen came as some 400 Buddhist priests and nuns were leaving a small pagoda where they had been attending a ceremony and were moving to the main street through a narrow alleyway. The Buddhists found their way blocked.

A high ranking police officer began arguing heatedly with some priests, allowing the crowd to move out in the main street only in small groups, apparently to prevent them from forming a process-

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Associated Press

PETER ARNETT
... AP man roughed up

to prevent the newsmen from trying to apprehend the assailants. Police then formed a line