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Dear Ralph:

Back in Diemland again, this time for about 12 days before proceed-
to Laos, Hongkong, Manila again, and then Tokyo. I can't recall
whether I sent you my revised itinerary. In any case, I shall
be reachable at the Ambassador Hotel in Hongkong from March 15
till 19; then at the Mabuhay Hotel in Manila until the 24th. I
will be going to Naha from there for one day, en route to Tokyo.
I'll write to the Project there before leaving Saigon and let t
them know I'm coming.

Well, call it Fishel's fool luck -- anyway you look at it. I
missed the excitement very neatly. I was in Rangoon when the
planes bombed the palace here, and had just arrived here when
General Ne Win took over there. Hmph! Wouldn't you know it!
Think of being out here so close, and yet being between the two.
(I'm accused of arranging both of them, and being carefully out
of the picture on each. Sounds reasonable, come to think of it.
In Bangkok, as a matter of fact, a Thai who talked to me very
candidly later told my Embassy contact he was sure I wasn't
truly a professor)

I was interested to find that the MSU people, with a couple of
exceptions, weathered the local excitement calmly and with much
maturity, whereas some other people, including MAAG officers'
families, went haywire, became hysterical, and so on. Eleanore
Fox distinguished herself by her calmness, and she went around
her neighborhood calling on other Americans to reassure them
and to offer them any help they might need (they didn't need any-
thing but nerve injections), although she herself has again been
quite ill with a painful skin allergy and a bad bursitis in her
shoulder for which she is now receiving cortisone shots.

Although the newspapers here and elsewhere referred to the bomb-
ing of the Palace (which is thoroughly gutted and will have to
be rebuilt) as an act committed by two young pilots for personal
revenge reasons, it was not only that but much more as well.
These young men's families are members of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan
Đang, which you'll recall is a North Vietnamese political party
which lost its strength at the time of partition in 1954, but which
has been quietly reorganizing here in the south and preparing t^o

try to seize power. I think it is clear that the bombing was intended to eliminate the President, Nhu and the Madame, and had it succeeded, certain Army units would have been led by their commanders to seize key points in the city and elsewhere. Whereupon the politicians in the VNQDD, along with their military comrades, would have taken power. This group, like some others we know, is not overly savory, has no clear-cut ideology or program, and certainly is not "democratic." It is simply anti-Diem and pro-VNQDD. Now, of course, the regime will take steps to try to eliminate QDD officers from their posts in the Army and its civilians who happen to be in the bureaucracy from their positions as well. Had the plot succeeded, you may be sure they would ruthlessly have liquidated Diem's supporters wherever they found them. After all, this is the course of revolution: if you succeed, you've got it made; if you fail

The city hums with three times the usual number of rumors these days. I have been told flatly by any number of people who KNOW that Madame Nhu was killed in the bombing, as was her baby; that she is seriously ill now at a hospital in the Philippines, having been evacuated by US Air Force plane; the Diem was supposed to be out of the Palace when the bombing occurred, since it was aimed only at his brother and sister-in-law; and so on and on ad nauseam. Needless to say, this is the customary Catinat crop of crap, if you'll forgive the expression. But people believe it -- because they want to believe it. The bitterness and hatred toward the Madame in particular has become so strong and open that with all my strong feelings about her I find this almost unbelievable in its personal character and universality. Tomorrow or the day after she is scheduled to make her first post-coup public appearance, to inaugurate a memorial to the Trung sisters, on the waterfront. Who knows: she may fall in!

Everyone here talks of Diem's incredible stoicism and courage. One hour after the bombing he left on a scheduled field trip (on schedule, as a matter of fact), and two hours later he received the diplomatic corps with not even the slightest evidence of having just experienced a shocking attempt on his life. He joked with them, was relaxed and natural -- exactly as I remember him in 1957 after the assassination attempt at Banmethuot. One US air force officer told me that had the pilots released their bombs a fraction of a second (1/100, he said) earlier, Diem would surely have been killed; a fraction later, and the Nhuses would have had it. As it was, they all escaped, except for the Nhu baby's nurse. The first bomb actually fell in Diem's bedroom while he was there, but failed to explode! Mme. Nhu, rushing into the next room to rescue her children, failed in the smoke and flames to see a hole in the floor where the bombs had exploded, and fell two stories to the Palace basement. She suffered only scratches and bruises, I was told. But I'm afraid her bitterness once more destroyed whatever good judgment she has, for the Government today issued a communique (written by her personally, incidentally) concerning her injusires, that seemed to me in markedly poor taste, spiteful, nasty, and not the kind of thing that will make her any more friends or even sympathizers.

Ralph Smuckler
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I thought you might be interested in reading a letter I sent to Sid Ulmer from Rangoon about ten days ago. As a matter of fact, I've been wondering whether he ever got it, since I learned this morning that another letter, to Hai here, never left Rangoon apparently, and by the same token, Jane hasn't received one I sent her that same day. (The Rangoon postal clerks are in the habit of removing the stamps and throwing the letters away, then selling the stamps again.)

Did you ever read my letter to Hannah about Vietnam? If not, let me know, and I'll make a copy for you while I'm here or in Manila, since I think it's the sort of thing you and Glen should read.

Jane tells me the MSU termination hit page one of the Japan Times. Ugh.

Best to Glen, to Lil and Phyllis, Marge, and all.

Cordially,

Alles