



NGUYỄN VĂN THIỆU

**President of the
Republic of Vietnam**

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MAIN

I only want to preserve this land from falling into Communist hands, and to shorten the war with a just and reasonable settlement which can reduce the suffering of the people of South Viet-Nam.

I only want to forge for the nation a strong position in every field: military, political, social, so as to enable us to attain the desired peaceful settlement.



THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Nguyen Van Thieu is the second President of the Republic of Viet-Nam, and the first President under the new Republic established by the Constitution of April 1, 1967.

He was born on April 5, 1923, in the village of Tri Thuy, Province of Ninh Thuan, in the southern part of central Viet-Nam. This geographical position of his native province makes him at home with Vietnamese from every part of the country, the Vietnamese natives of the Mekong Delta as well as the natives of the northern provinces.

In 1945, at the end of World War II, as a young and ardent nationalist, Nguyen Van Thieu joined the Resistance movement to defend Viet-Nam's independence against the French attempts to reestablish colonialist rule over Viet-Nam. The movement was directed by the Viet-Minh, whose name is an abbreviation of « League for the Independence of Viet-Nam. » It made him the local youth leader and District Chief in his native province.

Thieu however discovered after a few months that the Viet-Minh movement was actually directed by the Communists, who wanted to exploit the Vietnamese nationalists in order to establish Communist rule over Viet-Nam. He realized that Communism represented the greatest danger for Viet-Nam, and decided to leave the Viet-Minh ranks, and to enlist in the Merchant Marine.

Perhaps it was not by mere chance that his first vocation was directed toward the sea, because his native village of Tri Thuy is



Trousers rolled up, President Thieu wades into the muddy field to plant the first Miracle IR-8 and IR-5 rice, significantly called in Vietnamese «Than-Nong» (God of Agriculture), «setting a new stage for a green revolution in Viet-Nam.»



His father, Nguyen Van Trung, who died recently at the advanced age of 81, was a farmer and a fisherman.

His mother, living in Saigon, had to open a small business stand to help President Thieu through high school.

Lieutenant General Thieu is seen stepping out of the home where he was born and raised. (Tri Thuy Village)





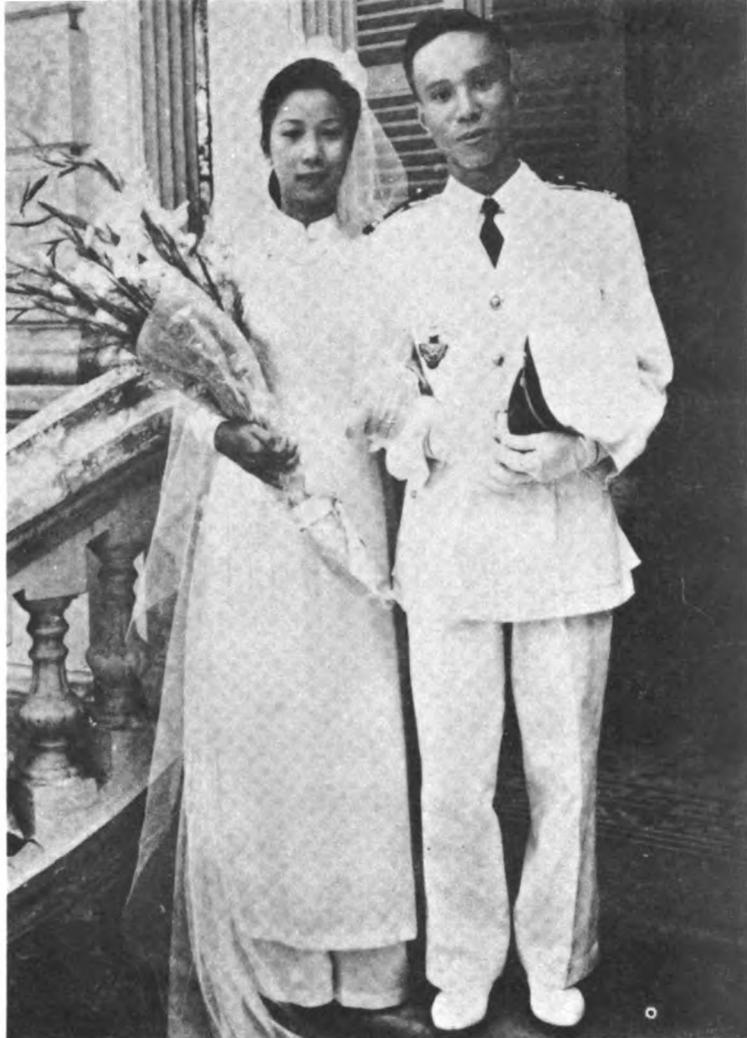
Lieutenant Thieu became instructor at the National Military Academy in 1951.

Later, Lieutenant Colonel Thieu came back to the Military Academy as its Superintendent for four years. Today, many middle-grade officers, including some generals, look up to him as their teacher.

Colonel Thieu (right), 5th Infantry Division Commander, conducts an operation against a V.C. stronghold, the Duong Minh Chau forests near the Cambodian border. (March 1963)



While fighting in Ca Mau as a company commander, Lieutenant Thieu took a ten-day leave to marry the former Miss Mai Anh of the Mekong Delta. After a short honeymoon he went back to the battlefield



on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and most of the villagers there make their livelihood from fishing in the deep blue seas which wash the vast stretch of scenic coastline of central Viet-Nam.

In 1948, the Vietnamese Nationalist Army was born, and a Military Academy was created in Hue to train the officers for the newly created Army.

As a man of action and a dedicated patriot, Ensign Nguyen Van Thieu made up his mind to apply for admission to the Military Academy. He succeeded in joining the first Officer Class of the Academy, and received his Second Lieutenant commission to become a part of the first nucleus of the Officers Corps of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam.

Throughout the Indochina War, Thieu served in practically all the major parts of Viet-Nam, from the plains in the Mekong Delta to the hilly provinces of North Viet-Nam. In 1954, at the time of the battle of Dien Bien Phu, he participated in Operation Atlante in Central Viet-Nam.

For his valor in action, Thieu was awarded the highest military decorations, including the Army Medal 1st class, the Air Force Order 1st class, the Navy Order 1st class, the Hazardous Service Medal, the Leadership Medal, and eleven Citations.

Perhaps more precious than these distinguished awards is the knowledge of men throughout the country, the team spirit, the talent for organization, and the qualities of leadership he acquired in his years of hard struggle on the front line.



In 1964, returning to the Mekong Delta as its area commander, Major General Thieu gives orders to his staff officers during an operation in Phu Quoc Island.

For experience abroad and further military training, he attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in the United States, and the Joint and Combined Planning School, Pacific Command, in Okinawa.

Recognized by his superiors for his wide experience and qualities of leadership, in 1956 Lt. Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu was appointed Superintendent of the National Military Academy in Dalat. He served for four years in that assignment, during which he trained many classes of Vietnamese Officers who today compose the middle echelons of the Corps of Vietnamese Military Officers.

In 1961, Colonel Thieu was made Commander of the First Infantry Division, responsible for the whole area of the Demilitarized Zone, Con Thien, A Chau and Khe Sanh. In December 1962, he was assigned the Command of the Fifth Infantry Division. He returned in 1964 to the Mekong Delta as a Major General commanding the Fourth Army Corps. Subsequently, he became successively Chief of Staff of the Army, Deputy Minister of Defense, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister.

In June 1965, when a civilian government facing continued unrest decided to remit the powers to the Armed Forces, Thieu's fellow officers unanimously chose him, without his seeking the office, as Chairman of the National Leadership Committee. In this position, General Thieu became Chief of State.

On June 14, 1965, upon accepting this high responsibility, Chairman Thieu, in an address to the Nation, said:

To thwart Communist aggression, we must have powerful backing, and we must have a strong Government which dares to take responsi-



Feeling at home among youth because he is a youth leader himself, President Thieu dons an ROTC cap during a visit to the Saigon University Student Division.



The President's principal concern is the welfare of his men. The wounded have a special place in his heart. He devotes part of his free time to visiting them.



President Thieu sips ceremonial wine from a long straw with a newly returned dissident Montagnard (Fulro) as a gesture of reconciliation. At his right is Prime Minister Tran Van Huong.



Elders in Viet-Nam are by tradition respected by the younger people, President Thieu is awarding a medal to an old dignitary who has contributed to the development of his village.



«Fishing gives me time to think,» says the President. On weekends, whenever possible, he goes as far as Phu Quoc Island to fish in the sea.



President Thieu gives a party for children at the Doc Lap Palace during the Moon Festival.

bility before the nation and before history, and which does not deceive or flatter the people, but strives to serve and protect them.

Chairman Thieu realized the importance of building solid foundations of constitutional democracy for the Nation.

The National Leadership Committee, under his Chairmanship, organized local elections in the villages and hamlets to restore the Village Councils, in order to allow the rural population to participate in the administration of their local affairs.

On the national level, he devoted his efforts to the holding of elections for the Constituent Assembly, so that representatives of the people could elaborate a Constitution for the Nation.

An overwhelming majority of the population participated in these elections.

In his speech at the inauguration of the Constituent Assembly on September 27, 1967, Chairman Thieu said:

The fact that 80% of the eligible voters went to the polls to elect the Constituent Assembly indicates eloquently the deep attachment of the people to democratic ideals. It shows also that the people strongly believe that the democratic system which will be installed will help speed up the achievement of our national goals, and in particular the victory over Communism, to bring back peace and happiness to the nation.

After six months of intensive debates, the Constituent Assembly voted to adopt the National Constitution. It was promulgated by Chairman Thieu on April 1, 1967. On that occasion, Chairman Thieu, in an address to the Nation, said:

The promulgation of a Constitution and the preparations for elections for a constitutional government do not mean yet the achievement of democracy, and triumph over Communism. This is only the first step on the long and arduous road toward our ultimate goals, an independent, free, united Viet-Nam, a democratic society for Viet-Nam based on justice, progress and peace.

In the subsequent Presidential elections, Thieu presented himself as a candidate on a political platform which consists of these three major guidelines: To Build Democracy, to Secure an Honorable Peace, and to Establish a Society Based on Justice and Progress.

Elected the first President under the new Constitution, President Thieu said in his Inauguration speech on October 31, 1967:

I will open wide the door to peace and leave it wide open to the North Vietnamese authorities in order to seek a peaceful solution to end the war which has caused so much suffering to the entire Vietnamese people. The end of the war will be achieved when the North Vietnamese authorities realize that their aggressions no longer pay off. We want nothing more than the withdrawal of the aggressive North Vietnamese troops and an end to their subversion and terrorism in South Viet-Nam. Then peace will be restored immediately... The increase of our entire people's efforts in this struggle will shorten the way to peace, a genuine, lasting peace that can ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Viet-Nam in Independence, Freedom and Democracy... These efforts are made not only to restore peace in Viet-Nam, but also to check the danger of Communist aggression, maintain stability in Southeast Asia and build a durable peace for Asia and the world...

In the task of building democracy, although we have made great progress and established democratic institutions in the villages and hamlets, we have to make greater efforts to complete the formation of the constitutional institutions in the shortest time possible.

In the program to reform society, the establishment of a new order based on social justice, to raise the standard of living as well as the educational level of the population is the preliminary condition to the materialization of a progressive society and to bring the country out of its present under-developed condition.

In these undertakings, I must have your cooperation. The measures I outlined to you are only the first steps in an overall program. They are the beginning of a journey into a promising future.



As President of the Republic of Viet-Nam, President Thieu, a Roman Catholic, advocates the separation of Church and State, thus keeping religion out of politics. On the left, the President is seen worshipping in a Roman Catholic Church. Respecting other faiths, he also participates in their rites by burning incense sticks during official ceremonies.



THE FIRST LADY

People meeting Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu will find themselves face to face with a traditional woman of Viet Nam — polite but reserved, self effacing, with a shy charm and pleasing manner. Her personal qualities — simplicity and natural warmth of character — have contributed much to the esteem in which she and her husband are held by the Vietnamese people. In a country where memories are long and many ancient customs and beliefs still hold firm, the First Lady of Viet-Nam bridges with composure the past and future of her country.

Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu comes from the Delta, a beautiful area famous for its fertile soil, its waters full of fish, its year-round sunshine and its amiable, easy going people. Born in My Tho in 1930 into a solid middle - class Catholic family, she was one of eight brothers and sisters whose parents were both medical practitioners. Her mother worked only for charity, earning the lasting goodwill of the poor of her province and instilling in her family a sense of devotion to this day adhered to by her daughter. The family lived simply and the children were raised in the strictest of old Vietnamese traditions. The girls attended the local Catholic convent in My Tho.

In 1949, a family group photograph presented to an old friend on the eve of his departure for France was shown by chance to a young Second Lieutenant in the Army by the name of Nguyen Van Thieu, also travelling to France.

Not knowing the family, he extracted a promise from his friend to make the necessary introductions on their return. One year later this was done and, having glimpsed only once and for a few seconds the girl in the photograph, he asked for her hand in marriage. Although a Buddhist, he was accepted by her family, but in true Vietnamese style, they were not to meet again until one year later, the day of their marriage.



The present acute crisis in our society is due to spreading violence. The Vietnamese women must counter violence by immersing society in love and compassion.

*Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu
Women Social Workers Association
June 1, 1968*



«One of the privileges I enjoy most nowadays is that I am entitled to call all the children of Viet-Nam my children.» Here a young war orphan greets the First Lady on one of her visits.

Since then, Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu has lived the life of an Army officer's wife, moving from post to post. She has had 15 homes throughout Viet-Nam where she personally took care of the housework and cooking. Her sixteenth home in Saigon's stately Independence Palace doesn't stop Mrs. Thieu from occasionally cooking herself one of the President's favorite dishes from his home province of Ninh Thuan — a spicy fish and vegetable soup called *canh chua* (sour soup).

In 1965 when President, then General Nguyen Van Thieu, became Chairman of the National Leadership Council, Mrs. Thieu became more active in public life. Her two children, a daughter aged 14 and a son of 7, running her household and aiding her favourite charities had, until then, occupied all her time. With the election of her husband to the Presidency, she began to devote almost all her free time to works of charity, particularly among the refugees.

Mrs. Thieu has long experience in social work. In 1965 she was elected the Chairman of the Association for the Protection and Welfare of Military Dependents.

More than a duty, it is quite obviously a pleasure for Mrs. Thieu to help her fellow countrywomen. She moves among the homeless, quietly talking to the women with compassion and the children with great affection. She calls each child «My child» and every woman «My sister», in terms of deference. For Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu there is little or no formality. When the people need help, she is there to help them. Whether distributing food, blankets and milk, or just talking to the people, she is one of her own South Vietnamese people, and they know it.

For them, on 1 June 1968, she founded the Association of the Women in the Service of Society to «counter violence with love and compassion».

Mrs. Thieu devotes most of her time to the relief of refugees, the war widows and orphans. She also helps to save lives by donating blood.





Shown here in the garden of their modest military quarters : left to right, 15 year-old Tuan Anh, President Thieu, 7 year-old Loc and Mrs. Thieu.

