



Burning Monk - The Self-Immolation

June 11, 1963

Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk from the Linh-Mu Pagoda in Hue, Vietnam, burned himself to death at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon, Vietnam.. Eye witness accounts state that Thich Quang Duc and at least two fellow monks arrived at the intersection by car, Thich Quang Duc got out of the car, assumed the traditional lotus position and the accompanying monks helped him pour gasoline over himself. He ignited the gasoline by lighting a match and burned to death in a matter of minutes.

David Halberstam, a reporter for the New York Times covering the war in Vietnam, gave the following account:

I was to see that sight again, but once was enough. Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of burning human flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly. Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think.... As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him.

Resources:

- The Self Immolation of Thich Quang Duc
<http://www.uwec.edu/greider/BMRB/culture/student.work/hicksr/>
- Biography of Thich Quang Duc
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thich_Quang_Duc

Execution of a Viet Cong Guerrilla

February 1, 1968

With North Vietnam's Tet Offensive beginning, Nguyen Ngoc Loan, South Vietnam's national police chief, was doing all he could to keep Viet Cong guerrillas from Saigon.



Nguyen Van Lem was captured, his hands bound, he was brought in front of the journalists. Loan pulled out his revolver and immediately executed the prisoner. Loan later insisted that this was justified because the prisoner had been the captain of a terrorist squad that had killed the family of one of his deputy commanders.

Adams won a Pulitzer Prize for a picture that, as much as any, turned public opinion against the war. Adams felt that many misinterpreted the scene and in Time Magazine stated: "The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths."

Resources:

- Voice autobiography of execution by Photographer Eddie Admas
<http://www.newseum.org/warstories/interviews/mp3/journalists/bio.asp?ID=22>

From "Social Research Quarterly"
Volume 75, Number 2, summer '08
Editor's notes:

The papers in this issue concern the related subjects of martyrdom, self-sacrifice, and self-denial. They have long and complex theological histories but would not have been chosen as our theme if they did not have an equally rich, and problematic, place in today's world. Who and what is a martyr? Does someone who inflicts needless pain on innocent others for a cause while destroying him or herself qualify? Do suicide bombers and kamikaze pilots who are lionized by their compatriots and excoriated as terrorists by their victims qualify? Or is martyrdom reserved for the likes of Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk from the Linh-Mu Pagoda in Hue, Vietnam, who burned himself to death at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon to protest the repressive policies of the Diem regime on June 11, 1963? Do hunger strikers who are protesting some perceived injustice qualify? Does the nature of the cause matter, and if so, which causes qualify? Does someone who is made to suffer for his or her ideas, who refuses to be silent even if it means risking death, qualify? What do we know about the psychology of martyrdom and self-sacrifice? Must martyrdom always be voluntary? Does martyrdom have a privileged place in most religions? These and others are the questions we hoped would be covered in this issue. But like all journal issues—which depend on the vicissitudes of the lives of those who start out committed to write and end up having to withdraw from an issue—we have been only partly successful. Fortunately, I think we have been sufficiently so. I am persuaded that anyone who reads the papers in this issue will end up with a deeper understanding of the history and problematics of martyrdom, which is pretty much all I as editor can realistically hope for.

—Arien Mack

D. DEATH SQUAD ASSASSINATIONS

1. ILLUSTRATIVE CASE: ARCHBISHOP ROMERO

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

On 24 March 1980, the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, was assassinated while celebrating mass in the Chapel of the Hospital de la Divina Providencia.

The Commission finds the following:

1. Former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson gave the order to assassinate the Archbishop and gave precise instructions to members of his security service, acting as a "death squad", to organize and supervise the assassination.
2. Captains Alvaro Saravia and Eduardo Avila, together with Fernando Sagrera and Mario Molina, were actively involved in planning and carrying out the assassination.
3. Amado Antonio Garay, the driver of former Captain Saravia, was assigned to drive the gunman to the Chapel. Mr. Garay was a direct witness when, from a red, four-door Volkswagen, the gunman fired a single high velocity .22 calibre bullet to kill the Archbishop.
4. Walter Antonio "Musa" Alvarez, together with former Captain Saravia, was involved in paying the "fees" of the actual assassin.
5. The failed assassination attempt against Judge Atilio Ramírez Amaya was a deliberate attempt to deter investigation of the case.
6. The Supreme Court played an active role in preventing the extradition of former Captain Saravia from the United States and his subsequent imprisonment in El Salvador. In so doing, it ensured, inter alia, impunity for those who planned the assassination.