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23 Oct 63

FROM SAIGON 1896

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NW24045

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IN 45567

1. AT INITIATIVE OF MAJ GEN TRAN VAN DON, LT COL CONEIN MET WITH HIM MORNING 23 OCT AT JOINT GENERAL STAFF. COVER FOR MEETING WAS DISCUSSION RECENT DEMARCHE MADE TO SECRETARY THUAN AND COL TUNG WITH RESPECT TO SUPPORT OF SPECIAL FORCES.

2. GEN DON WAS QUITE AGITATED. HE STATED THAT THE GENERALS COUP COMMITTEE HAD DECIDED TO ATTEMPT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE 26 OCT NATIONAL HOLIDAY IN ORDER TO STAGE A COUP WITHIN THE WEEK. HOWEVER, ON 22 OCT GEN HARKINS HAD CALLED IN GEN DON AND STATED THAT HE (HARKINS) HAD REPORTS THAT COL NGUYEN KHUONG, A MEMBER OF GEN DON'S STAFF, WAS PLANNING A COUP TO OCCUR ON OR ABOUT 27 OCT. (SEE USARMA SAIGON C-398*, 21 OCT 63, DTG 211055Z). GEN HARKINS ALLEGEDLY STATED TO DON THAT THIS WAS THE WRONG TIME FOR A COUP, THE WAR WAS GOING WELL AND THAT COL KHUONG SHOULD BE MADE TO CEASE AND DESIST IN HIS PLANNING. FURTHERMORE, GEN DON ASSERTED THAT WORD OF COL KHUONG'S OVERTURES TO THE AMERICANS HAD REACHED THE PALACE. AS A RESULT, THE 5TH DIVISION AND THE 7TH DIVISION, WHICH HAD BEEN COUNTED ON AS KEY ELEMENTS IN THE SAIGON AREA TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COUP, HAD BEEN EXTENDED ON THEIR OPERATIONS

PA 13-9-15

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OUTSIDE OF SAIGON BY ORDER OF THE PRESIDENT.

3. DON DEMANDED TO KNOW THE ANSWERS TO HIS PREVIOUS QUESTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE USG ATTITUDE TOWARDS A COUP. CONEIN REPLIED THAT, SPEAKING ON INSTRUCTIONS, HE COULD SAY THAT THE USG WOULD NOT THWART A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT OR DENY ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO A NEW REGIME IF IT APPEARED CAPABLE OF INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MILITARY EFFORT, ASSURING POPULAR SUPPORT TO WIN THE WAR, AND IMPROVING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE US.

4. GEN DON THEN ASKED CONEIN TO TELL THE AMBASSADOR, AS FROM THE GENERALS COUP COMMITTEE, THAT COL KHUONG WAS NOT A MEMBER OF THE COUP COMMITTEE, DID NOT REPRESENT THE COMMITTEE OR ITS THINKING, AND SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AS REPRESENTING ANY SUBSTANTIAL ELEMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE COUP COMMITTEE WILL MEET ON 23 OCT AND DECIDE ON APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINARY ACTION TO BE TAKEN WITH RESPECT TO COL KHUONG.

5. CONEIN INQUIRED IF GEN DON HAD ATTEMPTED TO CONTACT HIM THRU THE MEDIUM OF LAM NGOC HUAN. GEN DON ADMITTED THAT HE HAD. CONEIN INQUIRED WHY THE GENERALS HAD NOT THEN SPOKEN TO THE AMBASSADOR AT THE RECEPTION ON THE 18TH. DON RESPONDED THAT THERE HAD BEEN TOO MANY MEMBERS OF GEN HARKINS'S STAFF TO PERMIT ANY SECURE CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR.

6. CONEIN THEN CHALLENGED DON TO PRODUCE PROOF THAT THE GENERALS COUP COMMITTEE EXISTED OR THAT THEY HAD ANY PLAN WHATSOEVER. TO THIS, DON SAID THE GENERALS PLANS WERE WELL ADVANCED AND THAT AS PROOF HE WOULD SEEK THE PERMISSION OF THE

COMMITTEE ON 23 OCT TO TURN OVER TO CONEIN ON 24 OCT, EYES ONLY
FOR THE AMBASSADOR, THE COMMITTEE'S POLITICAL ORGANIZATION PLAN.
TO ACCOMPLISH THIS DON REQUESTED CONEIN TO MEET HIM AT 1900
HOURS ON 24 OCT IN DOWNTOWN SAIGON IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THIS
PLAN.

7. GEN HARKINS IS IN BANGKOK TODAY BUT ON HIS RETURN
AMBASSADOR WILL DISCUSS MATTER WITH HIM.

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