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Submission No.

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CONFIDENTIAL

FOR CABINET :

PROVISION OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FOR THE FRENCH
AND VIETNAMESE FORCES IN INDO-CHINA

If Indo-China falls to the Communists, the whole of South-East Asia will be imperilled. It is therefore an essential Australian interest to bolster up the French and Vietnamese Forces which are primarily responsible for putting down the Communist insurrection. The French have made it clear that they do not, in the absence of overt Chinese intervention, seek assistance in the form of troops, since this would turn their national struggle into an international one. The French do nevertheless require material and moral support. While by far the largest proportion of material assistance will come from the United States, the provision of even small quantities by Australia will demonstrate to the French our appreciation of their military efforts and our practical interest in the successful outcome of their operations.

For these reasons, before M. Letourneau, the Minister in charge of relations with the Associated States of Indo-China, visited Australia early in March, I ascertained from my colleagues in the Defence and Service Ministries that equipment as listed in Annex A was available and surplus to Australian requirements. We were in agreement that this equipment could most appropriately be offered as a gift to the French authorities, although it would need to be inspected by experts to determine its suitability for operations in Indo-China. The list was discussed in general terms with M. Letourneau

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who expressed considerable interest and said that he was prepared to send a technical mission to Australia to inspect it. I have since been informed by the French Ambassador that the technical mission is ready to come to Australia as soon as convenient dates can be arranged.

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the formal offer to the French authorities as a gift of such items of surplus equipment as are suitable for use in operations in Indo-China. It is further recommended that the French authorities be formally invited to send a technical mission to Australia to inspect the equipment and to determine, in consultation with Australian Service authorities, which items are suitable for use in Indo-China. Subsequent to such technical inspection, it is recommended that details of disposal and removal of suitable equipment be decided by the Service Ministers concerned in consultation with the Minister for External Affairs and the Treasurer.

(R. G. CASEY)
 MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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LIST OF MILITARY ETC. EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE**NAVY**

The only equipment available is :

2 million rounds of .303 incendiary ammunition.
100,000 rounds (approx.) of .303 armour piercing
ammunition.

ARMY

The following are available in limited numbers :

Landing Vehicle, Tracked 4 (LVT 4)
Australian Landing Craft 40 (ALC 40)
Gun, 6 pounder (with some ammunition)
Howitzer, Pack 75mm (with some ammunition)

AIR(a) Aircraft(1) Mosquitos (54)

These aircraft have been held under cover at Archerfield, Queensland, and are generally in good condition except that they have had some parts taken from them for use as spares. The engines have either been removed or are being removed by part of the overhaul process. These engines should be in good condition and those already removed from aircraft are stored at Archerfield. Certain items on these aircraft would require replacement before they could be regarded as serviceable.

(11) Mustangs (119)

This number of Mustangs can be divided into (a) those made in U.S.A. of which there are 52 and (b) those made in Australia of which there are 67.

The U.S.A. manufactured Mustangs have been held in open storage and are virtually useless except that spare parts may be obtained from them. The related engines from these aircraft which have been removed and stored at Toowoomba are of U.S.A. origin and may be of value to the French authorities.

The Australian manufactured Mustangs with Packard (U.S.A.) engines installed have been held under cover at Toowoomba, N.S.W., and it could be said that they are in fairly good order. Ten of them were made specifically for fighter reconnaissance duties and are therefore not standard Mustangs. The remainder are mainly aircraft recently withdrawn from British service because a number have developed internal corrosion in the coolant pipes. These latter pipes distribute the ethylene glycol

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