

S E C R E T

THE RECORD

20 Nov 63

Bohannon

Conversation with Gen Mai Huu Xuan

1. Called on Maj Gen Xuan in his office at the Hotel de Ville this morning at his request. Primary purpose was to re-establish old friendship, and for him to find out what I was doing ( he had not known until the ~~past~~ evening of the 18th that I was back in the country) and what I could do to help him. A number of points of interest emerged.

2. Gen Xuan stated very positively that the French and the Communists are working closely together in Saigon. He went on to say that there had been a well-prepared plan to take advantage of the coup, whenever it might come, with the action scheduled for two days after it. This action, he said, included student demonstrations, an effort at a ~~2~~ general strike, as well as the usual plastiquages, etc. He did not say, but implied, that there was French knowledge, or perhaps planning participation, in this affair. ~~French knowledge, or perhaps planning participation,~~ In answer to a later wisecrack about his French "friends" he grimaced, as though to acknowledge that he was well aware that he is supposed to be pro-French, and a bit later rather pointedly reminded me that I should know how close he really is to some of his "friends" as contrasted to Americans with whom he can be frank and honest.

3. Gen Xuan spoke concerning his problems as Mayor of Saigon, specifically the large numbers of refugees, including many Communists, who live in certain areas in great misery, and are ripe for trouble makers. He went on to say that, fortunately, his old contacts were still good enough so that no trouble had yet occurred, and that he ~~now~~ had trusted officers in key spots. Nevertheless, he said, he felt that action must be taken to relieve misery, and demonstrate government ability and intentions, through medical and food assistance initially. He said also that he had a special psychological warfare section which is working on this problem.

4. Gen Xuan stated that he was now wearing 3 hats, Mayor of Saigon, "Commandant d'Armes" of Saigon-Cholon, and Chief of Security, resulting in a regular 14 hour working day. He spoke with feeling about the necessity for breaking up the Can Lao, and what he referred to as the "black police", for whom he seemed unable to find any official name in English or French, referring to them by a Vietnamese term. The most immediate problem, he felt, was the necessity for "blocking off the VC from Saigon", and then gradually pushing them back in the country-side. He went on to say that there would be many more troops available for the purpose, now that the regime did not feel it necessary to keep them immobilized to protect the palace from the people and the Armed Forces.

5. COMMENTS: Gen Xuan seems even tougher than before, and still a very wily bird who feels the truth is too precious to be dispensed loosely. Nevertheless I formed the impression that he is still an intensely Vietnamese loyalist, and that he still regards Americans as the best friends of Vietnam. There were definite indications that he was not ready to speak entirely freely to me, but that he would rather evade, perceptibly, than to lie to me. There were many questions which I could have asked, and undoubtedly had answered, were it not that I wished to impress on him that I am not in the intelligence business.

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