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Defense Message for Pentagon Official

Testimony From Saigon

By MILTON BERLINER

Defense counsel for William E. Godel, former Pentagon official charged with embezzlement of Government funds, reached into the Chi Hoa prison at Saigon for one of his major witnesses.

Bui Quant Van, a Diem government official who described himself as a "political prisoner," gave a deposition here on March 2.

The questions propounded to him in Saigon by Atty. Henry Berliner, and his answers, were read into the Alexandria Federal District Court trial record yesterday.

PROJECTS

The examination centered on military projects initiated in Viet Nam by Mr. Godel and the use of U. S. funds to finance them.

Q— "Did one of them become known as the Strategic Hamlet Program?"

MR. VAN: "Yes, formally. I don't know if you know the President Diem was a Mandarin and he had the idea for a kind of paternalism. If some people do not deal with him he will get them out of office."

(Abraham Dash, Justice Department lawyer who was there for the Government, objected to the testimony as "irrelevant.")

Q.— "Did the Vietnamese government have funds to pay for these trips (to the hamlets)?"

MR. VAN: "You may understand this more than me. President Diem always urged the high American officials to pay; some from Mr. Godel, some from Gen. Lansdale, and any high officer who understands. We never believe for one second to get President Diem to give money. ... the U. S. would (produce) a whole fistful of money so our country could get it done."

CONTROL

Mr. Van testified that Viet Nam officials at that time (1951) were too much controlled by Diem's secret service.

"The only people who hel..."

particularly is Mr. Godel," he said. "Mr. Godel pay for everything."

"I know President Diem appreciated Mr. Godel but he was afraid of Mr. Godel. He said once to me that American people that come here come to make a coup."

Q.— "Can you state what Mr. Godel's general reputation was among Vietnamese officials?"

"Big," Mr. Van replied.

In cross-examination, Dash asked: "Do you consider yourself a friend of Mr. Godel?"

MR. VAN: "I hope so but after the coup I was arrested and the Vietnamese government said I was an American spy. The really bad part is they never understand. I must fight for peace."

Mr. Berliner interrupted: "I would like the record to show that at this point the witness expressed extreme emotion, his eyes became red and appeared to water."

"We must protect the American-Vietnamese rapport."

Mr. Van continued. "And if not we would all be killed by nationalists and so that means get out the idea to all Vietnamese. We must have the will to fight and so after this I must get back and maybe go to some foreign country. I don't want to stay here. They do not appreciate this man in Viet Nam."

The defense also obtained a deposition from Col. Bui Quant Trach at the Combat Defense and Test Center in Saigon. Col. Trach, an engineer, testified that Mr. Godel gave President Diem a radio, a rifle and other items.

"How do you know that?" Mr. Dash asked.

"Because I have one cousin in the palace," Col. Trach replied.

Counsel for co-defendant John A. Wylie of Silver Spring produced several witnesses yesterday who testified that Mr. Wylie had a general reputation for veracity and honesty and for being a conscientious worker.

The jury is expected to get the case today.