

F Post
9-25-75

Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has dispatched its top efficiency expert to Iran to straighten out a supply snarl, which is rapidly developing into the worst military foul-up in peacetime history.

The trouble shooter, Erich von Marbod, previously was rushed to Saigon during the final hours of the Vietnam War. He managed to salvage or destroy sensitive equipment, which the Pentagon wanted to keep out of communist hands.

Under the noses of the advancing communists, he hauled out uncrated electronic equipment on barges and flew out South Vietnamese planes. He saved the United States hundreds of millions of dollars.

Now von Marbod has been sent to Iran, as Defense Secretary James Schlesinger's personal representative, to work a new miracle.

The problem has been created by the Shah, who has squandered his oil billions on modern weapons faster than his armed forces can assimilate them. In the past two years, he has ordered a staggering \$6.4 billion worth of military hardware from the U.S.

As a result, mountains of munitions are piling up on Iranian docks and fields. Planes, helicopters and other sophisticated weapons are left in crates for weeks, waiting to be assembled.

Iranian air crews simply can't be trained fast enough to operate all the aircraft that the eager Shah has thrust upon them. They were just learning to fly the F-4s when the Shah began buying F-5Es. Before the F-5E crews are broken in, the still more advanced F-14s will begin arriving.

It will be months before Iranian crews will be able to operate some of the complex new planes and helicopters. It will take even longer to train technicians to repair the intricate equipment when it breaks down. The Iranian Navy won't be able to man some of the new destroyers for two years.

The Pentagon has already assigned 2,000 military advisers, under the command of Maj. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, to help the Iranians utilize their new equipment. But the U.S. technicians can't teach the Iranians the necessary skills as fast as the supplies are dumped on them.

The accumulation is mounting, meanwhile, with the biggest shipments yet to come. "The Shah has bitten off more than he can digest," said one source. Another conceded: "We are projecting a massive snafu."

It will be von Marbod's mission to save the Shah from his own haste. The Iranians are competent enough to operate a modern military machine once they're properly instructed. But it will take "a lot of show-and-tell," one source told us.

Von Marbod has a staff of eight crack experts, direct access to the top Pentagon brass and a reputation as a man "who gets things done." But this still may not be enough to transform Iran into a major military power overnight.

Footnote: One reason for the massive overbuying, commercial sources confide, is that most Iranian officials are corrupt. The big U.S. munitions makers keep representatives in Teheran. They are paid huge commissions, which they share with the Iranians who approve the purchases. The corrupt Iranians usually get a 10 per cent kickback; the more

purchase orders they approve, therefore, the richer they get.

DRUG FILES — The Drug Enforcement Administration has invested heavily in grease pens to black out the sensitive paragraphs from files that they are compelled to divulge under the Freedom of Information law.

Officials explained to us that convicted drug pushers are using the law to try to overturn their sentences and mobsters are demanding file searches to seek the identities of confidential informants.

One active New York drug dealer sent in a formal inquiry, for example, demanding whether he was being investigated by federal agents. The DEA held back the information for the legal time limit, and then arrested him for selling heroin just before his question would have had to be answered.

The officials claim that as high as 90 per cent of the disclosure requests come from individuals directly or indirectly involved in the drug trade. "We can't fabricate a story or fail to respond," a senior DEA official told our associate Bob Owens. "All we can do is draft gobbledegook."

With LES WHITTEN

On the other hand, the DEA censors have been using their grease pens freely to keep information from the public. We invoked the Freedom of Information law, for example, to get the DEA file on us.

The file included a Sept. 11, 1973, memo about a column we had written. "The subject article," states the memo, "indicated that Jack Anderson was in possession of classified Justice Department documents." The rest of the memo, including the name of the official who wrote it, was blotted out.

THIEU'S TRIP — The real reason South Vietnam's deposed President Nguyen Van Thieu has applied for a visa to visit Britain, according to diplomatic sources, is to settle there. He, therefore, has reached an understanding with the British that his six-month visa will be considered "open ended."

He would prefer to live in the United States, but U.S. diplomats have talked him out of it. His arrival, they warned him, might touch off demonstrations. So he is now planning to reside in Britain where his son attends school.