

Anna Chennault Talks Said Taped

By Jack Anderson

The hullabaloo over the White House tapes has raised reports of another secret tape, which could settle a great historical controversy.

Excellent sources tell us that Anna Chennault, the Chinese widow of World War II hero Gen. Claire Chennault, was picked up on tape as she allegedly lobbied with the South Vietnamese ambassador to sabotage a peace conference on the eve of the 1968 presidential election.

This election-eve peace effort might have won the close election for Hubert Humphrey. Instead, Saigon issued a statement opposing the peace conference and refusing to participate. This made the abortive peace effort look like a last-minute political trick to save Humphrey from defeat. Humphrey now believes the Saigon statement cost him the election.

Was Madame Chennault responsible for disrupting the peace effort? The facts are in dispute, but this much is acknowledged by all sources. Richard Nixon's campaign manager, John Mitchell, had asked Madame Chennault to keep the campaign informed on developments in Southeast Asia.

Bugged Embassy

This quest took her to the South Vietnamese embassy, where she spoke to then-Ambassador Bui Diem. Our

sources claim the embassy was bugged and her conversations were secretly taped.

The dispute is over what was said. Madame Chennault insisted to us that she merely sought information but said nothing about boycotting the peace effort. Our sources swear she was recorded as warning the ambassador that Humphrey would immediately pull U.S. forces out of Vietnam if he should be elected, that the Communists would take over the country and that government officials would be executed.

Her alleged statement to the ambassador, given as a representative of Mr. Nixon, was communicated to Saigon. When Lyndon Johnson learned of the taped conversation, say our sources, he was furious. His anger became more explosive when a Nixon campaign aide, Robert Finch, accused President Johnson of announcing a peace conference before he had "gotten all his ducks in a row."

The enraged LBJ, believing the Nixon camp had upset the ducks in Saigon, put through a phone call to Nixon. Our sources say that Johnson declared he was still President, accused Nixon of instructing Madame Chennault to sabotage the peace conference and threatened to expose the whole affair on nationwide television. Johnson petulantly referred to Finch as "this guy Fink."

Dirksen's Mission

Before Johnson hung up, Mr. Nixon was able to mollify him. They agreed that Sen. Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) would go to the South Vietnamese ambassador and declare that Madame Chennault was not speaking for Mr. Nixon. In return, LBJ agreed not to take to television.

But the damage had already been done. The peace-disrupting statement from Saigon, issued the weekend before the election, was never repudiated. And Nixon defeated Humphrey by a close one per cent of the vote.

Footnote: Humphrey told us he had been informed of Madame Chennault's alleged intervention but not of the existence of any secret tape. Humphrey said he sent one of his own campaign aides, James Rowe, to the South Vietnamese ambassador with a message. Humphrey directed Rowe to tell the ambassador that if South Vietnam's President Thieu did not come to the truce table and if Humphrey should be elected, Thieu "would rue the day."

Coup d'etat: An anticongress coup d'etat appears to be under way in the ranks of the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council, which advises the Secretary of Transportation on auto safety.

At the 1973 "congress," General Motors executive Trevor Jones, an industry delegate, convinced the council to hold

its 1974 symposium in conjunction with the annual convention of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE).

Later, however, some council members learned that the industry-dominated SAE would administer the entire congress. The auto men would arrange the program, fix hotel assignments and even decide which papers would be presented.

Council member Dale Hogue, a proconsumer Washington attorney, dispatched a letter to Jones expressing his concern that the council would become "an instrument of industry."

"I realize I was remiss in voting for the resolution without investigating its ramifications . . ." Hogue continued. "SAE is regarded as an extension of the motor vehicle industry inasmuch as its main body of members is from the auto industry . . . Therefore (our) relations with the SAE should be at arm's length . . ."

Since receiving Hogue's letter, Jones is reconsidering the arrangement with the SAE. The auto engineers, however, are confident that when the dust settles, the automotive industry itself may well be telling the government what is safe and what isn't. They already have begun making hotel arrangements for the 1974 joint conference.

Footnote: Hogue confirmed the authenticity of his letter but refused to discuss it.