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Chou Unveils Some Of Plot Mystery

By Robert G. Fichenberg
Executive Editor, Albany
Knickerbocker News Union Star

PEKING — Premier Chou En-lai has made public hitherto unpublicized details of the reported attempt by Lin Piao to flee to the Soviet Union in September, 1971, in fear that his plot to assassinate Mao Tse-tung had been discovered.

Lin, said to be the designated successor to Mao, was Defense Minister and deputy supreme commander. He, his wife, son and several colleagues were killed the Chinese say, when their plane crashed and burned in Mongolia. Nine bodies were found.

In an interview with 22 visiting American newspaper editors, Chou submitted the questioning on the Lin episode, the first time any high Chinese official has done so.

According to Chou, the plot never had a chance of succeeding because Lin "relied on a small handful of conspirators." He could not tell more persons for fear of a leak.

Chou said that despite Lin's designation as Mao's successor in 1969, he came to believe he really never would succeed Mao because of increasing ideological differences.

Afraid

According to Chou, Lin decided to seize power by assassination, but soon after hatching his plot he feared that his plan had been dis-

covered and decided to escape to Russia.

Chou gives this account of what happened next:

Mao and Chou learned that Lin had secretly arranged with his son, a high-ranking officer in the Chinese air force, to fly them to a hideaway at the seacoast city of Peitaiho. Chou called Lin's wife and asked why her husband wanted the plane. She said she knew nothing about it.

Mao promptly ordered all aircraft in China grounded. Lin decided to defy the order and fly to the Soviet Union in his commandeered jet. However, the navigator and radio operator failed to go along.

When the plane reached Ulan Bator, Mongolia, it ran out of fuel. The pilot tried an emergency landing. When the plane hit, one of its wings touched the ground and caught fire. All aboard were burned to death.

Helicopter

A second group of conspirators tried to escape in a helicopter but were forced down by air force planes.

Chou said Lin's first overt move came in April, 1969, when he had Chen Po-ta, Mao's former personal secretary and a fellow conspirator, draft a speech for Lin to give at the Communist party's ninth annual congress, challenging Maoist philosophy. The central committee rejected the speech and it was not given.

Lin began to indicate differences with Mao in 1969. He opposed Mao's decision to rebuild the party after the violent cultural revolution of 1967-69, and protested the decision to seek normalization of relations with the United States.

Soon after it was learned that Chen Po-ta wrote the aborted speech, he disappeared from view. This apparently alarmed Lin and led to his decision to kill Mao and to replace him with a military dictatorship.

Asked whether this incident wasn't a critical period for Chinese leadership, Chou replied: "There was nothing critical, how was it critical? His plot collapsed then and there."

Nevertheless, several intriguing questions remain:

- Why did the ordering of a plane by Lin, who as Number One man certainly had the right to a plane, arouse suspicion?

- If all Chinese planes were grounded, why did leaders let Lin's plane take off and fly toward Russia without shooting it down?

- And why have top leaders gone to such pains to emphasize that Lin had only a "handful of followers"?

When one editor asked Chou about "this jigsaw puzzle," he replied, "What jigsaw puzzle? There is no puzzle about it. It's much clearer than your Warren Report on the assassination of President Kennedy."