

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES  
FROM PETE KINSEY  
SUBJECT: INTERVIEW WITH LUCIEN CONEIN

On January 21, 1975, Senator Weicker and I interviewed Col. Lucien Conein who is currently head of special operations of the strategic intelligence section of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Conein said that he retired from the CIA in July of 1968. In 1969 he went to South Vietnam on his own where he tried to make some money through his connections there. Being unsuccessful, he returned to the U.S. in early 1971. He went to France for six weeks with his wife and returned in April, 1971. In late '71-early '72 he was contacted by the White House regarding his knowledge of drugs in SE Asia. Krogh was the first person to talk to Conein about this and asked him what he thought about the drug situation and ~~what~~ what would he do if he had the responsibility for counteracting it. In response, Conein ~~pre~~ prepared a paper outlining his ideas which he gave to Krogh.

On another occasion, Krogh asked Conein about how to go about setting up a drug intelligence organization and that although the White House was getting inputs from Customs and BNDD, he wanted an outsider to take a look at it. Conein wrote another paper stating that trafficking organizations had to be penetrated using basically <sup>same</sup> the clandestine means which had generally been employed by the CIA in SE Asia.

About the time of the release of the Pentagon Papers, Conein said he got a call from an ~~acquaintance~~ acquaintance, Howard Hunt, who said he wanted Conein to come to the White House to talk to him.

This occurred in early July, 1971. Hunt told Conein that he was

working for the President and that anything that was said between them would be covered by executive privilege. Hunt interviewed Conein at the White House and asked him about Ellsberg whom Conein had worked with in Vietnam. Conein told Hunt that Ellsberg had been highly thought of while in Vietnam - in fact - so highly thought of that Ambassador Porter had taken him on his staff. [Note - this was the meeting Hunt had installed the tape recorder under the couch and then sat on it]

Conein said he was surprised when the camera crews arrived at his house the day of the Pentagon Papers release. Conein said Bill Gill of ABC handed him a copy of the NY Times and had underlined Conein's name in the numerous places it appeared. Conein told Gill that he could not talk to him because of the security agreement he had entered into with the CIA when he had left. According to Conein, Gill then said that he knew a security man at CIA that he would call to see if permission could be given for Conein to talk. Conein said that Gill called this man using Conein's phone. The CIA called Gill back a while later and told him that Conein could not talk. Conein said that in those days you thought "holy hell" would fall on you if you talked.

Conein said he had never had any contact with Kissinger but that he had met his principal aids. He had known Haig from his days in Vietnam and recalled John Lehman's name. He said there were others but he couldn't remember their names. Conein said that Hunt had not found him in a shopping center on his way out of the country. Hunt had been trying to call him at home but Conein had changed his phone to an unlisted number so Hunt had difficulty in reaching him. Conein said, however, that Hunt called him at home. Conein said that after Gill had left, the CIA called him and asked if the press had left. When Conein told them that they had, the CIA told Conein to meet them in a bowling alley behind the McClean shopping center.

Conein said he met the CIA people at the Bowling alley where he was given a sealed envelope. He took the envelope home and opened it and found \$500 in 20's. Conein said he laughed, threw the money in the air and said to himself "Where the hell can I go on \$500?" with a wife, three kids, dogs etc. Coneinx said that he called the CIA security man and told him that he was not a CIA paid agent and that he was not leaving. He wrote a note returning the \$500 to the CIA and signed it "Luigi"

During the time the white paper on the DIEM coups was being prepared by NBC, Conein said he was called and told that the White House was interested in Conein being interviewed. Conein said that he contacted the CIA security people who gave permission for him to do the interview. Conein said that the White House wanted him to say who had actually engineered the Diem assassination. Conein said that he would not do it -- that his interest in the story was what the CIA had done to prevent the assassination. He did say that the interview, which was aired in DEc of 1971, did not come out the way it should have.

Conein said that in January of 1972, Krogh called him to the White House and told him that they had some other work for him and that they would pay him for it. The work involved writing two more papers relating to international drug trafficking. After that Krogh told Conein that they could no longer keep ~~ix~~ him at the White House and asked him if he was interested in going to BNDD or Customs. Conein said he selected BNDD because it was related to his ~~ix~~ field of expertise. Ingersoll interviewed Conein in June, 1972 after which BNDD intelligence took Conein on as a consultant until they offered him a permanent position in December of 1972.

Conein said he had never met Colson or John Scali. He said he learned of Colson posing as Fred Charliss in the telephone call as a result of the Watergate testimony.

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Conein said he never denied having seen the cables forged by Hunt. He said that there were a stack of cables - all with Top Secret classifications. He didn't read them because he did not have a security clearance. Conein said he only saw the forged cable much later at a meeting with Lambert of Life magazine. Lambert had called him and said that he had a document that he wanted Conein to see. Conein met him and Lambert showed him the cable. Conein said when he saw it that if it were true, that he (Conein) had been played for a patsy by Henry Cabot Lodge. Conein said after that he went home and on a green (secure) phone called Colby at the CIA and told him of the cable and its implications. Colby said he had never seen the cable either. Conein said the cable showed complicity ~~in~~ off the White House instructions to Lodge to have Diem assassinated. However, according to Conein, Lodge would have had to have been awake at 6 am and he knew that Lodge never got up at 6 am.

Conein said that the BNDD-CIA agreement was terminated in July of 1973.

Conein said he never saw Ehrlichman.

Conein said that after Nixon's big meeting on narcotics in 1971, the CIA formed a narcotics unit to coordinate intelligence activities. He said that for example, the CIA in Laos in 1971 were not concerned ~~about~~ about drug traffic, but that when Nixon stepped up efforts against international traffickers, action was required. Coordination was also required. Krogh was the coordinator at the White House and chaired the committee responsible for coordinating agency efforts.

At BNDD (and now DEA), Conein worked in strategic intelligence. His first job was to start assembling the necessary information to develop patterns of trafficking organizations. Conein is now heading up the special operations section which involves training individuals to go into a country (with that country's approval) to gather intelligence on trafficking organizations. Conein said that

the DEA man established the operation and when the host country approves, he goes in-country and works with the host country's authorities. Conein said that this may involve recruiting in-country nationals and supplying and training them in the use of electronic bugging and camera equipment. Conein said that he has three men on his staff and 14 individuals in various stages of training.

When Weicker showed Conein the BR Fox catalogue of assassination equipment, Conein said "Yes, sir, . . . boy, this is something. . . . This ~~guy~~ Mitch is one of the craziest SOB's I've ever met!" Conein said that about a year ago he was looking for some specialized 500 cycle bugging devices for use ~~over~~ overseas. He said that Mike Morrissey of BR Fox made such equipment. He ~~also~~ said that when Morrissey was demonstrating the bugging ~~w~~ equipment he also brought in some ~~catalogue~~ <sup>assassination</sup> devices. Conein said he didn't buy any -- that he wouldn't throw one. Conein said he did not know Barbara Fox Spindel and could not recall ever hearing of Bernie Spindel.

Weicker said that from reading the cover memo, it sounded like Morrissey was making the equipment especially for Conein. Conein said that was not true and that he would go under oath. Conein said that he has never had this type of equipment. Conein said he never showed any interest in the ASTRO like of equipment.

Conein said that in April or May, 1974 he ordered bugging equipment from BR Fox for use overseas. The equipment included 30 line telephone bugging devices, 3 telephone bugging devices, and 30 receivers. He said he still had the equipment since since it had been decided not to use it.

Conein said that he first met Morrissey in 1973. At the time Morrissey had developed a Kell unit in the shape of a large belt. Conein said he met Morrissey in the Rosslyn area where Morrissey had an office. He told Morrissey to send the belt over to Justice for them to look at. The ~~Belt~~ belt was returned to Morrissey because it was too heavy to use. Conein said he met Morrissey again in April or May of ? and told him he was interested in listening devices.

Conein said he met Morrissey a total of four or five times. He said that DEA ordered the bugging equipment from him but that he was not very reliable because he did not deliver on schedule.

Conein said that he and Mitch Werbell had been in the OSS together in China. He said that Werbel was an armaments manufacturer and that he had been to Werbell's plant outside Atlanta on two occasions. He said that Werbel was a big wheeler-dealer and that on one occasion had wanted ~~to~~ Conein to go to London for him to arrange purchase of scrap from south Vietnam. Conein said that Werbell has a fantastic weapons collection including thousands of silencers for machine guns.

Conein said that at the demonstration, Morrissey demonstrated the bugging equipment, but another man demonstrated the assassination devices. Conein said that over the years lots of people have shown him lots of devices of this sort, but he remarked that he was intrigued with these devices because they were triggered electronically instead of chemically. Conein remarked that a lot of people think that once you have been in the CIA you're always in the CIA.

Conein told Senator Weicker that he should ask for an FBI investigation and that he would voluntarily take a polygraph test. The only correspondence Conein said he had with Morrissey that he could recall was a letter of confirmation under title III of the wiretap statute that the equipment (bugging) would be used for law enforcement purposes. Conein did not know why someone would try to sell him assassination equipment, He said that there were a lot of people who thought he was more involved in things at the CIA than he really was. Weicker asked Conein if he had launched any inquiry after seeing the demonstration of assassination equipment. Conein said he had not -- that BR Fox was legally licensed and doing work for the government. Conein said that the only agency he could think of which would be interested in the ASTRO equipment would be one of the covert arms of the CIA. Conein also mentioned that he told Morrissey

after the demonstration that if organized crime ever got any of that equipment they would have a field day. Conein said that another man from his office by the name of Searle ("Bud") Frank was with him at the time of the demonstration.

I called Frank at his office at DEA and asked him if he would come join us in the meeting. Mr. Frank arrived and discussed his version of the meeting with Morrissey, which essentially confirmed what Conein had told us. Frank said the equipment was demonstrated in an office on Connecticut Avenue outside of DEA headquarters. Frank said he took an academic interest in the assassination equipment because he had never seen such equipment before. Frank feels that Morrissey may have demonstrated the ASTRO equipment as a way of testing the waters or expressing professional pride. Frank said the meeting lasted about an hour and a half. Frank had no recollection of Morrissey saying that he had sold the assassination equipment to any other federal agency. Frank said he had the feeling that Morrissey's firm was with another arm of the government.

Frank said that DEA had never approved the ASTRO equipment or its application. He said it was raised in informal discussions among the agents, but the superiors said that in no instance would such equipment ever be used. He said that as a result of recent Supreme Court decisions regarding wiretapping, it was decided that the bugging equipment they had purchased from Morrissey could not be used overseas.

At Senator Weicker's suggestion, Conein placed a call to Morrissey's office at the Watergate. Morrissey was out and Conein left word for Morrissey to call him. Conein said he would either have Morrissey contact me directly or he would get back to me after setting up a meeting.

The interview concluded at 3:00 pm.