

1963 'Document' in Hunt's Safe

Strange Kennedy 'Cable'

Washington

A document purported to be a 10-year-old State Department cable dealing with American policy toward former South Vietnamese President Ngo Diem was in the possession of E. Howard Hunt Jr., the convicted Watergate conspirator, in the summer of 1971.

The document, dated three days before Diem was killed in a 1963 coup d'etat, takes the form of an instruction from high officials of the Kennedy administration to Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. ambassador in Saigon at the time, that Diem should not be given political asylum once he was deposed.

It is not known whether or not the cable is authentic.

Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, said the document had never existed. Lodge said that he had never received such a message.

It has been reported that John W. Dean III, President Nixon's counsel, accused Hunt of fabricating diplomatic cables "relating to President Kennedy's complicity in Diem's assassination" while working as a White House consultant in 1971 and 1972.

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The documents were reportedly discovered in a safe in the Executive Office Building quarters used by Hunt, who pleaded guilty in January to conspiracy in the Watergate case. The safe was emptied two days after the June 17 Watergate break-in on orders from Dean.

The presidential lawyer has since said that he gave two file folders containing the allegedly false material to L. Patrick Gray III, then the acting director of the FBI.

According to Gray, who resigned from his post yesterday, Dean told him that the papers, although not materially related to the Watergate case, constituted "polit-

ical dynamite." Gray has said that he did not examine the documents, but instead destroyed them.

The New York Times yesterday obtained the text of one of the documents that were in Hunt's possession during the late summer of

1971. The source of the text was William G. Lambert, a former investigative reporter for Life magazine.

Lambert, who said he had seen but did not possess the original document, refused to identify his source, although he would not deny that it was Hunt.

However, the Times has established that Hunt was in fact Lambert's source for the document, which was purported to be a State department teletype message sent to Lodge on Oct. 29, 1963.

It is not known whether the document in question remained in Hunt's possession until the time of the Watergate break-in last year, or whether it was among the papers destroyed by Gray.

The alleged cable, carried six signatures, including that of McGeorge Bundy, in 1963 a special assistant to President Kennedy for national security affairs.

Bundy, who since 1966 has been president of the Ford Foundation, said in a telephone interview that the purported cable was "the crudest kind of forgery."

Lodge, when told of the alleged message, laughed and replied that although he had never received it, "I would have remembered it had I gotten it."

Hunt, reached at the District of Columbia jail through his lawyer, William P. Bittman, said he would have no comment on either the authenticity of the document or Dean's allegations.

Lambert said he had been told that the cable had been sent to Vietnam on Oct. 29, 1963, over two of the three existing communications systems — that operated by the State Department, and

another, called a "back-channel," controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The third system, controlled by the Defense Department, was not used, he said. He suggested that the Pentagon had never known of the cable's existence — hence its absence from the Pentagon Papers, a secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam war, leaked to the press in 1972.

The Pentagon Papers show that President Kennedy knew of and approved plans for the coup against Diem by a group of South Vietnamese generals.

In fact, the American mission in Saigon maintained secret contact with the generals for weeks before the coup on Nov. 1, 1963, and kept the White House informed of each development.

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