

WHAT KHANH SAYS ON PHONE

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SAIGON.

Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh said in a telephone interview yesterday that "I am a soldier and I will do what the government has ordered."

Gen. Khanh, 38, added that he did not know what position he might be given following his removal as Armed Forces commander-in-chief. "That depends on the government," he said.

The general was reached by this correspondent at the mountain city of Dalat. He said he was "completely safe, completely free, but a little bit tired."

His dismissal by his subordinates on the Armed Forces Council was, he said, "difficult to understand—I was a little bit surprised."

In talks with the opposing generals Sunday, Gen. Khanh is said to have argued that the council's vote to dismiss him was not legal since a regular meeting of the body had not been called. But in the interview yesterday he remarked:

"In this country, in this stage, it's very difficult to talk about legality."

Gen. Khanh in the past has frequently been bitterly critical of United States Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor. Yesterday, however, he said "I really don't know" when asked about the accusations made privately by some Vietnamese officers that Gen. Taylor was involved in the abortive anti-Khanh coup on Friday. The Armed Forces Council's dismissal of Gen. Khanh came after that uprising had been quelled.

Relating a subsequent narrow escape from the rebels, Gen. Khanh recalled:

"I left the meeting at noon, with the American people staying long with the Prime Minister (Phan Huy Quat). Then I went to my house to have lunch with my wife.

"When I had finished lunch quickly, about 12:40, I went to Gen. Ky's headquarters (meaning Brig. Gen. Nguyen Cao Ky, the Air Force commander) at the airport. The rebels were also going there.

"They saw me with my car and my flag (the four stars of his rank) but they did not do anything. I don't know why. Then I saw some trucks with troops, but I thought it was a normal troop movement.

"When I came to see Ky, he said armored cars had surrounded the airport area, so he and I went right away to the airstrip and took off right above the armoured cars.

"If I had left two seconds later, they would have captured me. They could have shot down my plane. I do not know why they didn't."