

telex to 94521 Alphomega Boston

~~SAIGON~~

SAIGON, NOVEMBER 18--Profocus.

Although far less dramatic than

the Paris snafu, the Saigon government has suffered another recent diplomatic setback. For the past several months, behind-the-scenes, Foreign Minister Tran Chanh Thanh has been attempting to re-establish diplomatic relations with South Vietnam's pivotal, but aloof neighbor of Cambodia. Embarrassingly for Saigon, the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front maintains propaganda and quasi-diplomatic offices in Phnom Penh. Saigon wanted the ~~xxx~~ diplomatic rapprochement with Cambodia to compete with the Viet Cong on the political-psychological side, to spy on them--and to ^{have} ~~page~~ the way for developing contacts in case either Saigon or the Viet Cong--or both--should desire secret conversations in the future on an internal South Vietnamese political arrangement. But, last week, the word from Prince Sihanouk was--no.

--more

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Profocus—page 2. For several months now, there have been reports that the North Vietnamese Army was using Soviet-made tanks to defend and keep open its Ho Chi Minh Trail supply route in southern Laos. But, last week, General Creighton W. Abrams—American commander here who is himself a World War Two armor hero²—was reportedly warned by senior field officers not to be surprised if those NVA tanks made a mad-dash raid into South Vietnam. The high-impact raid would be conducted for political-psychological purposes to escalate Hanoi's bargaining position in Paris, these officers reason, since the jungled border area is hardly by military standards suitable "tank-country." One suspected tank target, however, is the Special Forces camp of Duc Co, situated near the abandoned western end of Route 19, which is the middle of three major horizontal highways running from the seacoast through the rugged high plateau to the Laos-Cambodian borders. Duc Co is situated at the ~~the~~ ^{NUF} ~~Loa~~ on Route 19 much like the Lang Vei Special Forces camp—near Khe Sanh—was at the Laotian end of Route 9. Lang Vei was overrun February this year as the Khe Sanh siege accelerated when the North Vietnamese first introduced ~~armor~~ the use of armor in the war. And, officers told General Abrams, the Soviet-made tanks near Laos are larger than the PT-76's that overran Lang Vei.

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VIEWWE

VIEWWE Rueter Reuters cable-cut, expected to be out several days, I'm ~~can't~~ telexing these two focu focil foci. We've already ^{in November} cabled roughly sixteen thousands Reuters words anyhow, so I'm planning on mailers in the interim until hard news breaks. Please cable specific requests ~~for~~ or other instructions. ~~Situatio~~ Paris situation still too murky to write. I've airmailed ~~the~~ zeepager and will go to Bien Hoa for field interviews ^{for} half-day later this week. Regards ~~for~~ Bev.

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editorial note 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, NOVEMBER 16 —The following is excerpts and an abridgement of the official Vietnamese government's reaction to Clark Clifford's statement. This is based on a press conference with Ton That Thien, Minister of Information. There's no such thing as an official transcript of a Vietnamese press conference, so this must be considered an unofficial translation. text Also, some of the questions are summarized. We'll check over the week-end on political developments, but I don't think things are jelled well enough at this point to write about. Regards Bev.

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