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NAVY DEPARTMENT
Office of Naval Intelligence
Washington, D. C.

December 18, 1941.

SUBJECT: FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION IN THE UNITED STATES

NOTE: Prepared by the Counter Subversion Section, Office of Naval Intelligence, from reliable and authoritative information.

Information recently received from a reliable confidential source reveals that Gaston HENRY-HAYE, French Ambassador in Washington, stated during March, 1941, that a FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION had been created in France on August 29, 1940. The Ambassador stated that the French Consuls in the United States had all been advised of this law and had been advised of this law and had been asked to take steps to form sections of the Legion in their districts, in place of the present French EX-SOLDIERS' ASSOCIATIONS, many of whose members were distinctly hostile to the present Vichy principles of collaboration.

Previous information had indicated, Sept. 4, 1941, the formation, in New York City, of a United States branch of Petain's Foreign Legion, under the leadership of one Colonel Michel MINOUX, who was reported to have resigned from the FRANCE FOREVER group in anger over the Free French invasion of Syria. This group was organized after consultations between Colonel George BERTHAUD-VIGNE, Counselor of the French Embassy, who has been prominent in French espionage activities in this country, and Colonel MINOUX. Its aim was stated to be "liaison work" with French-speaking groups and Americans with French sympathies. The basic principle was to be blind obedience to the Vichy Government's policy of collaboration with Germany.

In reference to already existing FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' ASSOCIATIONS in the United States, such as the "FRENCH WAR VETERANS" with a large membership of De GAULLE supporters, HENRY-HAYE stated that there were only four existing branches in the United States: (1) New York City, with 300 members; (2) Chicago, with 70 members; (3) Los Angeles, with 45 members; San Francisco, with 120 members. He added that many French ex-soldiers were out of touch with the Legion, many having acquired American citizenship or at least first citizenship papers. He commented further that many veterans of the war of 1939-40 had not joined earlier organizations, but preferred to wait until their status had been established, both in relation to the American nationality laws and to their obligations under French law.

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FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION IN THE UNITED STATES (Cont'd)

What the French Ambassador did not point out was the obvious motive behind the new FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION in this country; the intent to maintain the ties between the recently arrived French Veterans and Vichy and to re-establish ties with older groups or win over to the Vichy cause members who were leaning toward the Free French cause.

In this connection the French Ambassador is reported to have stated that, although there is no direct conflict between the French and American law, future Legionnaires will be required to take an oath of Fidelity to France and to Marshal Petain and will thus become liable under the Registration Act of the American Government. The oath contains the following: "I freely accept the Legion's discipline, in everything that may be asked of me under this ideal". There is no indication that the "everything" of the oath will be limited to matters in keeping with the interests of the United States, but the Ambassador's apparently candid caution was a very clever touch which will also serve to protect him from future accusations. Attention was even called to the fact that the taking of this oath may give rise to criticisms by the press and the Dies Committee.

It is also stated that existing French veterans' associations have acquired large monetary reserves and function as mutual aid societies. The French Ambassador also suggested that the reserves could not be transferred to the new Legion without great difficulty and that, in some cases, the majority of members of the old associations are of American nationality and would obviously reject proposals to transfer their assets to a society to which they could not belong. Here again HENRY-HAYE pointed out that French ex-soldiers, who have become American citizens or who have taken out first papers, would immediately lose their American status on entering the new LEGION and that the recruiting of members for the new LEGION, from among this group, could not be done. Ex-soldiers retaining French nationality and living in the United States as foreigners are, and will probably remain, a minority. Under these existing conditions, it is not planned to form two different sections of the new LEGION, but to limit efforts to the formation of one group where there is a sufficient number of ex-soldiers of the two wars who are inspired with the Legion spirit. Even thus, it was suggested that the taking of the oath be deferred as long as the ex-soldier resides in America. (In other words HENRY-HAYE thus eliminates difficulties connected with the taking of the oath). By declaring their desire to join the newly-formed sections of the LEGION in the United States, ex-soldiers show their willingness to serve France and do, in fact, perform an act of loyalty to the French Government.

The French Ambassador concluded that, if his proposals were approved by the French Government, he expected to endeavor, through the Consuls, to form new groups throughout the large cities of the United States.

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FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION IN THE UNITED STATES (Cont'd)

The new LEGION has been mentioned in the American press under different translations of its French title and has been mentioned as "PETAIN'S LEGION", "FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION" and "FRENCH EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION". The French Ambassador has evidently gone to great pains to try to establish the basic principle that the new LEGION will not be a group contrary to the interests of the United States;-a very debatable point. What he cannot deny is the fact that this EX-SOLDIERS' LEGION will be in direct opposition to the efforts of the Free French to unify the French, in this continent, into a group which will co-operate with the United States, England, Russia, and China in their united war effort.

FBI, MID, State Dept. cognizant.

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