

SECRET

The British authorities have received the following information from a good source who visited Marshal Petain towards the end of April.

The Marshal was in good health but greatly discouraged by his inability to control Admiral Darlan. Feeling that he was no longer master in his own house the Marshal was thinking of moving to North Africa. He had no particular date in mind for the move; it was a question of choosing the right moment.

It was not a question of the Marshal retiring to North Africa in a state of exhaustion. Quite the contrary. The Marshal was still obsessed with the idea of power. Realising that hope of reasonable treatment at Germany's hands had been proved completely false and feeling unable to remove Darlan as he had removed Laval, there was nothing left for him but to go to Africa and carry on there. It was apparently contemplated that a number of loyal supporters would accompany the Marshal, who would make his departure a national issue.

The Marshal would apparently endeavour to take the French fleet with him but it was doubtful whether some of the officers would not prefer to obey orders given by Darlan. The crews would probably side with the Marshal.

The source of the foregoing information emphasised how important it was that no hint of the Marshal's intentions should leak out.

Although the foregoing information has reached the British authorities from a reliable source they/

they do not set any high hopes on what may have been some remarks by the Marshal indicative only of a passing mood. Nevertheless they think it would be useful to place the State Department in possession of this report. With this information in mind the United States Ambassador at Vichy might find it possible to lead one of his conversations with the Marshal to the possibility of the latter going to North Africa and might be able to encourage the Marshal to carry the idea into effect. Possibly the Ambassador could take the line that it was understandable that the Marshal should remain in France in order to test the Germans and see whether they treated France with honour in accordance with the Armistice. Now, however, it had been proved that honourable collaboration with Germany which would result in relieving the sufferings of the French population and in particular prisoners of war, was quite illusory. Must not the Marshal therefore consider the possible alternative of leaving for North Africa with the French fleet, so helping to bring the war to a successful conclusion at an earlier date than would be possible if he remained at Vichy exposed to German insults and to Darlan's intrigues and the barren consequences of Darlan's extended policy of collaboration with Germany.

May 7th, 1941