

Ex-Analyst Says C.I.A. in Saigon Gave False Reports to Newsmen

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Frank Snepp, the former analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency in Saigon, said last night that the C.I.A. and the United States Embassy there had deliberately provided American newsmen with false information about a possible "blood bath" in Saigon in the closing days of the Vietnam War.

In a television interview, Mr. Snepp said, "The whole idea of a blood bath was conjured out of thin air. We had no intelligence to indicate the South Vietnamese were facing a blood bath."

The former C.I.A. man added that Graham A. Martin, the last American Ambassador at Saigon, "began planting horror stories in the press" because he was trying, "I think, to generate sympathy for the South Vietnamese cause abroad."

Meanwhile, it was learned that officials of the Justice Department and the C.I.A. had seriously discussed the possibility of appearing in Federal District Court in Washington to seek a ban on further public comment by Mr. Snepp.

Charges Misjudgments

The former intelligence analyst, who is 34 years old, published last week, without prior C.I.A. approval, a long history of the final days of the Vietnam conflict.

In the book, "Decent Interval," Mr. Snepp alleges that Ambassador Martin and other senior officials, including Thomas Polgar, the last C.I.A. station chief in Saigon, made a series of mistakes and intelligence misjudgments that resulted in poor planning for the final evacuation of Americans and Vietnamese allies from Saigon in April 1975.

A detailed account of the allegations contained in that book, which were the basis for Mr. Snepp's interview on the CBS News program "60 Minutes" yesterday, appeared in The New York Times on Friday.

In a statement issued Friday, the C.I.A. accused Mr. Snepp of violating his security oath and his personal word in publishing his work without agency clearance. But Government officials acknowledged at the time that little could be done to prevent publication of the book, which was then being shipped to bookstores by Random House, its publisher.

In a conversation yesterday, one intelligence agency official said that he and his colleagues believed that the Government should take further steps to insure that Mr. Snepp would not disclose more intelligence information. Such steps, he conceded, were "a little bit like closing the barn door after the horse has gone."

At least one former C.I.A. employee, Victor Marchetti, who was co-author of a book on the agency that was published

in 1974, is under such a court-approved ban. Mr. Marchetti's legal attempts to win a reversal of that ruling have been unsuccessful.

"We are treading on shaky ground," an agency official observed. "It's very difficult to predict the reaction of a Federal judge."

A Justice Department official, acknowledging that such a step involving Mr. Snepp was under consideration, added that it would be "premature to say that any decision has been made."

Further discussions about what to do, if anything, about Mr. Snepp will be held today in Washington, he said.

In his television interview, Mr. Snepp provided information about the C.I.A.'s handling of the press that is not contained in his book.

He named four American reporters as journalists "favored" by the agency and embassy in Saigon.

"We would leak to them on a selected

basis," he said, "draw them into our trust and into our confidence, and then we could shape their reporting through further leaks because they trusted us."

The reporters named by Mr. Snepp in this connection were Keyes Beech of The Chicago Daily News, Robert Shaplen of The New Yorker magazine, George McArthur of The Los Angeles Times and Wendell Merick of U.S. News & World Report.

Mr. Merick, asked for comment, depicted the Snepp description as "a gross exaggeration" and added:

"The C.I.A. probably made itself a little

more public in Vietnam. They were another arm of government with a point of view, and it was up to you whether you accepted their information or you didn't. If you did, you could be accused of being called a lackey. It can happen to you if you go to the State Department or the White House, and if you take their line."

Mr. Beech responded: "All I can say is that in this business, you talk to anybody and you do the best you can and I'm happy to be in the company of the accused."

Mr. Shaplen and Mr. McArthur were in Southeast Asia and could not immediately be reached.

Mr. Snepp also said that Malcolm W. Browne of the New York Times was among the reporters who were provided with misleading C.I.A. information about the chances for a last-ditch negotiated settlement in the final days of the war.

Mr. Snepp described Mr. Browne as one who "bit all this, hook, line and sinker," adding, "We were using Browne to pass messages to the Communist delegation at Tan Son Nhut."

He said Mr. Browne "was not operating as a C.I.A. operative or agent" but probably "behaving as he thought a good citizen ought to behave."

He conceded during the interview that Mr. Browne may have seen himself as simply a good reporter with a very good source, adding that "it would have been impossible for him to know" that he was being given inaccurate information.

Mr. Browne, who covered Vietnam for a total of about eight years, sharing a Pulitzer Prize in 1964 for his work there for The Associated Press, acknowledged that during his final weeks in Saigon he had relayed information between the C.I.A. and the Vietcong with the knowledge of both parties "because it seemed to me there were some duties in addition to journalism that could be performed."

"Since I was passing that information along to The Times in my dispatches," he added, "it seemed to me there was no compromise of journalistic principles."

Mr. Snepp also said in his television interview that he knew a "foreign journalist" paid by the C.I.A. whose articles were published in the Times and in other newspapers. He refused to name the journalist on the ground that he is "against dealing with sources and methods explicitly," but he said that the journalist in question was still publishing articles.

A spokesman for The New York Times said: "We have no idea which 'foreign' journalist Mr. Snepp was referring to."

In 1976 and again last September, The Times formally requested, under the Freedom of Information Act, that the agency disclose any information it had regarding past or present relationship between it and the newspaper or the newspaper's employees. The C.I.A. has refused to provide such information but said in 1976 that it no longer enters into such arrangements with part-time or full-time correspondents for American publications.

NEW YORK TIMES,

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1977