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FOR PEACE
CORPS

The Morning Show

WBKB-TV

October 27, 1966 - 8:00 AM

Chicago

POLITICAL NOVELIST DISCUSSES PEACE CORPS & C.I.A.

JIM CONWAY: "This is a copy of "The ZinZin Road," a novel by Fletcher Knebel, who also wrote "Night at Camp David," and the co-author of "Seven Days In May" and "Convention." He's one of the country's top political reporters, and currently, I would say, our leading political novelist.

"It's the story, basically, of the Peace Corps and people in the Peace Corps in the mythical country of Kaya(?) which is in Africa. How mythical is it, Mr. Knebel?"

KNEBEL: "Well, it's -- it's a synthesis, I'd say, of five or six West African countries. Incidentally, I ought to tell you that I'm more an all-purpose guest (LAUGHTER) you can use this for television, or cocktails in the evening, the only thing you can't do is you can't write a book in it."

CONWAY: "You have to take your coat off for that."

KNEBEL: "Yes."

CONWAY: "Speaking of taking your coat off, you did quite a bit of research on this, didn't you?"

KNEBEL: "I was over in West Africa for the Peace Corps for five or six weeks, in the spring of '65. I had no idea of writing a book, but I got about half way through my Peace Corps chore and I said, 'This is goo good to keep in a stuffy government report, I'm gonna write a novel about it.'"

JULIE WILSON: (Co-hostess on show) "How long did it take you, all-in-all?"

KNEBEL: "Takes me about a year to write a book, writing every day from about eight A.M. until one P.M., then I've had it, that's enough writin' for one day."

CONWAY: "Well now is there as much -- to use a -- a -- kinder term, hanky-panky, going on as you indicated?"

KNEBEL: "Ah -- I don't like that word too much, Jim, but yeah. I -- I think that the view of the Peace Corps at home, the general impression I get by talking to people is that it's kind of a bland outfit, and a bunch of young kids who're somehow wanderin' around the world doing good. Actually, although we don't like the term in this country, it's a very revolutionary organization, in this sense, that in most countries, under-developed countries, the government in power is either a military junta, a dictatorship, or a form of democracy that you wouldn't recognize. Now that's not always, it's not true in the Phillipines, but in most of them.

"Therefore, the Peace Corps gets on the ground, trying to help the folks on the bottom, and all of a sudden they find themselves emotionally and intellectually inclined against the government at the top. So in a sense they are a revolutionary element.

"And the -- the theme of "The ZinZin Road" is that the young people get on the side of an insipient tribal revolt and all of a sudden find themselves at odds with our own C.I.C. and State Department -- C.I.A., rather. And I'm sure that there's -- that's gonna happen in a big way in some country and it's going to be rather explosive. In fact, I wouldn't doubt if the Peace Corps got kicked out of some..."

WILSON: "Really?"

KNEBEL: "Well I think so. Someday. I don't know when. There -- there have been incidents that have never been in the press, small incidents, but it's natural. If you're working with the folks at the bottom and the folks at the top are trying to grind them down..."

(VOICES OVER-LAPPING)

WILSON: "I was just going to ask you if Sargent Shriver has reacted to your book."

KNEBEL: "I don't know whether Sargent Shriver has read it, Jack Vaughn, the current head of the Peace Corps has read it. Shriver's so involved with Adam Clayton Powell, I don't think he has time to read his own reports."

CONWAY: "What was Vaughn's reaction?"

KNEBEL: "I understand it was very good, I -- some people in the Peace Corps did not like it, of course, it really isn't out 'til Friday and so there hasn't been much time yet."

CONWAY: "Well are the -- the C.I.A. people as readily recognizable as you seem to indicate?"

KNEBEL: "Um -- yeah, the -- in a small country especially the 'spook' is pretty well known and his assistants. Now that's a funny thing. In -- in many countries the -- ah -- people in the government are convinced, some of the people, that the Peace Corps

are C.I.A. types. My own belief is that there isn't a single hidden C.I.A. person in the Peace Corps. Jack Kennedy at the start was adamant that it could not be used for intelligence, for spying, for obvious reasons. You can't have a man go over, or a young lady, to do good, and function in a humane way and really be spying, why it'd be a disaster.

"Nevertheless, in some countries there's no question that the C.I.A. adroitly has tried to get information from the Peace Corps volunteers because they're so close to the people and the people trust them. They trust the Peace Corps more than they do their own government officials, by far, or each other, which is a beautiful thing, really."

WILSON: "How important is the C.I.A., really, to the formulation of the U.S. foreign policy?"

KNEBEL: "I think it's extremely important. And what disturbs me about the C.I.A. is not so much its activities abroad, but what it does here at home. I -- I -- for instance, I would be appalled if you were a secret C.I.A. agent, for whatever reason, because you purport yourself to be a television commentator. Or if I, as a writer, if this book were covertly propaganda for the C.I.A.. I think it's appalling. Now, when for gathering of intelligence abroad, and they have to resort to dirty tricks, both sides do it, that's -- that's all right. But to taint and corrupt university faculties, I -- I just think it's awful. And -- and there are -- are a couple of organizations, I'm not sure of it, but of the caliber of the Red Cross, where the C. -- I don't mean the Red Cross, but of that caliber -- where the C.I.A. people are. This is an open society, and I just don't think we oughta have intelligence agents spying in our own nest."

WILSON: "I don't either, it is appalling."

CONWAY: "But outside the Republic you feel that it is necessary?"

KNEBEL: "I -- I do, but I -- I -- I think it should be under a tight line. I -- I've talked to some ambassadors, and apparently when the ambassador is a tough guy and he calls the C.I.A. head in and says, 'Look, I want to see every one of your cables, I don't want you doing anything that I don't -- haven't put my stamp of approval on,' and it works, because most C.I.A. people abroad are good."

"But, when the ambassador takes the position, 'Well, that's kind of dirty work and black operation, I'd better not know about it,' whew, then they can run hog wild. Wow."

CONWAY: "How can we avoid helping some governments which to us seem unsavory? For example, some of these juntas you were talking about?"

KNEBEL: "That is really the big dilemma of U.S. foreign policy, and it gets us into something like Viet Nam finally when a lot of us get killed. It -- it's hard to know, because, certainly we can't go around over-throwing governments. It's a -- it's a long term thing. For instance, I have -- I have a clear feeling that if in Cuba instead of supporting Battista with all manner of economic props, if we had made it pretty clear to the Cuban people we were against Battista but would do nothing to overthrow them that was -- him, that was their business, and had the kind of programs that we're now belatedly starting in Viet Nam to raise the standard of living, I don't think there'd ever been a Castro.

"Furthermore, I think the Cubans would have -- they liked us pretty well, they don't now."

CONWAY: "But on the other hand, though, Cuba's standard of living is probably at least the second highest in Latin America."

KNEBEL: "Yeah, but that's deceptive, Jim. I -- I think -- were you in Cuba? I wasn't. I travel around a little bit, that's true. But when you say that that was the -- I think that Cuba has about eight million people, you're talking about a million people, about seven million at the bottom, where it was rough. Now the -- I think the beautiful thing about the Peace Corps is that they do, in very small ways, and you can't expect too much of the Peace Corps, there are only 11,000 of them abroad. But in their little villages they do their best, and it's really heart -- heart warming."

CONWAY: "The ZinZin Road, by Fletcher Knebel. You probably have some questions of Mr. Knebel, if you do remember our phone number and phone them in."

CONWAY: "Question for Mr. Knebel. A man from the North Side. Aren't there a lot of beatnik types in the peace corps?"

KNEBEL: "There are a few young men who wear beards, but I don't consider a beard necessarily to equate with everything that goes with Beatniks. No, there're not very many. In some countries they have a little argument on the staff, they make the boys shave off beards, that upsets about 9% of the young men. I don't think it's anything to worry about. What's wrong with beards?"