Supersnoop

When the New York *Times* last week published its dramatic story on the CIA's domestic snooping, the article and those that followed carried a familiar byline: Seymour Hersh. At 37, Hersh ranks as an almost unrivaled master of the governmental exposé. Woodward and Bernstein have Watergate, but Hersh's revelations over the past six years read like a historic road map to a generation: the massacre at My Lai, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's wiretapping of his aides (Kissinger has called him "my nemesis"), Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia, the Pentagon's pilfering of Kissinger's documents, the CIA's involvement in Chilean President Allende's downfall.

The honors have been commensurate. For the My Lai exposures, Hersh earned the Pulitzer Prize, the George Polk Memorial, the Sigma Delta Chi and the Worth Bingham awards. He also collected another Polk, a Front Page and a Scripps-Howard Award for his disclosure of the U.S. bombing of Cambodia.

What makes Sy Hersh gallop? He explains it in his expansive way: "I'm smart and I work hard." Hersh was brought up in a middle-class Jewish family in Chicago (his father ran a dry-cleaning shop). "I had a happy enough childhood," he told one interviewer, "lived for baseball, had no idea what I wanted to be." Which may explain why Hersh, a B student at the University of Chicago, dropped out of law school after a year and drifted into journalism in 1959. He ended up with the Associated Press but abruptly quit when it cut his piece on chemical and biological warfare from 10,000 to 1,700 words.

Incredible Story. After an unsuccessful stint as Eugene McCarthy's press secretary in 1968, Hersh picked up a tip and traveled 30,000 miles around the country to track down 45 participants in the My Lai massacre. However, he failed to peddle the story to several national magazines because he was relatively unknown and the story seemed so incredible. Finally, David Obst, manager of the Dispatch News Service, a loose confederation of anti-Establishment freelancers, broke the story by selling it to 36 papers in the U.S. and abroad. In 1972 the New York *Times*, which had once turned down Hersh, hired him as an investigative reporter.

Hersh's complex personality seems suited to his work. He is in turn talkative, churning, abrupt, zealous, egotistical and abrasively honest. His impact is like a blast of air rushing in and out of the insulated corridors of Washington's secretive institutions. On a story, he goes day and night: tousle-haired, tie askew, he searches out sources high and low, working the phone, visiting homes, establishing rapport—often among junior staffers—and furiously scratching notes (he does not use a tape recorder).

Hersh takes an almost jaunty view of his forays: "Being an investigative reporter is like being a freak. You're trying to get information other people don't want you to have. I don't make deals, I don't party and drink with sources, and I don't play a game of leaks. I read, I listen, I squirrel information. It's fun." One

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NEW YORK *TIMES* REPORTER SEYMOUR HERSH
A blast of fresh air in secret corridors.

government official describes his technique as one of sheer persistence: "He wheedles, cajoles, pleads, threatens, asks a leading question, uses little tidbits as if he knew the whole story. When he finishes you feel like a wet rag."

Hersh claims that he is not an ideologue or a crusader. However, Obst remembers asking him during the My Lai story why they were working such long hours. Hersh answered: "So that people will know the truth. So that things can be changed."

True to his investigator's trade, Hersh will not reveal his sources for the CIA story except to point to "the red flag" raised by Young Turks in the CIA. He says that he prepared himself "by reading everything I could get my hands on," including old books like Kim Philby's *My Silent War*. "But," he adds, "all of the story came from my interviews."

There is a strong likelihood that Hersh's CIA story is considerably exaggerated (*see* THE NATION) and that the *Times* overplayed it. So far, Hersh has failed to name one of the 10,000 citizens whom the CIA allegedly watched nor does he explain what kind of surveillance the CIA used. He is unclear on whether Nixon instigated the CIA abuses or followed old agency practices. He also fails to say whether the CIA briefed congressional leaders on the plan. Hersh is a thorough researcher, but he once made one beaut of a mistake on Watergate. In May 1973, he wrote an article in the *Times*, which he now deeply regrets, quoting a number of Watergate sources as saying that Dean had not implicated Nixon in the cover-up.

Hersh, who lives in a comfortable house in the Cleveland Park section of Washington, will move to New York next fall when his wife enters New York University School of Medicine. He intends to stay on at the *Times*, with which, as an inveterate anti-institutionalist, he maintains a love-hate relationship. What he admires is the "impact" the newspaper has: "That's my heroin."

Hersh thinks journalists have not yet learned the lessons of Watergate: "We're back to writing handouts." But what will he do next? "It might be interesting to try politics. Or maybe I'll dig into the multinationals. I just don't know."

Shrinking Freedom

The International Press Institute (IPI), the 23-year-old organization founded in Switzerland to protect beleaguered newsmen round the world, has issued its gloomiest annual report. IPI finds the world press in 1974 "under open attack on all fronts."

Here is IPI's scorecard:

In South America, Uruguay, Peru, Brazil all have a muzzled press; Bolivia and Argentina are heading that way; and Chile's newspapers have dwindled from eleven in the days of Allende to five today.

In Africa, the government-controlled press dominates the Ghana scene, but Nigeria has "the freest press in black Africa"; Egypt, where the picture is brighter, has lifted every restriction but military censorship.

In Asia, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines all get poor marks. In Europe, IPI applauds the arrival of press liberty in Turkey, Greece and Portugal, sees some liberalization in Yugoslavia, but no change in Spain. As for the Soviet bloc countries, IPI simply says freedom of the press does not exist there.

The world's standout performance, according to IPI, was the role played by the U.S. press in the Watergate scandal. "The U.S. press," the survey concludes, "showed the world that the United States is a democracy conscious of its values and ready to defend them."