5/10/89

Dear Sam,

I think I told you I'm reading Neil Sheehan's A Bright and Shining Lie, about our adventures in Vietnam, although it is a biography of John Paul Vann.

I've made a copy of page 415 for you. It did 't copy completely but what I want to call to your attention is clear enough

He refers to the creation of the American Friends of the Middle East and indicates that was in 1947 or 1948. He also says it was financed by the CIA.

It thus has to have been one of the CIA's first such projects and I think it is interesting that so early in its existence it was clandestinely anti-Israel Israel.

The extent of the CIA's control is indicated on 496-7: it could and it did fire the pedophile who'd organized it.

At that time, when it was organized, Truman hud just established the CIA. It was that new. And some in it were already so anti-Israel they got the first such outfit (" the first major organization to lobby for the Arab cause")established and they continued to finance it.The time frame for 496 is the LBJ years.

I am not suggesting that the CIA was doing Truman's bidding and I doubt he was aware of this or most such projects.

I think this does say something about the CIA.

Best,

Harold

liked trucks and buses best and would pick a big bus out of the traffic.

One evening in the fall of 1938 when they had been friends about a year, Crutchfield came by to pick up John. He was waiting on the porch. Crutchfield could hear Myrtle inside the house screaming obscenities at Frank Vann. "Let's get out of here," John said. "She's raising hell."

He told Crutchfield that he was in despair. He couldn't stand living at home any longer. He didn't know what to do. He was thinking of running away. It seemed to be the only alternative. Crutchfield had seen enough to be convinced that John would run away, and if he did there was no knowing what would happen to him. Even if he did not run away, Crutchfield thought, the anger that Myrtle kept building within him would sooner or later burst out in self-destructive acts that would get him into trouble with the law. A young minister had taken over the Methodist church to which Crutchfield and his family belonged. He was stirring the whole congregation with his energy and ideas. Crutchfield took John to see him.

The minister's name was Garland Evans Hopkins. He was a man of charisma and contradictions, and he became the closest figure to a father Vann ever knew. Hopkins was a scion of one of those antique Virginia families—the Evanses on his mother's side—who were rich in pedigree and short in coin. He saw himself as an aristocratic champion of the downtrodden. He was to attain a reputation of sorts before his premature death twenty-seven years later. The Methodist Church sent him to Palestine in 1947 to assess the conflict between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionist Jews who were creating the state of Israel. Hopkins came away from the experience convinced that the victims of Hitler's Holocaust were in turn victimizing the Palestinian Arabs. He became the principal American advocate of Palestinian rights in a period when it was fashionable to sympathize only with Israel and built the first major organization to lobby for the Arab cause and to promote relations with the Arab states—the American Friends of the Middle East. The CIA clandestinely financed the organization but Hopkins ran it.

When Gene Crutchfield brought his troubled friend to Hopkins in 1938, Hopkins was twenty-four years old and in charge of LeKies Memorial, the Methodist church in the Atlantic City neighborhood. He had taken over the parish the year before and wore a mustache to try to make himself look older. It complemented his horn-rimmed glasses and added a bit of distinction to an otherwise unimpressive medium height and build. Hopkins's father and grandfather had been Methodist ministers, but tradition was not the reason he had dropped out of law school and entered the ministry. He had been attracted by the ideas then being promoted within the Methodist Church in Virginia. They were ideas of the kind that are now taken for granted in American life—nutrition and welfare support for dependent children; free medical care for the impoverished and the aged; the right of workers to organize a union, to receive a minimum wage, to strike; interracial cooperation. In the Virginia of Hopkins's youth all of these ideas were new and "liberal," and they were radical where labor and race were concerned. His first assignment in the ministry had been as social-work director at a church in a Richmond slum which was being used as a center to experiment with relief and welfare programs. He had then been sent to LeKies to put his experience to work in Atlantic City.

The Depression had fostered receptivity to change at the lower level in the urban South. The working-class congregations of the period liked having a minister who was "progressive." The content of Hopkins's sermons was not the only innovation that had made him so popular at LeKies. His dynamism suffused every aspect of church life from worship to social work, and he led in whatever he did. The choir improved, because Hopkins was an accomplished pianist and taught its members to sing better. The church did not have a Boy Scout troop, and so he started one, made himself the scoutmaster, took the boys on camping trips, and joined them in earning merit badges for lifesaving and other skills. He told terrifying ghost stories around the campfire. The boys were as enthusiastic about him as their parents were.

It is apparent from what Crutchfield saw and from the subsequent relationship between Hopkins and Vann that the fourteen-year-old boy unburdened himself to the young minister as he had not done to any other man. Crutchfield had been struck by the high intelligence Vann displayed in understanding the relationship between Myrtle and Frank Vann and wanting to break free. Another boy caught in his predicament might not have been able to perceive the source of his troubles so clearly. Hopkins saw that this was not only a boy who wanted to be rescued, but one whom it would be particularly sad to lose. In a letter written not long after they met he spoke of what "an exceptionally bright boy" Vann was. He brought Vann into his congregation toward the end of 1938 by having him join eleven other young people and adults who stood up at a Sunday service and professed Christian faith. Hopkins also persuaded him to enter the LeKies Boy Scout troop. Vann's troubles had led him to drop out of the first troop he had joined at his grammar school.

home to tell Mary Jane: "I will never live with you again." Maxwell Taylor, who had resigned the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in mid-1964 to replace Lodge as the ambassador in Saigon, vetoed the appointment. A cable from the embassy informed AID that Vann was "too controversial." Vann offered to go as a simple province pacification representative. The embassy replied that Vann was not wanted in any capacity. He said that he would go to Thailand, where a minor insurgency was then underway, if he couldn't go to Vietnam. The officials at the Far East Bureau said they would think about his offer.

Mary Jane realized that he had to return to Vietnam for his own survival. She had never seen him as despondent as he became during the winter of 1964–65. He "took to the bed," as the old Southern expression has it. He lay on the couch in the living room for hours at night and on weekends, staring at nothing. He no longer walked the way her John had always done, swinging a leg forward as he strode into life. He walked more slowly that winter and let his head droop. He was, she could see, losing his self-respect and his faith in himself.

As usual, he did not give up entirely. He appealed to Lodge and York to intervene for him. He persuaded the officials at the Far East Bureau to ask Taylor to reconsider. He even wrote Taylor a friendly letter describing his efforts to maintain public support for the war with his lectures and interviews on Vietnam.

He was rescued by a fellow Virginian who admired him—the Sam Wilson who had heard Churchill's voice over the farmhouse radio in 1940 defying the Nazis and walked seven miles through the rain to join the National Guard. Twenty-five years later Wilson was an Army colonel in Vietnam, detailed to AID as chief of its pacification program. He had been Lansdale's assistant at the Pentagon during Vann's briefing campaign there in 1963. Wilson had been amazed then by the brilliance of Vann's critique, and the two men had immediately liked each other. He did not learn Vann was attempting to return to Vietnam until he saw a copy of the message from the Far East Bureau asking Taylor to reconsider. Wilson went to Taylor and said they could not afford to reject a man of Vann's qualities. Taylor relented. Vann could come as an ordinary province pacification officer.

Vann had a cruel encounter with his youth just before he left. While in Washington in February and March for three weeks of processing and orientation lectures at AID headquarters, he stayed with Garland Hopkins at Hopkins's house in the Virginia suburb of McLean. Hopkins had been destroyed by his pedophilia. The CIA had fired him as head of the American Friends of the Middle East, the pro-Arab lobby that

he had built and that the CIA secretly funded. He had then been dismissed as pastor of a prominent church in Arlington and also removed from the Virginia Conference of Methodist ministers, in which his father and grandfather had held honored places. His wife had divorced him because he had taken to beating her and their youngest son under the stress of his disgrace. He still could not control his obsession and molested some boys in his neighborhood. The parents complained to the police, and this time he was going to be prosecuted. He could not bear the shame. He wrote out his will and an obituary listing his accomplishments. He also wrote a note to Vann, and then he took a rat poison containing strychnine, inflicting a painful death on himself—strychnine kills with convulsions. Vann found Hopkins's body when he returned to the house on a Sunday night. The note asked Vann to distribute the obituary to the newspapers, listed family members and friends for Vann to notify, and also asked him to see to it that Hopkins's body was cremated. Vann called the police and then did as his boyhood mentor asked. "Let these few chores be a last token of our long and splendid friendship," the note said. The horror of it made Vann more eager than ever to be gone.

Martin Marietta put him on a leave of absence, because his AID appointment was a temporary one. Washington did not expect the war to last long. His conscience was clear about Mary Jane and the children. He had them settled in the house in Littleton, and his contract with AID entitled him to fly home once a year at government expense to visit them for thirty days.

He took the Pan American jet west out of San Francisco along the route that the nation had followed into Asia in the previous century—to Honolulu, to Guam, then to Manila, and then on to Saigon, this new and contested place. Shortly after 11:00 A.M. on Saturday, March 20, 1965, his plane circled high over the city and then banked down sharply to the runway at Tan Son Nhut to avoid the guerrilla snipers who were now all around Saigon. He walked out of the air-conditioned cabin and down the ramp into the heat and humidity, which were at their worst just before the monsoon season. The discomfort felt good to him. He had been gone almost two years—twenty-three months and two weeks. He would never be away from the war that long again. He was back in Vietnam, where he belonged.