

Ex-Agent Interviewed

CIA Drug Cover-Up In Vietnam Alleged

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The U.S. Embassy in Saigon protected some senior Vietnamese officials against investigations by American narcotics agents because the officials were important to the United States, according to a former CIA agent.

Frank W. Snapp III, the author of a controversial new book that accuses American officials of mishandling the April 1975 evacuation of Vietnam, said the CIA "frustrated various probes into the drug problem from time to time whenever an important agent . . . was involved."

Snapp noted that "in recent years, the CIA has had reporting responsibilities on the drug question abroad. There is a conflict of interest," he declared.

"Sometime we don't want a drug trafficker arrested because he's operating as an agent. So the trafficker is not arrested."

Snapp wrote "Decent Interval," a book about the two years between the 1973 Paris agreement that was supposed to halt the Vietnam war and the fall of Saigon. The CIA charged Snapp Friday that he had violated his secrecy oath and a personal pledge to its director, Adm. Stansfield M. Turner, by publishing the book without the agency's clearance.

THE CBS TELEVISION program "60 Minutes" yesterday broadcast an interview with Snapp that was filmed a month ago. At that time, the book was being printed secretly, so the interview with Mike Wallace was kept secret until Random House had distributed 17,000 copies of it.

Snapp, who worked briefly for Wallace in 1966 before joining the CIA, has not been available for other interviews.

The book did not mention the large, well-organized narcotics trade that went on in Vietnam. The trade seemed to reach a peak in the early 1970s when many U.S. soldiers became addicted to drugs. It was never clear whether the underlying motivation for the trade was simply profit for corrupt South Vietnamese officials or a North Vietnamese attempt to weaken American forces while making a profit for the Communist war effort.

Wallace asked Snapp about "talk

Snapp replied. He did not specify whom he meant.

SNEPP ALSO SAID that American journalists were used by the CIA and then-U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin to spread false information about the imminent Communist takeover.

He said journalists who were "used" by the U.S. government were Keyes Beech of The Chicago Daily News, George McArthur of The Los Angeles Times, Robert Shaplen of The New Yorker, Bud Merick of U.S. News & World Report and Malcolm Browne of The New York Times.

Snapp said none of the journalists were CIA employees or operatives and were unaware that the information being fed them was false.

Merick said the Snapp description was "a gross exaggeration."

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."

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

Snapp described Browne as one who "bit all this, hook, line and sinker." He said that Browne "was not operating as a CIA operative or agent" but probably "behaving as he thought a good citizen ought to behave."

Browne could not be reached immediately for comment, but CBS News quoted him as acknowledging that he carried information from one side to the other during the final days of the war. Browne further was quoted as saying that he had probably been "had" to some degree by both sides, in the final chaos.

SNEPP TOLD WALLACE there was in the Ford administration "a concerted effort to suppress information on the collapse" of Vietnam. The CIA tried to whitewash its role by leaking favorable material to the press, thus making "a mockery of the secrecy system," he charged.

He therefore regarded the secrets as having been declassified and available for him to write about, Snapp said.

Anyway, he explained, the secrecy agreement he had signed when he went to work for the CIA has "a clause there that requires or specifies an officer can go and register his complaints with appropriate authorities in the agency."

"I wanted not to go public. I wanted to do my after-action report on the inside and was rebuffed at every turn.

"I feel I have met my obligation," Snapp said.

At the CIA's request, the Justice Department is now studying whether to prosecute Snapp on charges of violating his secrecy oath. Official sources as well as private lawyers have expressed doubt that any prosecution can succeed under these circumstances.

that Marshal Ky (Nguyen Cao Ky, a former air force head, premier and vice president of South Vietnam) was involved in the drug business, not just in Vietnam but in Southeast Asia." Ky's political position had been built up in the 1960s by the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, but he was later sidetracked in favor of Nguyen Van Thieu.

"These gentlemen at the top of the Thieu government, and during Ky's time, were being protected by the embassy against investigations by . . . American narcotics agents,"