

Saigon Dope Dealers Riding High

By Jack Anderson

The feverish U.S. effort to build up the South Vietnamese Air Force, apparently, is giving wings to the opium smugglers in Southeast Asia.

This is the ironic conclusion to be drawn from a new, highly classified General Accounting Office report on worldwide opium traffic. Numbered copies of the 151-page document, classified "Secret," have been distributed to a few top administration and congressional leaders.

The report declares bluntly that "the Vietnamese military, especially the air force" could not be trusted and should be subjected to tougher "customs controls."

Thai dope runners are working with the air force brass, the report suggests, to smuggle opium into South Vietnam by air. But Vietnamese officials have been unable to stop it because "there were just simply too many military airfields (about 300) and too few customs officials."

Yet the U.S. has been turning over to the South Vietnamese Air Force the very types of planes most useful for transporting illegal drugs. These include fat C-130 transports, UH-1 helicopters and prop-driven, A-1 fighters.

In the gloomiest assessment we have ever seen of the dope problem in Vietnam, the secret report contradicts official propaganda about South Vietnamese-American cooperation on narcotics and, cites esti-

mates that "only an insignificant amount of heroin had actually been interdicted and seized."

Heroin for GIs

The top U.S. drug suppression coordinator in Vietnam is quoted in the report as saying: "Even if (Saigon and Washington) were totally successful from now on in stopping all heroin from entering Vietnam, there (is) enough heroin in-country to keep every soldier high until the last U.S. serviceman has withdrawn from South Vietnam."

The reason smuggling can't be brought under control, of course, is corruption throughout the Saigon government. The GAO report describes one secret meeting, for example, between American Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

"The U.S. ambassador again met with the Vietnamese president," states the report, "to discuss the progress of a campaign . . . against smuggling and narcotics."

After an exchange of polite words, "the Vietnamese president was told, however, that the results of the antidrug campaign thus far had not been sufficient to remove the issue as a threat to continued American support.

"Arrests to date had been mostly of small peddlers and street pushers who were not adequately punished when brought to trial. The ambassa-

dor stated that it was essential that big traffickers be investigated, prosecuted and severely punished."

But invariably, diplomatic pressure would produce only a small flurry of activity, and then the corruption would take hold again.

Or, as the secret report succinctly puts it: "Vietnamese officials acknowledge that there were still significant problem areas."

Washington Whirl

COMMERICAL RETALIATION—The French, whose supersonic Concorde jet has been stopped from landing at U.S. airports of its banshee-like noise, are threatening commercial retaliation against the U.S. In San Francisco, French scientific attache Francis Latapie confided recently to American engineers that U.S. insistence on lower noise levels for the Concorde could lead to "retaliation" by government-controlled French and English airlines. This, he said, "will start . . . a commercial war." In Washington, a French embassy spokesman admitted that delicate talks have been going on between Franco-English representatives and American environmental and aviation agencies. But he said Latapie's view was certainly not the official French position.

COKE'S RESPONSE—Our report that Coca-Cola was raising a private war chest to preserve its franchise system brought howls of outrage from

Coke's bigwigs. Some charged we were unfair for saying their franchise arrangements cost consumers up to a nickel a bottle. But at least one gutsy Coke bottler, Pope Foster, president of Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Taft, Calif., agreed with us. He said our story was "factual" and he is himself suing Coke for just the kind of activities we described. Foster's suit alleges that Coke won't give him enough concentrate to serve customers so he can compete with larger bottlers.

MICROWAVE VERDICT—For years, we have warned that overexposure to faulty microwave ovens and military radar can cause cataracts—sometimes years later. The federal government, particularly the Pentagon, has tried to minimize the danger. After all, an admission would mean millions of dollars worth of changes in military electronic hardware that now gives off high levels of microwaves. The Veterans Administration's prestigious Board of Veterans Appeals, however, has broken with the military to rule that the cataracts which partially blinded an ex-Navy radar man 10 to 15 years after his discharge were caused by microwaves. While turning down the veteran, Arthur Kay, on disability from various other ailments, the VA board said in its unprecedented ruling that "entitlement to service connection for bilateral cataracts is established."