

NEWS FROM



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U.S. GOVERNMENT IS ACCUSED OF "IGNOMINIOUSLY AND CALLOUSLY" BETRAYING THOUSANDS
OF LOYAL VIETNAMESE CIA AGENTS AND SAIGON EMBASSY AIDES IN HUMILIATING PULLOUT:

CHARGES LEVELED BY SAIGON EX-CIA CHIEF STRATEGY ANALYST FRANK SNEPP IN DECENT INTERVAL,
WRITTEN IN TOTAL SECRECY AND PUBLISHED WITHOUT ADVANCE ANNOUNCEMENT BY RANDOM HOUSE

"There is (I hope) little in this book that will touch anyone's ideological nerve. By now most Americans have made up their minds about the rightness or wrongness of the Vietnam war, and the aptness of its ending. Instead of rehashing old arguments, I have attempted to set out the evidence as fairly and as objectively as I can, without malice, or favoritism, toward any of the principal actors. This in itself was perhaps the most difficult part of the writing, for many of those who figured prominently in the story were close personal friends whose mistakes and shortcomings might have been forgotten, except for Saigon's final tragedy."

--Frank Snepp, from his Foreword

NEW YORK, Nov. 18 -- In a Random House book being published Monday, November 21, a former high-level CIA strategist, who was among the very last Americans to flee beleaguered Saigon on April 30, 1975, will accuse the Ford Administration, the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department of massively covering up the facts about our precipitate evacuation of Vietnam during the final three days of the 14-year American presence there.

The book, titled DECENT INTERVAL (592 pages, \$14.95), was written in secrecy over the past 18 months. Its existence as a Random House publication became known only Friday, November 18, when investigative reporter Seymour Hersh of The New York Times broke the story.

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Snepp's story, as told in DECENT INTERVAL, is deeply disturbing. Specifically, the author accuses the U.S. Government of having covered up leaving behind secret documents identifying CIA informers in Vietnam, abandoning nearly 70% of the 90,000 or so loyal Vietnamese who since 1961 had worked for the CIA and other American agencies--and jettisoning nearly \$250 million in gold bullion.

Snepp also documents how Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin, and Saigon CIA Station Chief Thomas Polgar, were consciously manipulated by friend and foe alike into believing that Hanoi would agree to a political solution to the war. As a result of this deliberate deception, Snepp maintains that Washington was lulled into delaying evacuation until it was too late to save tens of thousands of compromised Vietnamese.

Among the facts brought out in the book, never before revealed, are:

* How Jean-Marie Merillon, the French Ambassador to Saigon, sought to reassert French colonial influence in a postwar Vietnam by getting his neighbor, Graham Martin, to believe almost to the bitter end that the North Vietnamese would stop short of seeking total victory in the South.

* How CIA Station Chief Polgar, a World War II Hungarian refugee who joined the Office of Strategic Services (the CIA's forerunner), was so emotionally committed to the idea of a negotiated way out of Vietnam that he found it difficult to judge contradictory intelligence objectively. Polgar is described by Snepp as unable to cut emotional ties to his native Hungary. The Hungarian Communists serving on the truce observer team exploited this weakness, shipping in from Budapest top agents whose "prime mission was ... to trick and mislead the CIA's Chief of Station."

* How Graham Martin, a 61-year-old career diplomat, successor to Ellsworth Bunker five months after Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho signed the January 1973 "cease-fire" agreement (and whose strident anti-Communism and distrust of reporters made him "in a sense a perfect extension of the Nixon White House"), would simply pigeonhole negative field intelligence or press reports that ran counter to the fantasies spun by Saigon's generals. In the beginning, writes Snepp, his "beams of Calvinist steel (were) tempered against normal stress." In the end, he left Saigon a frail and broken man. After giving his side of the story to Snepp, Martin was eventually shunted into retirement, denied even a ceremonial farewell luncheon.

* How the CIA's Saigon Station, with Ambassador Martin's encouragement, shaped and shaded field reports so as to give Washington the false impression that the Thieu government was "fighting a poor man's war." By citing "facts" like a 60% reduction in

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ARVN fire power, a 50% loss in mobility due to bomb, ammunition and fuel shortages-- "figures pulled out of the air," says Snepp--the Embassy hoped to convince a chastened Congress to appropriate massive new funds to keep the battle going despite overwhelming voter sentiment for a Vietnam disengagement.

* How Kissinger, heady with his Nobel Peace Prize and supremely confident of his own infallibility as a negotiator, allowed his "good friends" Leonid Brezhnev and Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin to persuade him that, ultimately, the Hanoi Politburo would settle for a Vichy-style solution--a belief that forced President Nguyen Van Thieu from office at the eleventh hour to no avail whatsoever. Worse, how Kissinger dissembled to the press after the debacle, claiming that Hanoi had "switched signals" by "shifting to a military option" on April 27. Snepp's book (together with last year's memoirs by North Vietnamese General Van Tien Dung, which Snepp quotes at length) makes it abundantly clear that as of March 13, when Hanoi learned of Thieu's decision to militarily abandon the strategic Central Highlands, an all-out attack on Saigon was a foregone conclusion.

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DECENT INTERVAL derives its ironic title from what Kissinger's critics said at the time of the January 1973 "cease-fire" agreement: that it was no end in itself, merely an assurance that there would be a "decent interval" between an American withdrawal and the inevitable Communist takeover. But as history now records, that interval--hardly decent--lasted only about an hour, as the victorious North Vietnamese marched into Saigon to capture tens of thousands of abandoned South Vietnamese "American collaborators."

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Although the CIA knew that Snepp was writing a book--indeed, his intention to do so led to his resignation in January 1976--the agency had no idea of when the book would be finished, when it would be published, or who would publish it. While Snepp, as required of all CIA employees, had signed the obligatory agreement giving the CIA full pre-publication review power, he indicates in the book that he felt free of that obligation after learning that the CIA and Kissinger were attempting to whitewash what had taken place by leaking their own version of the story--including highly sensitive intelligence--to select journalists. These leaks, Snepp maintains, made a mockery of the CIA's secrecy strictures and actually endangered agents who had been left behind in Vietnam.

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By contrast, Snepp is careful in his own account of Saigon's final days not to expose any secrets that might put the CIA's current operations in jeopardy. Agents still with the CIA in sensitive posts are given pseudonyms and their modus operandi withheld.

Snepp felt duty-bound to expose the mistakes that led to our "ignominious and callous" departure from Vietnam, if only to force the CIA to learn from them. "In terms of squandered lives, blown secrets and the betrayal of agents, friends and collaborators," he writes, "our handling of the evacuation was an institutional disgrace. Not since the Bay of Pigs ... has the agency put so much on the line and lost it through stupidity and mismanagement."

Here are some other revelations brought out in DECENT INTERVAL:

* How the CIA and other government officials exposed secrets and jeopardized deep-penetration agents by careless, politically motivated leaks to visiting Congressmen and the news media.

* How Washington repeatedly misled Thieu about the steadfastness of American support--even to the point of encouraging him to believe he could still count on B-52 bombing raids--thus prompting him to overextend his forces and squander his strength.

* How the CIA allowed a Communist spy in Thieu's entourage to continue his work of providing General Dung's North Vietnamese command with military intelligence, enabling Dung to score his lightning victories in the final days of the war.

* How young Embassy officers and personnel from the Defense Attaché's Office finally managed to save the evacuation from total disaster by defying Ambassador Martin and the restrictions imposed by the CIA leadership back in Langley, Virginia.

Never before, in no other book on the business of spying, has the interaction of espionage, analysis and crisis management been so meticulously--and devastatingly--explored as in DECENT INTERVAL.

Snepp reveals for the first time an extraordinary intelligence operation that might have led to the release of countless American POW's well before the cease-fire agreement of January 1973--had not the CIA interfered. The case involved one Nguyen Van Tai, one of the highest-ranking agents ever to fall into U.S. hands. Shortly before Snepp was brought to Saigon to interrogate Tai, Hanoi offered to trade a high-ranking American prisoner for him--and perhaps others as well. The CIA turned them down on grounds that the American was far less valuable to the United States than Tai, and the intelligence he might provide on Hanoi's intentions. The American, who had already been locked up for six years, remained in a Communist prison camp for another 18 months, and talk of any general prisoner exchange went into limbo.

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Frank Snapp was born in North Carolina. A graduate of Columbia University and a former CBS News researcher, Snapp returned to Columbia in 1966 to take a master's degree in International Affairs. It was there that the CIA recruited him.

During his eight years with the agency, Snapp worked both sides of the espionage arena, both as operative and as analyst--contrary to standard CIA practice. Responsible for handling interrogations and an important informant network, he also wrote nearly all of the strategic analysis that was sent to Washington by the CIA Station.

Upon returning home from Vietnam in May 1975, Snapp repeatedly sought permission to file a no-holds-barred report on the evacuation and the events that led up to it. He was rebuffed at every turn. Ultimately, after being given the CIA's coveted Medal of Merit ("in recognition of his especially meritorious service" in Vietnam), he announced openly his intention to write a book. In short order, he was subjected to all sorts of pressures, both from within and outside the agency.

In January 1976 he resigned from the CIA in protest, and shortly thereafter--following publication of General Dung's memoirs--went public with some of his charges by granting an interview to Don Oberdorfer of The Washington Post. "Nothing much happened," recalls Snapp. "The story was picked up by some other reporters, like Keyes Beech of the Chicago Daily News, and Tom Polgar was flown in from abroad to tell me to shut up and to remind me of my 'loyalty oath.' That did it."

In early spring 1976, a mutual friend brought Snapp together with Random House. For the next year and a half, DECENT INTERVAL was written and edited in total secrecy. It is being published exactly as Mr. Snapp wrote it, with a view to telling the whole story--the true story--of our departure from Vietnam.

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Commenting on the publication of DECENT INTERVAL, Robert L. Bernstein, chairman and president of Random House, said:

"In the near future, former Presidents Ford and Nixon, as well as Dr. Kissinger, will produce their own versions of what happened in Vietnam. We believe it is important that the public be informed about the mistakes that were made there, and about the lessons that should have been learned to prevent our repeating those mistakes. We believe that our American democracy will be well served by having available, in whole, the memoirs of someone who was there in Saigon, in the bull's-eye, implementing the policy decisions of those at the top, and witnessing the gathering storm of the last four days of April 1975."
