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The Wash

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WASHINGTON, D.C., FRIDAY,

Book Charges CIA

Former Analyst Claims Botched

By Henry S. Bradsher
Washington Star Staff Writer

Defying CIA rules to publish an uncensored account of the fall of Vietnam, a former top CIA agent in Saigon says senior U.S. officials allowed themselves to be deceived about Communist intentions and as a result abandoned thousands of loyal Vietnamese in an ill-prepared evacuation that "was an institutional disgrace."

Key American officials refused to

believe accounts of the rot in the Nguyen Van Thieu regime or spies' reports of North Vietnamese plans during the two years between the 1973 Paris cease-fire agreement and the fall of Saigon, according to the agent's new book, "Decent Interval."

The book pictures Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham A. Martin, and the CIA station chief in Saigon, Thomas Polgar, as suppressing unpleasant truths to try to sell to

the U.S. Congress optimistic assessments of the Vietnam situation.

AS THE SITUATION finally began to crumble in March and April 1975, the book says, the Soviet Union sent messages to Kissinger, and Hungarian diplomats told things to Polgar that delayed American evacuation plans. For the CIA, this caused "squandered lives, blown secrets and the betrayal of agents, friends and collaborators."

"Not since the abortive Bay of

ew Weekly Guide --- On Page B-1

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Betrayed Agents

Vietnam Pullout 'Squandered Lives'

Pigs invasion of 1961 had the agency put so much on the line, and lost it through stupidity and mismanagement," the book says.

The author, Frank W. Snepp III, says he found the CIA unwilling "to deal candidly with the Vietnam issue." Three weeks after receiving the CIA's Medal of Merit, he resigned from the agency with the decision to write his own account and not "submit my manuscript to the agency for clearance and censorship, as all for-

mer employes-turned-author are required to do."

The CIA was already selectively leaking a favorable version of what had happened to journalistic favorites of Kissinger's, Snepp wrote. If it could do this "to whitewash its role in Vietnam, it had forfeited the right to censor me in the name of security or national interest," Snepp said.

THE PUBLICATION and distribution of the 602-page book were con-

ducted secretly by Random House, Snepp said in the foreword. The reason was to avoid possible CIA moves to try to stop its appearance with a court injunction.

The author, now 34 years old, was a CIA agent in Saigon in 1969-71 and again from 1972 until a helicopter lifted him off the U.S. Embassy roof in the last wave. He interrogated prisoners, debriefed spies and in the last years became the CIA's top ana-

See VIETNAM, A-6

VIETNAM

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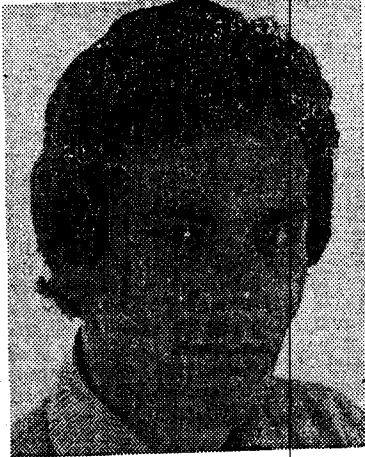
lyst in Vietnam and one of Polgar's main troubleshooters.

The CIA did not have any immediate comment on the book. Its director, Adm. Stansfield M. Turner, reportedly had asked for more information on complaints that Snepp had made about the agency's Vietnam operations. Kissinger was quoted by an aide as calling Snepp's allegations "nonsense."

The book gives a real-life look into an incredible world of spying, deception and intrigue.

The United States had both Vietnamese agents and eavesdropping devices planted in Thieu's inner offices. It also had agents high enough in the Communist system in South Vietnam to report many Hanoi decisions promptly and accurately.

HANOI HAD ITS well-placed spies, too. One close to Thieu reported in December 1974 what the South Vietnamese government expected to happen in 1975, enabling the Communists to outmaneuver it. "Among those responsible for the ultimate North Vietnamese victory," Snepp wrote,



FRANK SNEPP
End run around CIA

"the spy in Thieu's entourage clearly must rank high on the credit list."

Some of the deception was aimed at Congress. Snepp described how a congressional investigating delegation was fed slanted material in February 1975. Intelligence reports were doctored to support Ford administration arguments for more aid for Vietnam — even though money was being sought more for political

purposes rather than actual needs for weaponry.

The American press in Saigon was also deceived so that it would convey the message that Martin and Polgar wanted, Snepp related. His examples focused on repeated use of distorted or untrue reports in The New York Times to support the objectives that the embassy wanted to achieve in Washington.

But the main intrigue was aimed at the Americans.

POLGAR, WHO is now the CIA station chief in Mexico City, is of Hungarian descent. The International Commission of Control and Supervision, established by the cease-fire agreement, included Hungarian Communists. Snepp wrote that Polgar's judgment was clouded by their efforts to influence him.

The French ambassador in Saigon, Jean-Marie Merillon, relayed to Martin the kind of things Polgar heard from the Hungarians about Hanoi's willingness to have a negotiated settlement after its troops had capitalized on Thieu's abandonment of central Vietnam. And Kissinger received through Moscow what he wanted to believe were North Vietnamese assurances that the Americans would not be forced out of Saigon, the book related.

Meanwhile, Snepp said, Polgar was undercutting intelligence from spies of proven reliability which said that Hanoi had abandoned any intention of negotiating. Snepp's best spy confirmed this April 8, but as late as April 28 Martin was saying there would be a new cease-fire.

The final helicopter evacuation began the next day. More than 65,000 persons got out of Saigon in April. But many who should have been evacuated were not, Snepp said, because of a refusal by Martin and Polgar to plan ahead to the disaster that they would not admit was coming.

AMONG THOSE left behind, Snepp wrote, were about 1,360 local employees of the CIA's Saigon station, 400 CIA-trained members of the Special Police Branch, 400 Vietnamese intelligence organization workers.

“literally hundreds of high-level defectors who had worked closely with the station over the years to pinpoint and hunt down their former Communist comrades, and countless counter-terrorist agents — perhaps numbering as high as 30,000 . . .”

No one thought in time to destroy files, some computerized, that would give the Communists the identity of many of these people. Senior Vietnamese officials were too busy getting their families and their money out, and Americans failed to organize properly in time, Snepp said.

Most of what organization there was occurred irregularly. Young American diplomats and CIA men circumvented Martin's reluctance to mount an evacuation that, he argued, would shake Vietnamese confidence, Snepp reported.

But, while praising some, Snepp criticized many others for failing to do their duty. He reported that some CIA men abandoned stations up country from Saigon without taking care of their employees or destroying their files. He described several embassy officers as incompetent.

NONE WAS PUNISHED, his book indicated. Instead, Snepp said CIA analysts who had been wrong about Hanoi's intention received promotions and those who failed in the field were quietly given new jobs — in some cases, promotions.

The book's title refers to reports that Kissinger never thought the 1973 cease-fire agreement would bring a lasting end to the war but simply wanted to win a decent interval between the American withdrawal from Vietnam and the eventual collapse of Saigon.

Kissinger made possible the withdrawal that the U.S. public wanted, Snepp wrote. But he “never quite leveled with Congress or the American people about what was essential to preserving his imperfect peace.”

After Kissinger, Snepp placed secondary blame for the debacle on Martin. After waiting for more than a year in hopes of getting another important job as vindication for his work in Saigon, Martin retired in dejection from the State Department.
