

Neil Sheehan Replies to Patrick Buchanan

In your edition of June 19 you published a story on a July 8, 1971 memorandum from Patrick J. Buchanan, the President's speech writer, to John Ehrlichman. The story was accompanied by a partial text of the memorandum.

In his memorandum Mr. Buchanan says that when Richard Dudman of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch was captured by Communist forces while reporting on the American operation into Cambodia in May of 1970, I sent a telegram to Hanoi telling the North Vietnamese that Mr. Dudman and I were on their side. To quote from the memorandum: "Neil Sheehan, at the time of Dick Dudman's capture by the VC, sent a telegram to Hanoi all but saying let him go, 'Dudman is on our side.' Our intelligence intercepted this—and this could be utilized."

Mr. Buchanan's statement is false. The telegram did not say that Mr. Dudman and I were on the North Vietnamese side. I was not in 1970 and am not now on anyone's "side" in Indochina.

The facts are that when Mr. Dudman was captured I sent off three telegrams, identical in text, appealing for his safety. They went to Pham Van Dong, the Prime Minister of North Vietnam; Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then living in exile in either Hanoi or Peking, and Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, chief negotiator for the South Vietnam National Liberation Front in Paris. I do not have a copy readily available, but from memory I can accurately paraphrase the text as follows: *Please be sure that no harm befalls Richard Dudman. His safety is a matter of concern to a number of American jour-*

nalists who are personally opposed to United States policy in Indochina.

Those telegrams were designed to call the attention of the authorities in Hanoi to Mr. Dudman's capture and to provoke them into ordering whatever unit had captured him not to harm him. Dick Dudman is a friend and a colleague and I wanted to do all I could to make certain that he was not shot casually in the confusion of the war.

I knew that copies of the telegrams would end up in American intelligence channels. It is common knowledge that the National Security Agency and its affiliates monitor international cable traffic and that anything of interest is filed in one's dossier. I have never made any secret of my personal opposition to the war in Indochina. What I have sought to do is to keep my personal opinions out of my news coverage of the war with, I hope, reasonable success.

Mr. Buchanan's assumption that an expression of opposition to American policy in Indochina meant the taking of the North Vietnamese side is understandable. This sort of myopia is common to those who are convinced of their righteousness in all things.

Mr. Buchanan's willingness to consider exploiting for political purposes a personal act aimed at saving the life of a friend is, however, another matter. That willingness may tell us something about the instincts of Patrick Buchanan.

At another point in his memorandum Mr. Buchanan refers to me as a "leftist" writer. He is wrong again. I am a mugwump in personal politics.

NEIL SHEEHAN.

Washington.

POST 6/24/74