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THE SELLING OF THE CIA



Text by Morton Kondracke
Photography by Dennis Brack & Fred Ward



Victor Marchetti does not look, act or talk like a top spy. He looks like an overweight bureaucrat and he speaks quietly, in a voice that recalls, of all people, Red Skelton. Yet in the basement of his split-level Virginia ranch house hang autographed pictures of CIA Director Richard Helms ("To Vic—with appreciation for his support . . .") and former CIA Deputy Director Vice Admiral Rufus L. Taylor, whom Marchetti served as Executive Assistant. Marchetti says he has hung the pictures "for fun." He has *not* framed Admiral Taylor's recent letter to him, written since Marchetti began speaking out about the CIA, cautioning him not "to give help to our enemies within and without."

Taylor's letter refers to Marchetti's one-man campaign to rehabilitate the CIA's public image. The CIA has been trying to rehabilitate its *own* image, and thanks to the press, has been brilliantly successful at it. But Marchetti disagrees with the CIA press office's version and with most of the recent reportage on the agency.

Because of the Pentagon Papers, Marchetti told me, "the CIA comes out looking good in Vietnam because in the last years it was trying to get the straight poop to the White House. And it *does* look good by comparison to the military. But, one, the CIA was hawkish in the beginning and was pretty late to see the light on the analysis side; and, two, even now it is hawkish on the other—Clandestine Services—side, where the big money is. After all, the CIA right now is conducting a \$500,000,000-a-year secret war in Laos. The analysts can say it's a lost cause, just like Vietnam, but in my view the CIA can't take credit for being so great when at the same time they are carrying out policies like this."

Marchetti, 41, graduated from Penn State in 1955 with a degree in Russian studies and history and was recruited for the CIA by a professor there who was secretly on the CIA payroll as a talent scout. Marchetti says that the CIA's job offer came during a secret meeting in a hotel room, set up by a stranger who identified him-



Left: Ex-master-spy Victor Marchetti outside CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Like other CIA security measures, the fake "Fairbank" sign fools only the public. Overleaf: CIA headquarters.

break. He says he told Helms that "the intelligence community and the Central Intelligence Agency were just too big and too costly, that I thought there was too much military influence on intelligence—with very bad effects from that—and that I felt the need for more control and more direction.

"The clandestine attitude, the amorality of it all, the Cold War mentality—these kinds of things made me feel that the Agency was really out of step with the times," Marchetti told one interviewer.

"I just got fed up," he told another. His wife, he said, "knew I was unhappy and becoming more and more just a bureaucrat and said, 'Look, you're young enough to do something else. I'll work.'" So she took a job as a hospital clerk and Marchetti set to work writing a just-published novel, *The Rope Dancer*, placed in and around the executive suite at the CIA.

Marchetti says he could not bring himself, at first, to speak out about the Agency directly. After finishing the novel, he began work on a nonfiction book about the CIA, but a publishing agent declared it was too dull. He has finished a second novel, and now is making another stab at non-fiction. In interviews, he closely guards details on CIA operations or techniques that might be useful for the book.

He has apparently been more generous, on a confidential basis, with some Senators and Congressmen, including Senator Stuart Symington, who last month led a vain effort to limit the budget of the intelligence community—the CIA and the Pentagon's vast intelligence apparatus—to \$4 billion a year. Marchetti does not say, if he knows, what the actual intelligence budget is, but he has adopted from published sources the figure \$6 billion a year, and the estimate that some 200,000 persons are employed in various facets of American intelligence. Of these, some 18,000 are with the CIA, 6,000 of them working in "Clandestine Services;" that is, espionage, counter-espionage and covert actions ranging from propaganda to assassinations and paramilitary activity.

Marchetti figures that "the way to get people excited" about intelligence and its effects on the country is to start with its costs, always a concern to Congress and the taxpayers. Once the Senate got into the subject of costs, Marchetti recalls, it became apparent "how much the Congress really doesn't know about intelligence activities." Marchetti says that "even Symington doesn't know. He is on the Armed Services Committee and the Appropriations Committee, yet he doesn't know what's going on. The CIA subcommittee hasn't even met this year.

"At one place in the debate on the CIA budget, Stennis [Senator John Stennis of Mississippi, Chairman of Armed Services] said, 'You have to make up your mind that you are going to have an intelligence agency and protect it as such, and shut your eyes and take what's coming.'" In the same debate, Allen Ellender of Louisiana, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and one of the five Senators supposed to give closest scrutiny to the CIA, said of the Laotian war: "I wish to say that I do not know. I never asked, to begin with, whether or not there

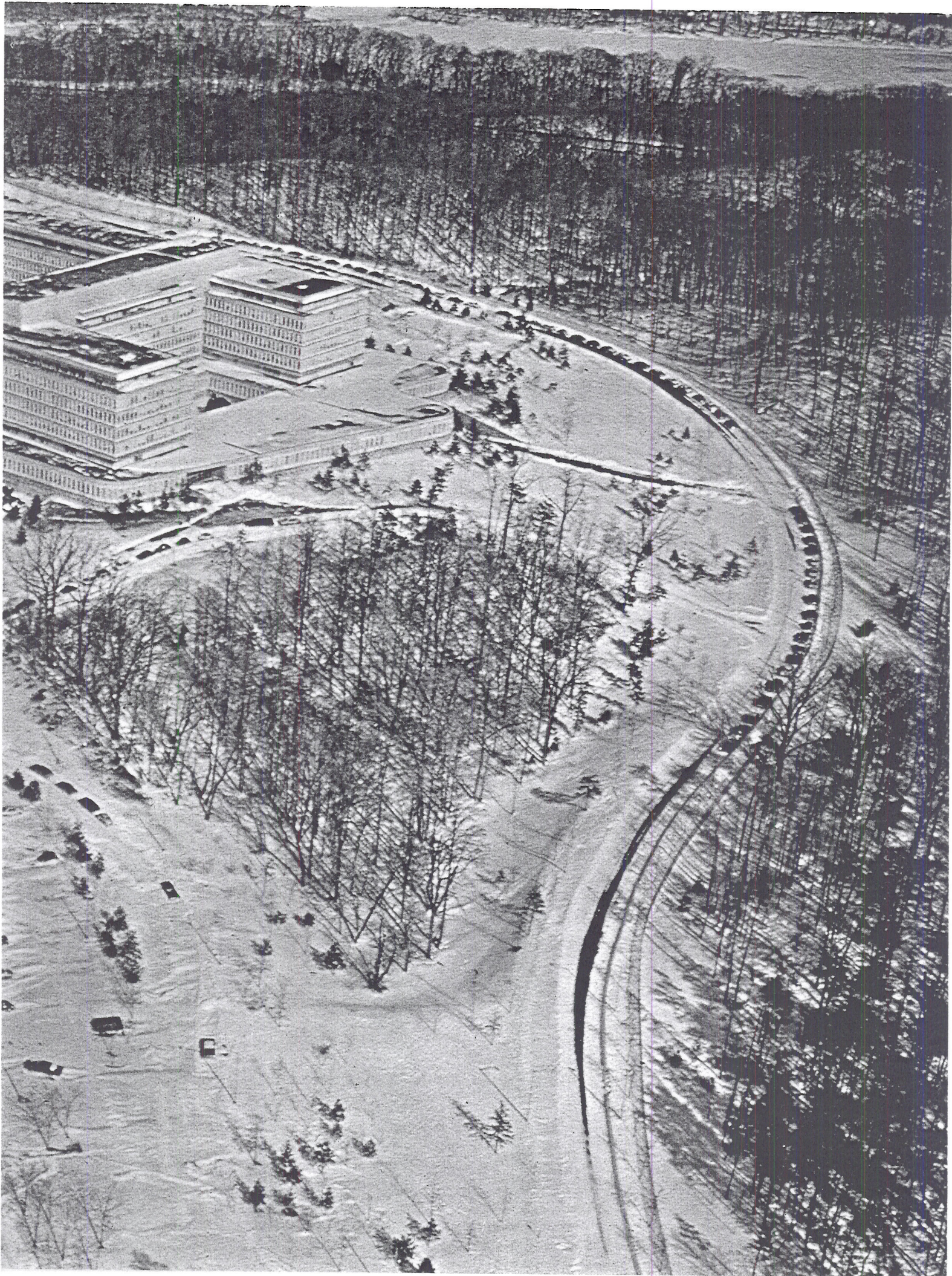
self over the phone as "a friend of your brother."

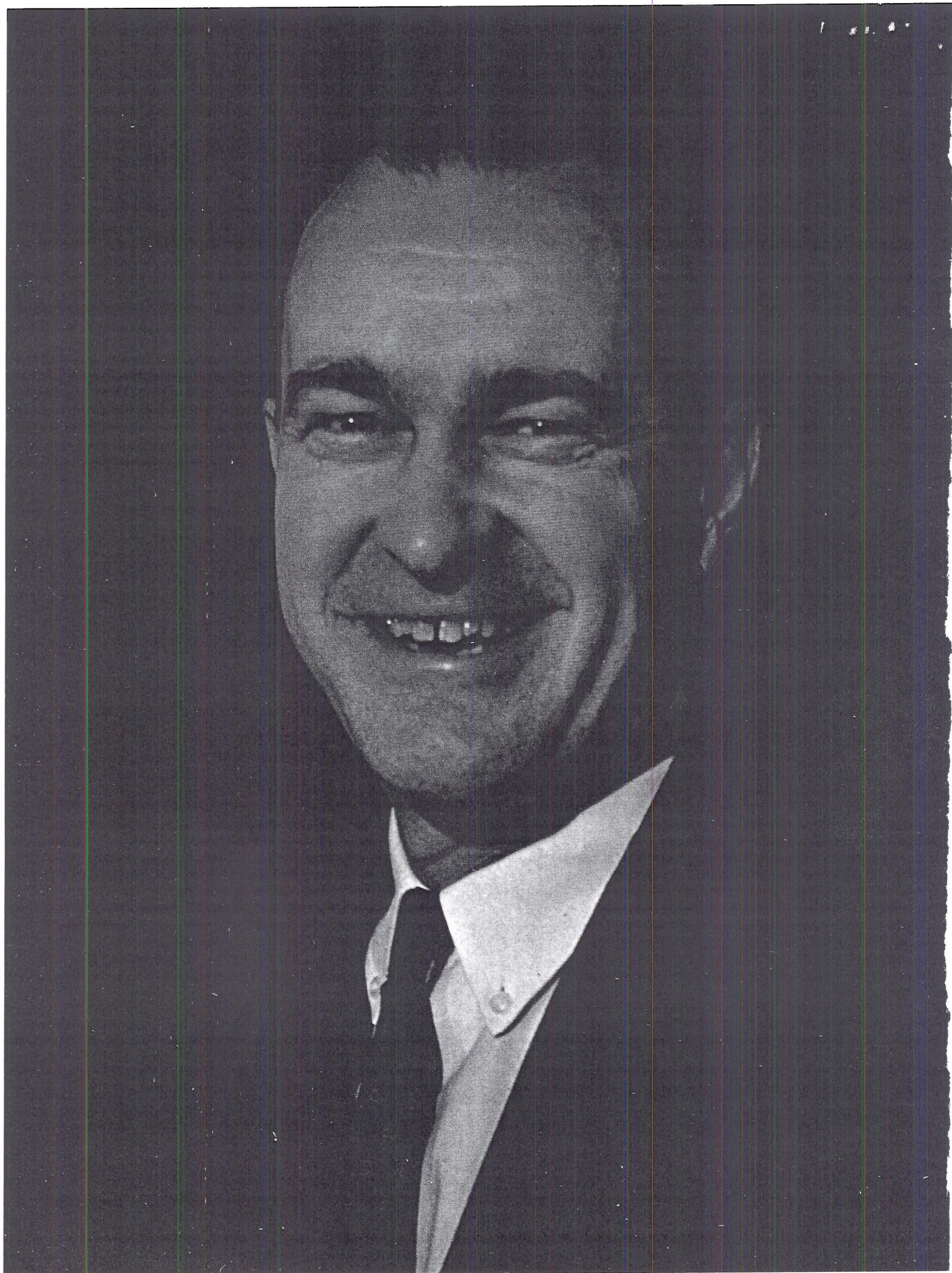
After spending one year as a CIA agent in the field, Marchetti came up through the "analysis side" of the agency and ultimately was promoted to the executive staff working on the top floor of the agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. For three years he was Special Assistant to the CIA Chief of Plans, Programs and Budgeting, then to the Agency's Executive Director and finally to Taylor.

Through much of his career, Marchetti has said, "I was a hawk. I believed in what we were doing." That was not the case with Vietnam, however. "In 1965 or '66, I came to the conclusion that this was the biggest damn blunder we'd ever made. I made a decision that I'd avoid Vietnam like the plague. Fortunately, I was working on Soviet military matters and I didn't have to pay much attention to it."

In 1969, Marchetti quit the agency. He has given different interviewers different reasons for making the final







were any funds to carry on the war in this sum the CIA asked for. It never dawned on me to ask about it. I did see it publicized in the newspapers some time ago.”

Marchetti said that Symington “made a good beginning” in his attempt to control the CIA budget, losing 56-31. Even Marchetti was apparently unaware that in 1956 an effort was made to create a joint House-Senate committee to control the CIA, like the one which oversees atomic energy. That effort lost, 59-27. In 1966, Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sought to create a special Senate panel on intelligence. That effort was defeated 61-28.

Said Marchetti: “It’s one of my strong beliefs that the CIA has to be more tightly overviewed by Congress. As it is now, the Agency operates almost exclusively under the authority of the President. Add the shroud of secrecy that surrounds intelligence, and all kinds of things can go on. They’re arrogant in the intelligence community. They think they know what’s good for the country, and that the people and the Congress will eventually catch up. Because they are not tightly controlled, a lot of things can go out of whack.”

The CIA’s secret agents, according to Marchetti, “still tend to be WASPS from the Ivy League. They are super-patriots, believers in the American Imperium, America as the new England that should spread its philosophies around the world. They went to work for the agency during the Cold War because they wanted to do something for their country, which they thought was the Good, and to stop the spread of Communism, which is the Bad.

“They aren’t right-wing extremists. They are very sophisticated. They don’t come across at all like John Birchers, but like Ted Sorensen, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the Bundys—Eastern Liberals who are interested in advancing America overseas.”

Marchetti said that “theoretically, it’s possible for the CIA to pull the President into a war with the President kicking and screaming, but it’s never been done to my knowledge; and all things being equal, I don’t think it’s very likely. The major covert activities of the agency have always been cleared with the White House, and, since Kennedy, there has been a mechanism—the 303 Committee, it used to be called, now it’s the 40 Committee—chaired by the National Security Adviser and including the deputy secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA Director.

“Whenever any intelligence agency is going to launch a clandestine operation that has high flak potential, it has to be brought to the attention of the Committee. This covers most of the big dirty tricks.”

While it may not be possible, according to Marchetti, for the CIA to start a war without the President’s approval, it is most certainly possible to do so without the knowledge of the Congress or the people—and, in fact, it has been done again and again. “The President of the United States,” says Marchetti, “even now can get us involved in a goddamn war without going through the process of getting war declared or even getting approval

**Richard Helms, Director of the CIA:
“Let’s review everything again and let
the chips fall where they may.”**

of Congress. He can say, ‘Well, I’m not really committing U.S. troops. I’m using CIA agents, and they’re hiring the actual forces overseas. The President can act without really ‘acting’ or being responsible for his actions, since it’s all secret. The American people don’t know about it. Congress doesn’t know about it. After all, the war in Laos started in 1962. The CIA was there.”

The United States gets involved in such operations as the Laotian war, according to Marchetti, by initially developing a secret capacity to act, and then by using it. “You establish a phony airline, you make friends, you buy up arms and you stash them away,” he said. “For example, Civil Air Transport was once a Taiwanese national airline run jointly by the CIA and the Nationalist government. “In the late 1950’s, when things began to heat up in Indochina,” said Marchetti, “George Dole, who developed the airline for the CIA, developed Air America as a spinoff. It built up into a huge airline. I once saw reports indicating that Air America had 10,000 employees and more planes than any commercial fleet in the United States.”

According to Marchetti, the CIA’s other airlines include Rocky Mountain Air, located near Phoenix, and Southern Air Transport, near Miami. Rocky Mountain, he said, “poses as a private general purpose air company. It gets contracts from the Interior Department, ostensibly to train firefighters. Of course, the way you train firefighters is to make parachutists out of them, which is what the CIA uses the airline for.” The CIA also maintains, he said, a major arsenal known as Midwest Depot “out around Kansas City somewhere,” where it stores a “huge inventory” of untraceable weaponry for arming CIA-supported movements overseas. For training its own personnel, according to Marchetti, the CIA has a base known variously as “Camp Nowhere,” “The Farm,” and “Isolation,” near Williamsburg, Virginia, and another in North Carolina known as “Isolation Tropic.”

Marchetti said that the CIA’s clandestine resources are apt to be applied nowadays only in countries where instability is great, especially in Latin America, Asia and Africa. They are of no use any longer, as they were immediately after World War II, in Europe. Marchetti’s list of nations where extensive CIA operations were mounted includes the Dominican Republic, the Congo in 1961 and 1964, Chile in 1966 and Laos.

And, of course, Vietnam.

“In the 1950’s,” said Marchetti, “the CIA had people like [Colonel Edward] Lansdale planning secret operations against North Vietnam. They were mucking about in traditional style, supporting the corrupt regime that happened to be in power. When it didn’t work, we got involved in the coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. In the early 1960’s, it was the CIA that came in with pacification and counter-terror programs. The CIA originated the ‘Phoenix’ program [the campaign to ‘neutralize’—by death, if necessary—the Viet Cong infrastructure]. It’s interesting how CIA liberals justify murder. They pretend they aren’t responsible for it. They hire the guy who hires the guy who actually commits the act, but they pretend they had no part in it.

“Even into the middle 1960’s, the CIA analysts were doing all they could to support McNamara and the President. They would ask CIA for these contingency

estimates—“What will the Communist reaction be to a certain US action, such as the bombing of Hanoi?” The CIA would reply that the Soviets would scream and yell, but neither they nor the Chinese would enter the war. There were many contingency estimates done in the early and mid-1960’s, when the US was considering various steps—from blockades all the way to bombing Hanoi and Haiphong. The estimates always read that the Chinese hordes were not going to come down, as in Korea.

“The estimates always had an encouraging tone. I think they were correct. The agency was never so hawkish as to suggest that our actions would lead to a military victory, but they did say that our actions would have a generally beneficial result. What started to happen in 1966 or so, when we were really building up in Vietnam, was that a split began developing in the agency. The clandestine types wanted to continue supporting the

effort. The analysts began to imply that things were going badly, and they started to challenge what the military was saying about the war.

“If you’re Director of the CIA, it’s your duty to report to the President that intelligence says things are going badly. But it’s also your duty to support his policies with your clandestine guys. It was getting pretty daffy over there, but it’s my impression that Helms, a Clandestine Services guy, was not appreciative of analysis. I got the impression that he was playing the role of good soldier for the President.

“About 1968, one morning after Helms had had a pretty difficult time at the White House, he said at a staff meeting that I was at, ‘You know, we’re getting pretty dovish in our reporting to the White House. The President doesn’t like it. We’d better look at this stuff and see if we can’t come up with some stuff to give him some



encouragement.' At this point, the analytical guys argued strongly and passionately that the President was wrong and he had to be told. The argument got hot across the table, but for the first time there was a full scale debate on the domino theory, the economic, political and military importance of Vietnam. The Director kind of blinked, and he said, 'Let's review everything again and let the chips fall where they may.'

"That's when the CIA finally began turning around as a whole, but it was in 1968, after the Tet offensive. You just can't say that the CIA was so dovish. It's a misconception from the Pentagon Papers."

According to Marchetti, the favorable CIA image that is abroad in the land is also the result of some careful planning on the part of Richard Helms. Soon after taking over at the CIA, Marchetti said, Helms appointed Jake Goodwin, a burned-out spy, to head the CIA Press Office.




"Previously," he says, "the Press Office was relegated to minor roles, mostly clipping papers in the basement of the building and saying 'no comment' on the telephone. Helms brought Goodwin into high-level staff meetings and listened to his advice on what to get into the press and how to do it. For one thing, Helms used to have lunch often with reporters at the Occidental Restaurant. His executive assistant told me once that Helms had lunch more often with reporters than at the agency, the White House or with Congressmen. This technique neutralized the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*," the two most influential newspapers in Washington. "In the mid-1960's, the *Post* would attack the agency indiscriminately. It was like the FBI—the *Post* would print anything against it. I remember, I almost cancelled my subscription, except that I like the *Post's* sports page. You can see the difference in the *Post* and the *Times* now. They're highly favorable, Helms always gets a pat on the back, and he's always referred to as the 'able' director or something like that.

"The Phoenix program—or something bad and nasty like it—never gets mentioned or, if it is mentioned, never gets tied too closely to the CIA and never at all to Helms."

By coincidence, the *Post* carried a story the day after Marchetti made this remark reporting that the bloody Phoenix program had been judged a failure by US officials in Saigon. The story ran on page 13, buried amidst Indo-Pakistani war stories. It referred to the CIA, but not to its Director.

What to do about the CIA? Besides exertion of congressional control over intelligence and its budget, Marchetti recommends separating intelligence analysis and intelligence collection into separate organizations. Clandestine Services should be a "small, highly professional, very well-covered operation, very secret along the lines of British intelligence and limited to the collection of information by human means.

"Covert *action*—that is, all those things from propaganda, secret contact with movements overseas, influencing elections, paramilitary operations—should be eliminated entirely. I don't think we've had a successful paramilitary operation yet. Even those thought to have been successful—like the Guatemalan overthrow—we're paying an awful price for now in terms of damage to our reputation and opposition from radicals and guerrillas. Covert action served a useful purpose, perhaps, in the early days of the Cold War, when the Soviets were behaving pretty crudely, but it doesn't make sense any more.

"The United States government does not need to save the world from Communism. Why support corrupt old dictators just because students are mouthing Communist slogans? What do we expect them to mouth? They can't be expected to recite our Constitution any more, the way they used to. It's time for us to try to influence the world, if at all, by example. I do think that we should continue to collect intelligence—though, as much as possible by overt and technical means. Because it is still a fact that you can't trust everybody." 

The CIA runs pr tours, along with opium, on Air America, its Asian-based airline. Marchetti: "Air America has 10,000 employees and more planes than any commercial fleet in the US."

C I A DOPE CALYPSO

by Allen Ginsberg (for Peter Dale Scott)

IN NINETEEN HUNDRED FORTY SIX
CHINA WAS WON BY MAO TSE-TUNG
CHIANG KAI-SHEK'S ARMY RAN AWAY
AND THEY'RE WAITING THERE IN THAILAND TODAY

SUPPORTED BY THE C I A
PUSHING JUNK DOWN THAILAND WAY

FIRST THEY STOLE FROM THE MEO TRIBES
UP IN THE HILLS THEY STARTED TAKING BRIBES
THEN THEY SENT THEIR SOLDIERS UP TO SHAN
COLLECTING OPIUM TO SELL TO THE MAN

PUSHING JUNK IN BANGKOK TODAY
SUPPORTED BY THE C I A

BROUGHT THEIR JAM ON MULE TRAINS DOWN
TO CHIENG MAI THAT'S A RAILROAD TOWN
SOLD IT NEXT TO POLICE CHIEF BRAIN
HE TOOK IT TO TOWN IN THE CHOOCHOO TRAIN

TRAFFICKING DOPE TO BANGKOK ALL DAY
SUPPORTED BY THE C I A

THE POLICEMAN'S NAME WAS MR. PHAO
HE PEDDLED DOPE GRAND SCALE AND HOW
CHIEF OF BORDER CUSTOMS PAID
BY CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE'S U.S. AID

THE WHOLE OPERATION NEWSPAPERS SAY
SUPPORTED BY THE C I A

HE GOT SO SLOPPY & PEDDLED SO LOOSE
HE BUSTED HIMSELF & COOKED HIS GOOSE
TOOK THE REWARD FOR AN OPIUM LOAD
SEIZING HIS OWN HAUL WHICH SAME HE RESOLD

BIG TIME PUSHER A DECADE TURNED GREY
WORKING FOR THE C I A

THE WHOLE OPERATION FELL INTO CHAOS
TIL THE U.S. INTELLIGENCE CAME INTO LAOS
I'LL TELL YOU NO LIE I'LL SPREAD NO RUMOR
OUR BIG PUSHER THERE WAS SOUVANNA PHOUMA

THREE STRONG PRINCES IN A POWER PLAY
BUT PHOUMA WAS THE MAN FOR THE C I A

TOUBY LYFONG HAD WORKED FOR THE FRENCH
BIG FAT MAN LIKED WINE AND WENCH
PRINCE OF THE MEOS GREW BLACK MUD
OPIUM FLOWED THROUGH THE LAND LIKE A FLOOD

COMMUNISTS CAME AND CHASED THE FRENCH AWAY
SO TOUBY TOOK A JOB WITH THE C I A

AND HIS BEST FRIEND GENERAL VANG PHAO
RAN OUR MEO ARMY LIKE A SACRED COW
HELICOPTER SMUGGLERS FILLED LONG TIENG'S BARS
IN XIENG QUANG PROVINCE ON THE PLAIN OF JARS

IT STARTED IN SECRET THEY WERE FIGHTING
YESTERDAY
CLANDESTINE SECRET ARMY OF THE C I A

ALL THROUGH THE 'SIXTIES THE DOPE FLEW FREE
THRU TAN SON NHUT SAIGON TO MARSHALL KY
AIR AMERICA FOLLOWING THROUGH
TRANSPORTING CONFITURE FOR PRESIDENT THIEU

ALL THESE DEALERS WERE DECADES AND TODAY
THE INDOCHINESE MOB OF THE C I A

-- January 5, 1972