

C.I.A. Agent Wages Lonely Battle for Vietnam Data

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 — Samuel A. Adams is a direct descendant of his colonial namesakes, a Harvard man and an official of the Central Intelligence Agency who was once in charge of estimating the strength of Vietcong units in South Vietnam.

For nearly six years, Mr. Adams has been waging a one-man campaign against top Army officers who he believes deliberately falsified critical intelligence information a month before the Vietcong began their devastating Tet offensive at the end of January, 1968.

In essence, Mr. Adams, who is about 38 years old has worked for the C.I.A. for the last 10 years, wants the Army to begin a full investigation into the distortion of intelligence that he says was ordered by top officers working in the headquarters of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, or MAC V, then headed by Gen. William C. Westmoreland. General Westmoreland, who later became the Army Chief of Staff and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired from the Army last summer.

The Army and the CIA. have

refused to make such an investigation.

In 1967, the issue of enemy strength was a critical one. Mr. Adams and his colleagues at the C.I.A. were convinced that Army intelligence officials were deliberately underestimating the number of Vietcong guerrillas, apparently to bolster their contention that the Army's controversial search-and-destroy tactics were successful in reducing the number of Vietcong.

Mr. Adams's protests then, all made in a 35-page memorandum circulated among Government officials, got to the attention of the Presidential Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a high-level intelligence group, but no inquiry was held. The C.I.A. refused to permit Mr. Adams to forward his memorandum to the advisory board, which had requested the document.

Testimony Challenged

Now, Mr. Adams has again raised the issue—still within the Government—by contending that his allegations may have a bearing on the Government's prosecution of Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo Jr. in the Pentagon papers case, now being tried in Los Angeles.

Early this month, Mr. Adams offered a number of documents to the Justice Department that, he alleged, refuted a key prosecution witness's testimony in the trial to the effect that publication of a highly classified series of Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandums dealing with enemy strength could be helpful to the enemy. The Government contends that publication of such documents in the Pentagon papers in 1971 was dangerous to American forces in Vietnam.

Introduced as Evidence

In the documents, Mr. Adams wrote that his concern about the integrity of the raw intelligence cited in the Joint Chiefs of Staff papers "led me to question whether the release of these statistics helped enemy intelligence or harmed American forces in Vietnam," as alleged by a key defense witness, Lieut. Gen. William G. DePuy.

Most of Mr. Adams's documents were eventually introduced into evidence by the court, after a bitter complaint by attorneys for Dr. Ellsberg and Mr. Russo who alleged that the Federal prosecutor in the case attempted to disguise the significance of the Adams allegations by, among other things,

not describing him as an official of the C.I.A.

The documents provide a rare glimpse into the give-and-take among the agencies involved in the production of a top-secret national intelligence estimate for the White House.

Mr. Adams specifically contended that the deliberate downgrading of Vietcong strength estimates began at a Saigon conference of C.I.A. and Mac V intelligence experts in September, 1967, and continued for months. "The possibility was raised," Mr. Adams says of his research, "that General Westmoreland may have originated the orders which led to the fabrications."

Speech Recalled

By that fall, General Westmoreland and other senior officials were repeatedly saying in public that the strength of the Vietcong was "declining at a steady rate." For example, in a speech in November, 1967, to the National Press Club here, General Westmoreland said that the enemy's "guerrilla force is declining at a steady rate. Morale problems are developing within his ranks."

The basic for these assertions, Mr. Adams wrote in the documents released by the court, was an order given to

military intelligence officers shortly before the Saigon conference open in September, 1967. That order flatly forbade the military men to accept an enemy troop strength total higher than that provided in a paper that, according to Mr. Adams, was prepared by high-ranking Mac V officials. The paper was given to officers at the conference, he alleged.

The C. I. A. analyst said the military men had been ordered to arbitrarily lower the estimates on the various categories fixed by the Army—ranging from mainline Vietcong units to local irregulars—as the conference proceeded.

Army officials said last week that, "based on the information presently available," they do not "intend to investigate the Adams allegations." Some well-informed Army sources indicate that military investigators believe Mr. Adams's charges to be ridiculous.

Mr. Adams, who is said to be a fourth cousin, seven times removed, of John Adams, the second President of the United States, has refused to discuss the case with reporters.

His friends acknowledge that his one-man battle has done little to advance his career in the C.I.A.—he was recently transferred from a job dealing with current intelligence to a lower-status position concerned with long-range research projects—but professed admiration for his integrity.

"The trouble with Sam is that he has always been right," one former colleague remarked. "He always told the truth and never cared whose toes he stepped on."