

MAY 31 1976

# Saigon's Secrets Seized

## Files of Thieu, U.S. Agent List Left for Hanoi

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North Vietnamese invading Saigon took over virtually complete files of the South Vietnamese armed forces, national police and secret intelligence agency, including highly classified data which had been furnished by the United States, according to the last chief CIA analyst of Communist strategy at the U.S. Embassy there.

Frank W. Snapp, who left Saigon on the final day of U.S. evacuation last year and resigned from the CIA this January, said the secret files of former South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu were also left behind.

Calling these unintended legacies "a tragedy," Snapp said they may reveal to Communist authorities a great deal about U.S. intelligence operations and permit them to identify well-placed U.S. agents behind Communist lines as well as "anyone who helped us in the slightest degree."

Snapp's statements in an interview confirmed portions of an extraordinary book-length memoir, recently published and broadcast in Vietnam, by the North Vietnamese Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Van Tien Dung. Dung was Communist field commander for the final campaign of the war.

At South Vietnamese police headquarters and military general staff headquarters "we found that top-secret files and documents of the puppet commanders were intact," Dung wrote. "A modern enemy computer containing the records of

each officer and enlisted man of the puppet armed forces of more than a million was still operating."

"Giai Phong", a recent book on the fall of Saigon by Tiziano Terzani, an Italian journalist who remained in the capital after the takeover, reported that double agents inside South Vietnam's Central Intelligence Organization were able to save "all the dossiers that had been compiled over the years by the secret police in collaboration with the American CIA."

Snapp, who is writing a book of his own on the collapse of South Vietnam, attributed the failure to destroy vital documents and other records to mistaken belief by senior U.S. Embassy officials in "smoke screens" and "ambiguous signals" which suggested that a negotiated settlement was possible. This "wishful

### VIETNAM, From A1

thinking," shared in Washington, put off the destruction of files and evacuation of key intelligence agents until it was too late, Snapp said.

Snapp said the CIA's chief in Saigon, Thomas Polgar, as well as Ambassador Graham Martin were deceived by hints of a negotiated deal in April 1975 and were encouraged in their belief by high officials in Washington. At the same time, however, "consistent intelligence from the ground was that there would be no negotiated settlement, and this was from the most reliable sources," Snapp said.

The North Vietnamese general's account of decision-making in the Communist command gives no indication that a negotiated deal was considered during the final Saigon drive, and every indication to the contrary. Dung relates that the

order for quick liberation of Saigon came from the North Vietnamese Politburo in the third week of March, 1975. He reports successive orders after that for the Saigon attack with no sign of letup.

Dung refers contemptuously to "perfidious diplomatic maneuvers to check our troops' advance and avoid total defeat." He attacks the "U.S. CIA clique in Saigon" for conducting what he claims were "many insidious plots." CIA station chief Polgar who is of Hungarian extraction, was a key figure in Saigon contacts

about a negotiated deal with Hungarian and Polish delegates of the International Control Commission.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger evidently placed credence in the possibility of a negotiated deal to forestall the attack on Saigon. Kissinger has said publicly that North Vietnam "changed their signals" and "appeared to shift suddenly to a military option" on April 27, three days before the fall of the capital. But the Dung account—and the intelligence reports cited by Snapp—indicate there was no possibility of negotiations and thus there was no shift in signals.

Snapp said several key points in the recent detailed memoir by the North Vietnamese general have convinced him that the Communist side had a spy with access to the most important information of the South Vietnamese government. At the same time, he added, the United States had accurate intelligence within days about Communist strategic decisions cited in Dung's account.

The crucial difference, Snapp suggested, was that the Communists believed the intelligence they were getting, but the United States chose to ignore its accurate intelligence data in a concentration on "smoke screens" and "wishful thinking" about negotiations.

According to Snapp, the account by Dung gives these indications of Communist intelligence powers:

- Dung reports receiving

a "flash cable" at his field command post March 13 from Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap in Hanoi saying that the Politburo and high command believed South Vietnam might abandon the Central Highlands in a "strategic retreat." Dung was instructed to quickly encircle Phubon, a key area in a retreat path.

According to Snepp, Thieu had been seriously considering such a retreat in great secrecy for only a few days before that, and secretly informed his cabinet and the Joint General Staff March 13 that he had decided to execute the withdrawal plan. The South Vietnamese general in charge of the withdrawal was informed March 14. The pull-out began March 15.

The United States knew nothing of Thieu's order until March 15. Snepp said. By then, Dung's troops were already moving to cut off the

retreat at Phubon. The quick North Vietnamese maneuver led to the destruction of nearly the entire force being withdrawn from the highlands—the equivalent of two divisions. This was to be Thieu's strategic reserve. "That loss spelled the end of South Vietnam," Snepp said.

• Dung quotes "our intelligence reports" on a major assessment session held by Thieu on the fourth floor of the presidential palace in Saigon Dec. 9-10, 1974. This assessment, which predicted only moderately big Communist attacks during 1975, was quoted by Dung in his memoir. Snepp said the quotation was a remarkably accurate summary of a U.S. CIA estimate—which he himself drafted—supplied for Thieu's use in the year-end assessment.

After learning of the Saigon assessment, the Hanoi Politburo amended its plan for a two-year campaign to liberate the South. While still planning for a 1975-76 campaign, the Politburo added a guideline for liberation in 1975 "if opportunities presented themselves," according to Dung.

This was done in Hanoi on Jan. 9, 1975. According to Snepp, the United States obtained an accurate intelligence report within 10 days of this decision.

• Dung quotes a secret report sent by Ambassador Martin to Washington on April 19, 1975, "on the true situation" in the South. Accurately summarized by Dung, this report was drafted by Snepp for Martin to use in persuading Thieu to resign the presidency and thus make way for the rumored "negotiations."

According to Snepp, Martin took a copy of the report to Thieu at the presidential palace on April 20, while cabling another copy to Washington. The report was a decisive factor in Thieu's decision to resign, which he announced April 21.

Snepp said he helped prepare—but does not stand by—another classified U.S. report which was quoted in the North Vietnamese general's account of the final days of the war. This estimate, cited as evidence that Thieu was "forced to fight a poor man's war," said that South Vietnamese firepower had decreased by nearly 60 per cent due to bomb and ammunition shortages, and that South Vietnamese mobility was cut in half by

① shortages of aircraft, vehicles and fuel.

Snepp said these estimates were prepared by U.S. officials in Saigon early in 1975 in an effort to get Congress on the need to ap-

② appropriate additional aid to South Vietnam. Snepp said the phrase, "a poor man's war," was originated by the United States for this purpose.

The former CIA official

③ said these estimates were "billingsgate" — numbers pulled out of the air for U.S. political reasons. He said he did not know whether or not North Vietnam believed

④ these numbers when its spies obtained them in Saigon.