

Author Charges

CIA Agent Misled My Lai

By Harry Rosenthal

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Author Seymour M. Hersh says an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency misled the planners of the ill-starred 1968 attack on My Lai by telling them they would find a Viet Cong battalion there. The agent denies it.

The assault units met only old men, women and children in the South Vietnamese village. Many were killed by the American troops.

Hersh, who won a Pulitzer Prize for breaking the My Lai story, identifies the agent in a new book as Robert B. Ramsdell, now a private investigator in Orlando, Fla.

"Ramsdell refused to speak specifically about the information he provided

Task Force Barker before the My Lai 4 operation, but acknowledged that his intelligence undoubtedly was a factor in the planning for the mission," Hersh writes in "Cover-Up," published yesterday by Random House.

In a telephone interview Ramsdell denied Hersh's allegations and said that although he was working for the CIA in the My Lai area

at the time of the killings, he had nothing to do with intelligence reports to the Americans.

Of his role in the CIA, Ramsdell said, "My function was with the Vietnamese. I had very little to do with the Americans."

He said that information gathered by the South Vietnamese was at times re-

layed to U.S. troops, but added that he doubts those reports could have become the basis for the misleading information fed to planners of the My Lai assault.

In the My Lai courts martial of Lt. William L. Calley Jr., and others there was testimony that the attack was made in the belief the village was the home of the

Planners

fierce 48th Viet Cong battalion which previously had inflicted heavy damage to American units.

The source of that belief was alluded to only as "intelligence reports."

Says Hersh: "The link between Ramsdell and the poor intelligence for the March 16 operation was never explored by the Peers panel,

the exhaustive Army investigation headed by Lt. Gen. William R. Peers. For one thing, none of the high-ranking officers on it had any reason to suspect that Ramsdell was poorly informed about Vietnam."

Ramsdell was sent into Quang Ngai Province, on Feb. 4 — 40 days before My Lai—to run the clandestine

Operation Phoenix, Hersh writes. The author describes Phoenix as "a joint American-South Vietnamese venture aimed at identifying and then neutralizing—either through imprisonment, assassination or forced defection — local members of the Viet Cong Infrastructure."

Ramsdell confirmed that he was involved in the Phoenix operation, but disagreed with Hersh's assessment of its aims.

"I don't agree with that. Identifying — this is correct. We wanted to capture certainly more than assassinate. A dead man was of no use to us at all."