

CIA

# Catholic Agency Linked to U.S. Military in Vietnam

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By KENNETH A. BRIGGS

A prominent Roman Catholic newspaper has renewed charges that the United States military entered into widespread collusion with Catholic Relief Services during the Vietnam war.

In charge of the agency's Vietnam program has assailed the newspaper report as "full of half-truths" and has defended his policy of cooperating with the American war effort.

While such cooperation has been the subject of persistent rumors in the last few years, the yearlong investigation by Richard Rosake of the National Catholic Reporter, an independent journal based in Kansas City, Mo., raises these reports to a new level of seriousness.

The paper, in its Dec. 17 issue, concludes that the agency went beyond its humanitarian mandate as the foreign relief arm of the United States Catholic Conference by aiding the military in such endeavors as forcibly uprooting Vietnamese peasants and herding them into refugee camps.

Among Mr. Rashke's contentions are that the Catholic service unit supplied huge amounts of food and other provisions to prison camps and to reimburse Vietnamese military forces. Military officers were said to have worked in Catholic Relief Service offices and provided

with agency files stocked with intelligence data.

The Rev. Robert L. Charlebois, who directed Vietnamese efforts for the organization, conceded yesterday that the agency accepted material help from the American Government and worked in close cooperation with the military.

He argued, however, that these arrangements were solely for the purpose of assisting the poor, and represented expedient choices under severe wartime conditions.

"When we found ourselves in the reality of the situation," Father Charlebois said, "we made the best of it that we could." He added that the pressing situation led the agency to accept many forms of help, among them transportation for staff members by Air America, the line operated by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Father Charlebois, now an assistant to the executive director of the agency, also pointed out that the policies in question saved lives. "What would have happened if we hadn't responded as we did in many cases?" he said. "Death." He continued: "No doubt hundreds of thousands of people were kept alive because we fed them."

Reports of alliances between the military and Catholic Relief Services have floated about for years. Many came to light a year ago with reports that the

C.I.A. employed American missionaries as informants.

The controversy began with the disclosure by Senator Mark O. Hatfield, Republican of Oregon, that the Director of Central Intelligence, William E. Colby, and Philip W. Buchen, White House counsel, had acknowledged in letters that enlistment of missionaries was considered standard procedure.

Vigorous protests from church groups followed, most demanding a change in policy. The outcries subsided when the new Director of Central Intelligence, George Bush, in one of his first judicial acts, issued a directive forbidding the direct solicitation of information from church personnel.

Catholic Relief Services and a Protestant evangelical agency, World Vision International, were mentioned widely as recipients of large Government grants. Suggestions that these agencies offered support for the war effort usually accompanied those reports.

The National Catholic Reporter article binds together many of these scattered allegations. Father Charlebois, who says he felt "nobody could win the war," maintained that the writer, Mr. Rashke, drew his materials for the most part from two sources—two former members of the agency staff whom the priest says he dismissed. One is a former priest, Father Charlebois said.