

Super Spook's Metamorphosis

Washington

Frank Snepp's inside-the-CIA book "Decent Interval," has surprised a lot of journalists who covered the Vietnam war, not because of its content, but because of its author, Frank Snepp.

Snepp was not only everyone's favorite CIA source during his two tours (1969-70 and 1972-75), but was also the spitting image of what an agent should be: handsome, athletic, paranoid, gung-ho. He was never without his .45 and his CIA bleeper which he always concealed in his briefcase.

Dressed in his ever-present dark sunglasses and a silk blue sport shirt open to the breastbone, Snepp would even drag his briefcase to the very edge of the pool at the Cercle Sportif Saigonnais, his favorite spot for briefing the media.

Only once did he break the habit: In the middle of a debutante party at the Newsweek villa, Snepp was seen with a drink in one hand and a paper bag — filled, of course, with .45 and bleeper — in the other.

Except for a certain stiffness of bearing, and the occasional military jargon ("roger" this, "roger" that), Snepp mixed well with reporters, and was known to share with them tokens of the local and very effective weed. Upon his return to the United States, in fact, Snepp was accused of "trafficking in drugs." Incredulous, Snepp asked for specifics.

"You were seen passing a joint from one person to another — that constitutes trafficking in dope," he was told. Snepp then explained that in order to keep up his contacts among the younger journalists, pot smoking was de rigueur.

There was, of course, a harder edge to this Bondian fantasy. Snepp would regale his friends with accounts of a bar shootout in which one Vietnamese officer was left dead. And then there was his blonde girlfriend, whom he claimed he discovered to be a Soviet agent. Asked how he solved that problem, Snepp told friends that he placed enough dope on her to get her thrown out of the country, and then "had a few of her friends killed."



FORMER CIA STRATEGY ANALYST FRANK SNEPP
'I wrote this book to exorcise the ghosts'

"Snepp loved the CIA and the whole sense of being a CIA agent. He was an extremely proud spook," recalls one journalist and friend. "His turning on the agency obvious-

ly had to do with his anguish over the institutional disaster. Don't forget, Snepp was well-trained by the CIA in the art of the double-cross."

New Times

**Snepp Was
Handsome,
Athletic,
Paranoid,
Gung-ho**

S. F. Chew
12-7-77