

★★★★ The Robert Maynard Hutchins  
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

October 12, 1987

Ralph McGehee  
422 Arkansas Ave.  
Herndon, VA 22070

Dear Mr. McGehee:

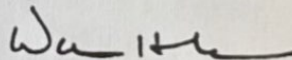
Thank you very much for your thoughtful response to the CBS "60 Minutes" segment that focused on the class that I teach.

We know each other. I talked with you years ago when you were in Santa Barbara for some lectures, and have kept your address and telephone number.

We rely on local "outside" speakers, in the main. But I will keep your kind offer in mind.

Many thanks for writing.

Sincerely,



Walter H. Capps  
Acting Director

# SPY STORY

5 OCTOBER 87

PROFESSOR KATZ:

I SAW THE SIXTY MINUTES PROGRAM LAST NIGHT AND THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER ME AS A GUEST SPEAKER FOR YOUR COURSE ON VIETNAM. I SERVED THERE WITH THE CIA FROM 68-70 AND AS THE ENCLOSED MATERIAL INDICATES, HAVE DEDICATED SOME EFFORT AT UNDERSTANDING THE WAR.

REGARDS,

*Ralph McGehee*  
RALPH MCGEHEE  
422 ARKANSAS AVE.  
HERNDON, VA., 22070  
703 437 8487

by Ralph McGehee

information. My book was not classified until 1970. The FBI refused the release until after the Vietnam War.

The book was written during a period when the President's military advisors were a good deal more honest than the CIA was at the time. I was a staff member of the Defense Department, and I was writing the book at

### McGehee's CIA Story

"A tour in Thailand and nearly two years in Vietnam convinced me the CIA was lying about the situation in Asia both in its intelligence and its propaganda operations, many of which were aimed at the American people and Congress."

time working in an intelligence position. I was in Thailand and in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970. I was a staff member of the Defense Department, and I was writing the book at

the end of 1970. I served with the CIA in Thailand, Thailand, and in Vietnam. In Vietnam I was the chief liaison officer with the Joint Military Advisory Group, the representative of the U.S. Army in Thailand, and made two trips to Vietnam. I worked for the CIA in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970. As my present interest was in gaining knowledge of the events being told, the Navy was involved in operations against the. I spent most of the CIA in Asia. I was a staff member of the Defense Department, and I was writing the book at

In a large way, the CIA at that time awarded me its prestigious Carter Intelligence Medal and its Honorable Service Medal. I had two Vietnam Service Medals and a commendation from the Director of the CIA for developing a program of intelligence and counter-intelligence. After leaving the CIA, I taught for a number of years at the School of Government and Administration, and later at the School of Government and Administration, and later at the School of Government and Administration.

I was involved in a number of activities. I was a member of the National Security Council, and I was a member of the National Security Council. I was a member of the National Security Council, and I was a member of the National Security Council. I was a member of the National Security Council, and I was a member of the National Security Council.

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# SPY STORY

**A former CIA officer tells what went wrong in Vietnam—and how it's happening again in Central America.**

by Ralph McGehee

I served 25 years in the Central Intelligence Agency, earning many of its awards and medals. At one time I believed the CIA's main goals were to save democracy in the world and to report accurate intelligence.

All that began to change for me in Vietnam, when I saw the terror, horror and murder created by its operations. This, plus an earlier experience in Thailand, began for me a reassessment of all my assumptions; I finally realized that the CIA is not an intelligence agency, but a covert action arm of the president's foreign policy.

As such, it supports dictators and overthrows popular governments while reporting "intelligence" justifying those activities. Misinformation is a major part of its covert role, and the American people and Congress are the primary target of its deceptions. Its actions in that capacity were most obvious in the Vietnam War. Policymakers are now attempting to rewrite the history of that war in order to mobilize public opinion to support the further use of American boys in other wars. Central America, of course, is the target of the next planned aggression.

To accomplish all of their goals, the powers that control our country must convince the American people that the Vietnam War was just, that only a lack of will and a determined effort prevented our victory. History, as in Orwell's *1984*, must be rewritten. On the tenth anniversary of our defeat in Vietnam, a massive effort to change the perception of that war was initiated.

I served with the CIA in Vietnam, and like the military veterans of that war, I bear psychic scars if not their physical wounds. I have found that learning the truth about Vietnam made me intensely angry and that anger ultimately helped me to purge many of those scars.

I joined the CIA in 1952 and left in 1977. In all those years I worked in the Agency's Directorate of Operations (DDO), the intelligence collection and covert action arm of the CIA. The DDO is frequently and accurately called the Dirty Tricks Department.

In the broadest scope, covert activities can be described as those operations designed to support or overthrow foreign governments. Covert operations break

*For 25 years the author was a senior analyst of communist party affairs for the Central Intelligence Agency.*

down into four main categories: political, economic, psychological and paramilitary warfare. In Vietnam in the past, and in Nicaragua today, the CIA employs all those various forms of clandestine warfare.

In my 25 years in the CIA I served overseas in Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, six years in Thailand and a tour in Vietnam. In Vietnam I was the chief liaison officer with the head of the Vietnamese Special Police, the equivalent of our FBI. A tour in Thailand and nearly two years in Vietnam convinced me the CIA was lying about the situation in Asia both in its intelligence and its propaganda operations, many of which were aimed at the American people and Congress. From that point forward I protested from within the CIA. As my protests escalated with my growing knowledge of the deceptions being used, the bureaucracy escalated its pressures against me. I opted out of the CIA to write a book and to try and alert the American people to what had happened.

In a huge irony, the CIA at that point awarded me its prestigious Career Intelligence Medal and its Honorable Service Medal. I earlier had won two Vietnam Service Medals plus a commendation from the Director of the CIA for devising a program of intelligence and counterinsurgency. After leaving the CIA, I testified before the staffs of the Senate and House of Representatives Permanent Select Committees on Intelligence and two other House and Senate Committees.

I immediately started writing a book about Vietnam entitled, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*. It took three years of research and writing to finish a manuscript and then because of the secrecy agreement I signed when I joined the CIA, I had to submit it to the Agency's Publications Review Board (PRB). The PRB made 397 deletions in the manuscript, claiming the information in those 397 areas was classified. To defeat those claims, I reviewed the overt record to try and locate similar information available in the public domain. I reviewed books by former Agency officers that had been cleared by the PRB and found much of the so-called classified information in those writings. I reviewed the published works of other government agencies, material in the Pentagon Papers, the seven-volume set of records of the Senate Church Committee and the House Pike Committee report of its investigation of the CIA. Using this, and other data, my arguments that the

information in my book was not classified prevailed. The PRB released the manuscript with insignificant deletions.

My writing style of making a point and then footnoting supporting source data made a good legal brief, but had little appeal as a book. One publisher, Sheridan Square, said it would publish the book if I

**"A tour in Thailand and nearly two years in Vietnam convinced me the CIA was lying about the situation in Asia both in its intelligence and its propaganda operations, many of which were aimed at the American people and Congress."**

would rewrite it as an autobiography—which I did. I re-submitted the manuscript to the PRB but was not prepared for what happened. Reagan had appointed William Casey Director of the CIA, and, I assume acting on his instructions, the PRB advised me that it would not allow me to publish the book, claiming that all of the information in it was classified. I stated to the PRB representative that they could not do this as all the information had earlier been declared declassified by the PRB. Furthermore, I noted, it was illegal, according to then applicable legislation, to re-classify information once it had been declassified and released. The PRB, in essence, said that was tough—they were doing it anyhow.

I immediately contacted the *Washington Post* which published a long expose. This public exposure of the Agency's illegal action forced the PRB to relent and release the manuscript.

After publication of the book, I traveled to the Caribbean and Central America to look at those situations so that I could speak and write accurately about what is happening there. Currently I am computerizing all available data on the CIA in preparation for writing another book. One thing I noticed in my first review of books about the CIA is that it uses the same techniques over and over again. Another thing that sticks out is the CIA's continual use of black operations.

Such operations are defined in the Senate Church Committee report as those activities designed "to give the impression that they are sponsored by an indigenous opposition force or a hostile power rather than by the United States." Using its authorization for black operations, the CIA constantly plants evidence to blame others. It plants "communist" weapons shipments, forges documents, doctors photographs, writes poison-pen letters and uses all manner of deceptions to convince the world that the U.S. is fighting terrorism rather than creating its own brand.

During my first 15 years in the CIA, I knew little of all this and believed that the Agency was like a missionary organization out saving the world for democracy and religion. This was in the depths of the Cold War; Russia was more than an enemy—it was the devil incarnate. We felt we had a calling to save America.

At the same time, I felt it reported accurate information to assist policymakers devise effective foreign policy. I was a rightwing Cold Warrior and could not tolerate any criticism of the CIA. I was proud and honored to be a part of its noble crusade to save the world from the evils of the "international communist conspiracy."

The first warnings that something was wrong sounded in Thailand in 1966-67. The CIA Station there assigned me the responsibility of developing an intelligence and counterinsurgency program with the 50,000-man Thai National police organization. In 1965, American officials were quite concerned about the situation in Thailand, as the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) had announced that it was launching armed revolution.

By late 1966, the CPT was already conducting a series of low-level raids in the north, northeast and mid-south of Thailand. The United States was involved in fighting wars in Laos and South Vietnam, with Cambodia about to blow up at any time. The addition of an active insurgency in Thailand to this scene had all U.S. officials seriously worried.

My assignment with the national police was a reflection of those concerns. I was ordered to turn 50,000 men, most of whom only had a few years of schooling, into effective counterinsurgents and sophisticated intelligence officers—a mission impossible. I never dreamed that my world would be turned upside down, not by failing in that seemingly impossible task, but by achieving unparalleled success. For I was to discover the real nature of the communist movement in Thailand, something the CIA could never admit. If CIA ever acknowledged the reality of the insurgency in Thailand, then it would also have to acknowledge the dimensions of the communist organization in South Vietnam. If it ever reported the truth about Vietnam, it would mean confessing to

sion, and Mr. McGehee doesn't disagree. To the exclusion of almost everything else in his life, he has im-

ment doctored intelligence information in the Vietnam War, concealing the degree of pro-Communist sympathy, to support official forecasts that the war was being won. A CBS News documentary broadcast last year charged that senior American officials in Vietnam, including the commanding general, William C. Westmoreland, conspired to alter and suppress estimates about the strength of North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces. Mr. Westmoreland, who vehemently denied the charge, sued CBS for libel, demanding \$120 million in damages. The case is still in litigation.

WA Veteran

of misleading and faulty intelligence, perhaps forcing the immediate withdrawal of American troops.

At that time, the CIA reported in its National Intelligence Estimate (what the President gets to see), that the CPT in all of Thailand consisted of 2,500 to 4,000 guerrillas. According to the NIE, they all lived in the mountainous areas and had no popular support in the lowland villages. From time to time, they would raid the villages, steal money and food, and kidnap young men for their army.

First, I decided to employ espionage techniques in a limited geographic area as a trial to see what the police were capable of doing. After determining this, I would then slowly expand the action outward to all threatened areas—approximately half of Thailand's 72 provinces.

The standard espionage techniques of agent spotting, assessing and recruiting, plus secret writing, dead drops and others, all failed spectacularly. But one experimental program had immediate success. I called it a district survey.

A Thai district is the equivalent of an American county. I first gathered all available information on a district from the Thai and American files. I wrote a situation report on it consisting of ten village reports, attached to which were name lists of every person in the village identified as either pro-government or pro-communist. I organized a 25-man team of mostly officer-grade police personnel, and trained them in the techniques of interrogation and interviewing. I armed them with the situation report and sent them into one of the villages to begin interviewing and interrogating everyone above the age of ten.

The team succeeded in the first village. One person admitted that he was a member of the CPT's Farmers' Liberation Association (FLA) and that he and fellow villagers had been formed into three-man cells of the FLA. This was the first time any of us had ever heard of it. With this lead, the team went from cell member to cell member and ultimately identified approximately 100 of them in that one village. We learned that the CPT organizers, who had been trained in Hoa Binh, North Vietnam, had worked in the village for months. After gaining the confidence of the farmers, they used Marxist themes of class warfare as a recruiting tool. They told the villagers that the vast majority of the Thai people were poor, and that the Americans supported the tiny minority of the rich over the poor. (Everything they said was true and obvious.) If the villagers joined the CPT, they promised, the party would eject the American-backed government of Thonon and Praphat and make sure everyone would own their own land. Offering nationalism and social equality, the organizers won the dedicated loyalty of the lowland villagers.

My team went from village to village and found the same situation everywhere. After three district surveys, I could state that the communists had 2,500 loyal supporters in the one province alone. Most of these I could name by true name and communist alias based on their own confessions.

My surveys on this phenomenon received the highest evaluations from the State Department, from the Deputy Director of Intelligence of CIA, and from all levels of Thai officialdom. The station asked that I sign up for another tour and expand the program to all threatened provinces.

I was ecstatic. My teams were destroying the hated communists. We were

reporting outstanding intelligence. We were not killing or torturing people—activities that are frequently associated with counterinsurgency operations.

Of course, I was aware of the career potential of heading such an important program. A few weeks after I had been asked to come back for another tour, the Station Chief called me to his office and told me he was shutting down the program. Stunned, I simply could not understand why we were shutting down a program that produced the best in-

General Westmoreland's intelligence officers over the number of guerrillas in South Vietnam; Adams said there were 600,000 guerrillas, Westmoreland, 300,000. But neither the CIA nor the military pointed up the role of mass-based organizations, from which the armed Viet Cong drew its recruits.

The point is that both arms of U.S. intelligence could not logically explain the dramatic rise in communist military strength. Without mass-based organizations, how could the communist ranks



**"I was the chief CIA adviser to the head of the Vietnamese Special Police, the equivalent of our FBI. We had some spectacular success rolling up one communist spy net after another."**

intelligence, cost virtually no money, hurt no one, and was destroying the CPT. I returned to CIA headquarters at Langley and tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade officials to change their minds.

I began reviewing intelligence coming in from Thailand. I was shocked to see the station once again reporting that the communists had only 2,500 to 4,000 guerrillas in the entire country, and that they had absolutely no popular support in the lowland villages. This I had proved wrong thousands of times over.

It was now mid-1968 and the Tet offensive had occurred in South Vietnam. At the time, the Agency had an internal draft and was forcing people to accept tours in South Vietnam. As with all volunteers, the CIA gave me a psychiatric examination. I guess they felt if you wanted to go there, you had to be disturbed.

Before leaving, I began reviewing the Agency's earlier intelligence about Vietnam. Back in 1959, the CIA had reported there were only 2000 guerrillas in the entire country—with no popular support. And then in 1967, Sam Adams of the CIA Intelligence Directorate argued with

rocket from 2,000 to between 300,000 and 600,000 in only eight years?

I read two books about the insurgency in Vietnam, Douglas Pike's, *Viet Cong*, and Michael Charles Conley's, *The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam: A Study of Organization and Strategy*. The books reported that the communists initially had organized the villagers into liberating associations: the Women's, the Farmers' and the various youth liberation associations. Once the organizational work was well under way, the communists expanded, refined and consolidated their revolutionary forces. The active young males were gradually formed into the militia, then local force units, and finally into main force regular army troops.

The radio of the National Liberation Front had announced in 1963 that it had six million members in its various liberation associations. Sam Adams found a captured Viet Cong document reporting they controlled five million people, yet in all of the CIA's intelligence there was not one disseminated report that mentioned a single member of a liberation association.

(Many years later, when I worked in the CIA's International Communism Branch, I wrote a study on Asian revolutionary forces. To prepare it, I read the published works of Mao Tse-tung, Lin Biao, Vo Nguyen Giap, Ho Chi Minh, Tran Van Dong, and Truong Chinh—all the major Asian theoreticians and activists. They all noted that the first step in forming a revolution was to organize the villagers into liberation associations.)

After arriving in South Vietnam, I spent six months agitating for the Station to include reporting on this basic element of the revolutionary force—the liberation associations. All my efforts met with hostile silence. Always naive, I could not conceive that the CIA would lie about the strength and nature of the revolution while Americans and Vietnamese were dying every day in what seemed a senseless charade of death. How could we ever win if we did not admit the real force of the opposition?

I knew something was terribly wrong but was not sure what. Later, of course, I learned that if we had ever admitted that the vast majority of the South Vietnamese were fighting against us, that fact would leave us but one option: admit defeat and pull our troops out of Vietnam. This the CIA refused to do.

Day and night, I endured a maddening turmoil as I tried to decipher what was happening. I became intensely angry, and thought if I made a huge banner saying "The CIA Lies" or "Fuck the CIA" and hung it from the roof of CIA quarters in the Duc Hotel and jumped off as a public protest . . .

I hated my inaction, but to die in those circumstances would only bring shame and poverty to my family, as the Agency was vengeful and would withhold death benefits. Even if I could hang the banner and jump the CIA would quickly cover up and say I was crazy. There seemed no way.

Eventually, I decided to leave the Agency. I wrote a resume and started to send it to various organizations. But since I worked in the covert side of the Agency, I could not admit CIA employment. My very skimpy resume noted I had played on three national championship football teams at Notre Dame, had graduated *cum laude* in business administration and was now, many years later, looking for a job. This totally unimpressive resume got me no job offers.

At this point, I had an economic and moral decision to make. I had four children with two daughters in expensive private colleges. Should I quit and destroy their opportunities or should I stay in the Agency and protest from within, thus keeping my family together? I opted for the latter, hoping that I would soon qualify for early retirement—which unfortunately, would not happen until 1977.

Having made that decision, I tried to blot out reality by burying myself in my work. I was the chief CIA adviser to the head of the Vietnamese Special Police, the equivalent of our FBI. We had some spectacular success, rolling up one Communist spy net after another.

Sam Adams, meanwhile, totaled up the number of Communist spies in all of South Vietnam and reported there were approximately 30,000. You do not have much of a wartime government when 30,000 officials dedicate themselves to the government's demise. On the other hand, the various American and South Vietnamese civilian and military agencies had

*Continued on page 10*

June 1985

sion, and Mr. McGehee doesn't disagree. To the exclusion of almost everything else in his life, he has im-

ment doctored intelligence information in the Vietnam War, concealing the degree of pro-Communist sympathy, to support official forecasts that the war was being won. A CBS News documentary broadcast last year charged that senior American officials in Vietnam, including the commanding general, William C. Westmoreland, conspired to alter and suppress estimates about the strength of North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces. Mr. Westmoreland, who vehemently denied the charge, sued CBS for libel, demanding \$120 million in damages. The case is still in litigation.

hundreds of thousands of agents trying to recruit spies in the Communist movement. All of them could not recruit one spy at any significant level in the Communist camp. This, I thought, was a dramatic comment on where the loyalties of the South Vietnamese people really lay.

It was a life-threatening action to serve as a Communist spy, and it was a safe and profitable role to work for the government, but 30,000 Vietnamese chose to put their life on the line for the Communist movement.

As I left Vietnam completely disillusioned in mid-1970, I wondered how many more Vietnamese and Americans would die. How many more civilians would we incinerate with napalm? Was there no way to stop the U.S. juggernaut from destructively pursuing its own fantasies?

I was glad to be leaving, but I knew, like so many other Vietnam veterans, that I would never again be the same. All of my ideals of helping people, all my convictions about the processes of intelligence, all feelings of joy in my life, all my concepts of honor, integrity, trust and love, all in fact that had made me what I was, had died in Vietnam. Through its blindness and murders, the Agency had stolen my life and soul, and I doubted I could ever regain them. Full of anger, hatred and fear, I bitterly contemplated a dismal future.

What had really happened in Vietnam? Why were we lying? Only years later, as I poured over the Pentagon Papers, was I to discover the truth. In 1954, they revealed, the National Security Council, an arm of the Presidency made up of the top national security officials, ordered the CIA to establish a non-Communist alternative to Ho Chi Minh. The NSC documents outlined that we needed to keep the markets, manpower, rice and minerals of South Vietnam in the U.S.' economic sphere. The documents also discussed the domino theory, which postulated that if South Vietnam was "lost" the dominoes might fall all the way to Europe.

After the Viet Minh had defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in early 1954, the Geneva Conference imposed a 300-day truce period when the Vietnamese could opt to resettle in either the North or South. This was a critical time for the CIA, and it moved rapidly to exploit the opening. It chose Ngo Dinh Diem, living in exile in Catholic seminaries here, to be the head of the new government of South Vietnam. He arrived at Ton Son Nhut airport to be met by the CIA's man in South Vietnam, Colonel Edward Lansdale, who told Diem that he would help him build a government.

Eighty percent of the Vietnamese were Buddhist, but our policy-makers thought that most of those revered Ho Chi Minh and could not be trusted. We therefore opted for a safe minority who shared many of our religious and political traditions. The plan was to incite North Vietnamese Catholics, many of whom had fought with the French against the Viet Minh, to migrate South. Once there, the CIA would use them as cadre for a police force, army and government loyal to Diem.

Agency teams went North and distributed leaflets in Catholic areas showing the circumference of destruction if the United States decided to use nuclear weapons. They also forged a document in the name of the Communist party of Vietnam citing harsh laws for Catholics after the end of the

300-day truce period. The conditions outlined were so draconian that the day following issuance of this forged document, refugee registration tripled. Agency teams offered money, jobs, land and transportation South to all who agreed to move. All of these efforts created a flood of refugees, approximately 800,000, moving from the North to the South. The Agency then used its domestic and world-wide media assets to trumpet to the world that these 800,000 represented the hopes of all Vietnamese who longed for freedom. The refugees were depicted on the nightly news, in magazines, in the newspapers as "the diseased, mutilated, starving bodies of the Vietnamese fleeing from the Godless cruelties of Communism." This evocative theme established the level of understanding of the American people about Vietnam for the rest of the war.

But the Vietnamese were not fleeing Communism—they were running because of CIA dirty tricks. Both they and we were to pay a heavy price for this covert operation.

When the refugees arrived in South Vietnam, the CIA used the young Catholic men in a variety of official capacities. They filled the ranks of Diem's police, his palace guard, his army and his government.

Next came elections to legitimize the new government—if the Agency was good at anything, it was good at rigging elections. The CIA staged a plebiscite between Diem and a man named Bao Dai, who still held a largely mythical throne in Saigon as a puppet of the French. Not surprisingly, Diem won. He did so well in Saigon that he had more votes than registered voters.

At this point, the CIA chose to manufacture a National Intelligence Estimate. The NIE, later available in the Pentagon Papers, proclaimed Diem was winning the loyalty of the South Vietnamese and that he had done it virtually all on his own, without any outside support.

That NIE illustrated the two roles of the CIA in sharp outline. Its policy role completely bastardized its intelligence. It created intelligence data to accomplish the policy objectives of a "non-communist alternative to the Ho Chi Minh government."

President Eisenhower, writing later in his memoirs, stated that if the election called for in the Geneva accords had been held, approximately 80 per cent of the Vietnamese would have voted for Ho Chi Minh. But the CIA sold the American people on the story that the war in South Vietnam was caused by a North Vietnamese invasion, that 98 per cent of the southern voters favored Diem. The opposite was closer to the truth.

The CIA hired a public relations firm for Diem that lobbied Congress and published a slick magazine eulogizing him. Diem was called the miracle worker who was saving South Vietnam. Vice President Johnson called him the Winston Churchill of Southeast Asia.

This massive propaganda effort established the American level of understanding about South Vietnam from that time forward. It led to the deaths of over 58,000 Americans, two million Vietnamese, and a final estimated financial cost to the U.S. of nine hundred billion dollars. These losses do not include the near total disruption of our own society nor the abused bodies and minds of the Vietnam veterans.

Diem, of course, could not survive when the Buddhist population rose up in

anger at his completely discriminatory 10% minority Catholic government. Eventually, he was assassinated. A series of coups followed.

In 1964, through a coordinated set of actions staged at the Gulf of Tonkin, the American Congress was tricked into giving President Johnson *carte blanche* to fight the war. By 1965, it was obvious that American troops would be required to save the situation. The National Security Council had earlier authorized the CIA to conduct black operations—the creation of

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evidence to blame others for U.S. actions. Successive State Department "White Papers" (1961 and again in 1965) rationalized the U.S. escalation with charges of aggression from Hanoi.

To buttress its case, the CIA took tons of communist-made weapons out of one of its warehouses—the Church Committee noted that the CIA possessed enough arms in its various arsenals to be one of the strongest armies in the world—and loaded them on a Vietnamese junk, faked a fire-fight, and called in Western reporters and International Control Commission observers to see proof of North Vietnamese aid to the Viet Cong.

The State Department detailed the weapons supply under the headline, "Hanoi Supplies Weapons and Ammunition and Other War Material to its Forces in the South." Seven pages of the White Paper were devoted to the CIA-planted evidence, including photos of the beached junk and the assorted ammunition and weapons it carried. On March 6th, 1965, just a week after issuance of the White Paper, President Johnson ordered two Marine Corps battalions into Vietnam and the initiation of Operation Rolling Thunder—the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, Americans were directly involved in combat operations in South Vietnam.

U.S. troops immediately discovered that the rural South Vietnamese, who were part of the armed revolution, considered them the enemy. A major portion of the casualties suffered by our troops resulted from booby traps and sniper shots from the local population. This infuriated our fighting men, who had been told they were there to save the South Vietnamese from the invading North Vietnamese forces. Instead, they found themselves battling the people they had come to save.

Later, in response to the introduction of a half million U.S. troops, the North Vietnamese army became directly involved in the fighting. The U.S. developed a simple plan to win—force the peasants by the millions into the crowded cities and towns and away from the Communists. Search-and-destroy missions, free-fire zones, and the bombing and napalming of villagers were the tools of this "forced urbanization" plan.

Today, our policymakers are trying to show that we could have won, denying still the real nature of the war. On the tenth anniversary of our defeat, we are being told that we were sabotaged by our own people. What we are not told is that the United States expended 15 and a half million tons of firepower in Indochina, twelve million tons in South Vietnam alone. That amount is the equivalent in destructive force of 600 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs. In comparison, the U.S. used six million tons of air and ground munitions in all of World War II. In its November-December, 1982 issue, the "Indochina Newsletter" reported that the total firepower expended by the United States and its allies in Indochina probably exceeds the total firepower expended by humanity in all wars before and after the Indochina war combined.

Our policymakers are rewriting the war. The major trouble spot now is Central America, and all the same deceptions are being used to trick us into believing we are fighting for justice and democracy. Elections are staged, documents are forged, "communist" weapons are found and a host of other CIA dirty tricks are employed to transform reality.

In Central America, the main problem, according to the Catholic Church, is an abysmal poverty and brutal oppression that has made life "a type of abomination."

One Central American nation broke out of the U.S. orbit—Nicaragua. The Reagan Administration found this intolerable and began, via CIA covert operations and other means, a massive campaign of deception against the Sandinistas. CIA-supported mercenaries, led by officers of the hated former National Guard, attack civilians and, by raiding farms and food and petroleum storage facilities, destroy the economic base of the country. Reagan equates these paid killers with our Founding Fathers.

It is a dangerous period, the outlines of which seem eerily familiar. And one should remember that Vietnam and the creation of the Watergate burglars were inextricably linked. Now Reagan, by executive fiat, has authorized the CIA to legally conduct domestic covert operations.

Can the era of break-ins, wire tapping, and deceit in high places occur again? War can wreak havoc on a society. Vietnam and now Central America merely foreshadow what will happen here if we are not informed.

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WA Veteran

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## A Veteran's Obsession With the Vietnam War

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—Fourteen years ago Ralph W. McGehee sat in a sparsely furnished Saigon apartment contemplating the disintegration of his small corner of the American Dream. He thought about hanging a banner out his window that said "THE C.I.A. LIES" and then shooting himself with the rifle he kept in his bedroom.

Mr. McGehee, a janitor's son from the South Side of Chicago who played on three national championship football teams at Notre Dame in the late 1940's, joined the Central Intelligence Agency in 1952 to fight Communism. Like dozens in his generation of C.I.A. recruits, he served loyally and ea-

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The New York Times/George Tames  
Ralph W. McGehee

gerly in the front lines of the cold war. Then, while working in Southeast Asia in the 1960's, he became disillusioned and convinced that the agency was intentionally distorting intelligence information to mask the extent of support for Communist forces in the region.

It was an agonizing personal and professional awakening that changed his life. Mr. McGehee, like some other American officials who were directly touched by the Vietnam War, became a kind of permanent prisoner of the conflict. He is part of a small but distinctive fraternity of former officials and journalists in Washington whose lives still revolve around Vietnam. For the last 10 years he has poured most of his intellectual and emotional energy into coming to terms with the war and his role in it.

His friends call the effort an obsession, and Mr. McGehee doesn't disagree. To the exclusion of almost everything else in his life, he has im-

mersed himself in the history of America's involvement in Vietnam, searching for some understanding of how he and the Government he was once devoted to lost their bearings in Southeast Asia. He accumulated a small library of books about the war, became a denizen of the Library of Congress and, contrary to all his training in the C.I.A., started to seek out journalists to convey his account of failures by the agency in Vietnam.

Eventually, part of this reckoning took the form of a book. Entitled, "Deadly Deceits, My 25 Years in the C.I.A.," it was published earlier this month in New York by Sheridan Square Publications.

The book is likely to add new fire to the debate over whether the Government doctored intelligence information in the Vietnam War, concealing the degree of pro-Communist sympathy, to support official forecasts that the war was being won. A CBS News documentary broadcast last year charged that senior American officials in Vietnam, including the commanding general, William C. Westmoreland, conspired to alter and suppress estimates about the strength of North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces. Mr. Westmoreland, who vehemently denied the charge, sued CBS for libel, demanding \$120 million in damages. The case is still in litigation.

### 'A Fog of Angry Disbelief'

For Mr. McGehee the issue is primarily personal, based on his experiences as an intelligence officer in Thailand and Vietnam. Specifically, he charges that the C.I.A. suppressed estimates he prepared showing widespread pro-Communist support in one area of Thailand.

When he first submitted his report about Thailand, Mr. McGehee said, his superiors praised his survey methods. However, when it became clear that his pessimistic assessment was not shared by senior C.I.A. officials in Washington, Mr. McGehee contends that the Thailand survey was abruptly canceled and that he was transferred to another country.

"I traveled back to the province in a fog of angry disbelief," he recalls in the book. "How could the agency let such a program die? It produced the highest-rated intelligence, and I thought it destroyed the insurgency. It did all of this at virtually no cost. What in the hell was going on?"

The doubts, once planted, festered and Mr. McGehee became a tormented man during his tour in Vietnam that began in 1968. When he urged the agency to employ the techniques for estimating enemy strength he developed in Thailand, his memo was returned with no comment. "Every waking moment I fought an internal battle of doubts and contradictions," he recalls in the book. "I couldn't sleep, my head ached all the time, the tension was terrible."

### Words of Coach Recalled

Mr. McGehee was eventually transferred back to Washington where he says he was assigned to a series of dead-end jobs and denied a promotion. He lost his friends. "Once my views became known, I was isolated," he recalled in a recent conversation at his home in Virginia.

Little of the Norman Rockwell boy remains in the man who retired in 1977. He still recalls with a smile the words of his coach at Notre Dame, Frank Leahy: "You have to pay the price, but if you do, you can only win."

But as he sits in his basement office beneath a picture of the 1949 national championship team, Ralph McGehee admits that he lost both his crusade and his innocence. "I guess I justify myself by thinking that I fought for what I thought was right," he said. "I didn't quit. I tried to get the C.I.A. to tell the truth. I also had to put my children through college."

After spending the better part of the last five years researching and writing the book, and arguing with the C.I.A. about what he could print, Mr. McGehee seems relieved that his days as an author have ended. "I'd sit over the typewriter for weeks before I could write anything," he said. "But it was a therapeutic experience."