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Letters to the Editor

Reply on CIA Drug Charges

SIR: On July 5, W. E. Colby, executive director of the Central Intelligence Agency, responded to a June 29 column by Judith Randal in a letter. He stated that charges of CIA involvement in the narcotics traffic from Southeast Asia were "unsubstantiated." Since I am one of the persons who have made such charges, I would like to give the basis for my findings.

The specific charge is that Air America aircraft chartered by the CIA have been transporting opium harvested by the CIA-supported Meo tribesmen in Laos. I have three sources for this information:

(1) This was told to me by Gen. Ouane Rattikone, former chief of staff of the Royal Laotian Army, who also admitted to me that he had controlled the opium traffic in northwestern Laos since 1962.

(2) Air America's involvement was confirmed by Gen. Thao Ma, former commander of the Laotian Air Force, who refused to carry opium for Gen. Ouane.

(3) I spent six days in August 1971 in the opium-growing Meo village of Long Pot, Laos. (*The writer assures us that that is, in fact its name—Ed.*) Ger Su Yang, the district officer, told me:

"Meo officers with three or four stripes (captain or more) came from Long Tieng to buy our opium. They came in American helicopters, perhaps two or three men at one time. The helicopter leaves them here for a few days and they walk to villages over there, then come back here and radioed Long Tieng to send another helicopter for them. They take the opium back to Long Tieng."

Verified by Others

This account was verified by other officials, farmers and soldiers in Long Pot. Ger Su Yang also reported that the helicopter pilots were always Americans. Long Pot harvests weighed approximately 700 kilos (1,543 pounds) and could not have been carried without the pilot's knowledge.

In my June 2 testimony before the Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee, I charged that "by ignoring, covering up and failing to counteract the massive drug traffic from Southeast Asia, our government is aiding and abetting the influx of heroin into our nation." I stand by this charge. The U.S. has put top priority on its military and political goals in fighting the war in Indochina. As long as our Asian allies have fought the war, U.S. officials have tolerated governmental corruption. Narcotics trafficking has not been treated differently from stealing U.S. aid, currency manipulation or black marketeering, all of which are rampant.

The CIA has organized a mercenary army of mostly Meo tribesmen in Laos under Gen. Vang Pao. The Meos' cash crop has been opium, and the CIA merely followed their French colonial predecessors' dictum: "In order to have the Meo, one must buy their opium." The CIA may not have bought their opium, but did ship it to market.

Ignored Involvement

More importantly, the CIA, the U.S. Embassy and the whole U.S. apparatus in Laos ignored Gen. Ouane Rattikone's involvement in the narcotics traffic, even while American troops in Vietnam were being decimated by Laotian heroin. His involvement, as well as the location of the heroin laboratories, was common knowledge among even the most junior U.S. officials. As late as June 9, 1972, Nelson Gross, the State Department's drug coordinator, called my charges of Gen. Ouane's involvement "unsubstantiated allegations." However, John Warner of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in a June 19 interview in *The Star* admitted for the first time that Gen. Ouane controlled and protected the Laotian narcotics traffic for years. Colby quoted Warner in his letter to try to discredit my charges, but conveniently omitted mention that the former chief of staff of the Royal Laotian Army was also the chief narcotics trafficker.

Southeast Asia is fast becoming the major source of heroin for the U.S. market, and high government officials in Laos and South Vietnam are involved in the narcotics traffic. The U.S. government knows this but ignores and covers it up.

The time has come when we have to decide which is more important to our country—propping up corrupt governments in Southeast Asia or getting heroin out of our high schools.

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Editor's Note: McCoy is the author of the Harper's Magazine article, "Flowers of Evil," appearing in its July, 1972, issue, quoted by Miss Randal.

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