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C.I.A. AIDES ASSAIL ASIA DRUG CHARGE

Agency Fights Reports That It Ignored Heroin Traffic Among Allies of U.S.

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 21 — The Central Intelligence Agency has begun a public battle against accusations that it knew of but failed to stem the heroin traffic of United States allies in Southeast Asia. In recent weeks, high-ranking officials of the C.I.A. have signed letters for publication to a newspaper and magazine, granted a rare on-the-record interview at the agency's headquarters in McLean, Va., and — most significantly — persuaded the publishers of a forthcoming expose on the C.I.A. and the drug traffic to permit it to review the manuscript prior to publication.

The target of all these measures has been the recent writings and Congressional testimony of Alfred W. McCoy, a 26-year-old Yale graduate student who spent 18 months investigating the narcotics operations in Southeast Asia. His book, "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," is scheduled to be published by Harper & Row in mid-September—barring delays caused by the intelligence agency's review.

In his book, Mr. McCoy alleged that both C.I.A. and State Department officials have provided political and military support for America's Indo-Chinese allies actively engaged in the drug traffic, have consciously covered up evidence of such involvement, and have been actively involved themselves in narcotic trade.

C.I.A. officials said they had reason to believe that Mr. McCoy's book contained many unwarranted, unproven and fallacious accusations. They acknowledged that the public stance in opposition to such allegations was a departure from the usual "low profile" of the agency, but they insisted that there was no evidence linking the C.I.A. to drug traffic in Southeast Asia. One well-informed Government official directly responsible for

monitoring the illegal flow of narcotics complained in an interview that many of Mr. McCoy's charges "are out of date." "Go back three or four years," he said, "and no one was concerned about this. It wasn't until our own troops started to get addicted, until 1968 or '69, that anyone was aware" of the narcotics problems in Southeast Asia.

This official said that in the eyes of the C.I.A., the charges were "unfair." He said of the C.I.A., "they think they're taking the heat for being unaware and not doing anything about something that was going on two or three years ago."

Based on 250 Interviews

During two Congressional appearances last month, Mr. McCoy testified that his accusations were based on more than 250 interviews, some of them with past and present officials of the C.I.A. He said that top-level South Vietnamese officials, including President Nguyen Van Thieu and Premier Tran Van Khiem, were specifically involved.

In July, 1971, Representative Robert H. Steele, Republican of Connecticut, said during a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing that the United States Government possessed "hard intelligence" linking a number of high-ranking Southeast Asian officials, including Maj. Gen. Ngo Dzu, then commander of the South Vietnamese II Corps, with involvement in the narcotics trade. Mr. Steele's accusations were denied and mostly ignored.

Mr. McCoy also alleged that Corsican and American syndicate gangsters had become involved in the narcotics trade. He said that such information was known to the C.I.A. In a chapter of his book published in this month's Harper's Magazine, Mr. McCoy further charged that in 1967 the infamous "Golden Triangle"—an opium-producing area embracing parts of northeastern Burma, northern Thailand and northern Laos—was producing about 1,000 tons of raw opium annually, then about 70 per cent of the world's supply.

The bulk of Mr. McCoy's accusations—both in the magazine and during the Congressional hearings—failed to gain much national attention. Nonetheless, the C.I.A. began its unusual public defense after a Washington Star reporter cited some of Mr. McCoy's allegations in a column.

Letter Sent to Paper

Two letters were sent to the newspaper for publication. Colby, the executive director of the C.I.A., and the other by Paul C. Velte Jr. a Wash-

ington-based official with Air America, a charter airline that flies missions for the C.I.A. in Southeast Asia. Both categorically denied the allegations linking C.I.A. personnel to any knowledge of or activity in the drug traffic.

A similar letter of disavowal, signed by Mr. Colby, was sent for publication to the publisher of Harper's Magazine within the last week. Robert Schnayer-son, the magazine's editor, said that the letter would be published as soon as possible.

The C.I.A. began its approach to Harper & Row in early June, apparently after learning of Mr. McCoy's appearance before the Senate subcommittee. Cord Meyer Jr., described as a senior agency official, met with officials of the publishing concern and informally asked for a copy of the manuscript for review prior to publication.

On July 5, a formal letter making the request, signed by Lawrence R. Houston, general counsel of the C.I.A., was sent to Harper & Row.

Mr. Houston's request was not based on national security, but on the thesis that "allegations concerning involvement of the U.S. Government [in drug traffic] or the participation of American citizens should be made only if based on hard evidence."

The letter continued: "It is our belief that no reputable publishing house would wish to publish such allegations without being assured that the supporting evidence was valid." If the manuscript were handed over, the letter said, "we believe we could demonstrate to you that a considerable number of Mr. McCoy's claims about this agency's alleged involvement are totally false and without foundation, a number are distorted beyond recognition, and none is based on convincing evidence." A copy of the letter was made available to The New York Times.

Mr. McCoy, in an interview, said that the book had been commissioned by Harper & Row and carefully and totally reviewed by its attorneys with no complaint until the C.I.A. request was made.

B. Brooks Thomas, vice president and general counsel of the publishing house, said in an interview in New York, "We don't have any doubts about the book at all. We've had it reviewed by others and we're persuaded that the work is amply documented and scholarly."

"We're not submitting to censorship or anything like that," Mr. Thomas said. "We're taking a responsible middle position. I just believe that the C.I.A. should have the right to review it." If Mr. McCoy

did not agree, he added, Harper & Row would not publish the book.

In a subsequent interview, Robert L. Bernstein, president of Random House and president of the Association of American Publishers, Inc., said that his concern had twice refused official C.I.A. requests for permission to revise manuscripts.

"In general," Mr. Bernstein said, "our opinion would be that we would not publish a book endangering the life of anybody working for the C.I.A. or any other Government agency. Short of that, we would publish any valid criticism."

In a series of interviews with The New York Times, a number of present and former officials of the C.I.A. acknowledged that smuggling and "looking the other way" was common throughout Southeast Asia during the nineteen-sixties. But many noted that the agency had since taken strong steps to curb such practices.

One official, who spent many years in Southeast Asia, said, "I don't believe that agency staff personnel were dealing

in opium. But if you're talking about Air America hauling the stuff around, then I'll bet my bottom dollar that they were in it."

Another former C.I.A. agent described Mr. McCoy's published writings as "1 per cent tendentious and 90 per cent of the most valuable contribution I can think of."

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