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Ex-C.I.A. Analyst Takes Stand for CBS

By M. A. FARBER

A Samuel A. Adams, whose thesis that the military had lied about enemy strength estimates in the Vietnam War formed the basis for a disputed CBS documentary, took the stand yesterday in the Westmoreland-CBS libel trial and told of the long road that led him to believe the underestimates placed American soldiers in jeopardy.

The testimony by Mr. Adams, who contributed years of research and scores of contacts to CBS as a paid consultant during the preparation in 1981 of "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," is considered crucial to the network's fortunes in the \$120 million suit brought against it by Gen. William C. Westmoreland.

"Did you believe," Mr. Adams was asked yesterday by David Boies, the lawyer for CBS, that a dispute over enemy strength in Vietnam in 1967 "was just in good faith?"

No, said Mr. Adams, "I had reached the conclusion at that point that there had been a deception."

The 51-year-old former analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency was called as the first "live" witness by lawyers for the network, who had opened their defense of the 1982 broadcast this week by reading depositions from other intelligence analysts into the record in Federal District Court in Manhattan.

Mr. Adams, who has devoted nearly two decades to proving his thesis, initially seemed exuberant as he recalled dodging bullets in Vietcong-controlled countryside and learning "the sanctity of evidence" he unearthed in reports of prisoner interrogations and captured enemy documents.

He remembered "bumping around the hot, dusty" province of Long An in 1966 in a pickup truck, compiling information in French, the only language he shared with a Vietnamese translator. He remembered in minute detail, the times and dates and circumstances in 1967 in which he came to feel that the military had decided to camouflage the real might of the enemy.

And for a man who will soon be portrayed on cross-examination as both mistaken and "obsessed," Mr. Adams appeared guileless under questioning by David Boies, the lawyer for CBS.

Q. When you traveled to Vietnam in January of 1966, what did you do when you arrived?

A. I got off the airplane.

At one point, as General Westmoreland looked on without expression, Mr. Adams described Vietcong defectors as "these gentlemen." At another stage he discoursed on a "band of Havana Cubans" he had monitored

and, at yet another, he lingered over the marriage of two junior C.I.A. colleagues.

"Maybe," said Mr. Boies, as Judge Pierre N. Leval smiled, "you ought to stick to the hierarchy and not get into the marital aspects."

As his testimony wore on, however, Mr. Adams grew as somber as most of the witnesses who preceded him since the trial began Oct. 9.

Mr. Boies asked Mr. Adams whether, in describing the military's position in a memorandum on enemy strength around the time of the 1968 Tet offensive, he had used the words "monument of deceit."

"That is correct, sir," Mr. Adams replied.

Q. That wasn't something that was manufactured or fabricated in the 1970's or the 1980's?

A. No, sir, it was not.

General Westmoreland commanded United States forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.

The documentary charged that, for political and public-relations reasons, his command had "conspired" to "suppress and alter" vital data on the size and fighting capacity of the enemy, mainly by deleting the Vietcong's part-time, hamlet-based self-defense units from the order of battle, the official military listing of enemy strength.

General Westmoreland contends that CBS defamed him by saying he deliberately misled President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He denies charges made by the broadcast that he imposed an "arbitrary ceiling" of 300,000 on enemy strength and ignored reports by intelligence officers of a larger Vietcong presence and a higher rate of North Vietnamese infiltration than he made known.

To prevail in his suit, the general must prove both that the program was false and that CBS knew that or acted with "reckless disregard" of its truth.

Besides CBS, the defendants at the trial are Mr. Adams; George Crile, the producer of the documentary, and Mike Wallace, its narrator.

Before Mr. Adams took the stand, Mr. Boies played for the jury a videotaped interview of Mr. Adams by Mike Wallace in May 1981, parts of which were later used in the broadcast.

Mr. Adams told Mr. Wallace the disagreement over enemy strength in 1967 — in which Mr. Adams and some other C.I.A. analysts favored an estimate twice the size of the 298,000 proposed by the military — was "anything but just a fight over numbers."

"It was the G.I.'s out there who had to fight these people, so it was terribly important to them," he said. "There

was always the grunt, the American infantryman, who actually had to fight these extra enemy soldiers, the ones that weren't supposed to exist."

Q. You realize what you're saying, that the commanding officers of those grunts were simply not telling their men in the field what was really going on, and therefore putting them in more jeopardy than they otherwise already were?

A. That's right.

Q. That's an awful accusation.

A. There you go.

Mr. Adams, a 1955 graduate of Harvard College, joined the C.I.A. as an analyst in 1963 after serving nearly four years in the Navy.

Mr. Adams, much of whose testimony confirmed evidence of his views and actions already admitted through cables and memorandums at the trial, will continue on the stand when court resumes on Monday. Yesterday he told the jury that his first assignment at the C.I.A. was examining a rebellion that broke out in the Congo Republic.

He said he became a Vietnam analyst in 1965 and made several trips in 1966 to South Vietnam, where he saw many American casualties caused by mines and booby traps planted by self-defense forces and where he began to realize the size of the enemy was being underestimated.

Mr. Adams recalled an incident in which he had asked a South Vietnamese colonel in Long An province whether the order of battle maintained by General Westmoreland's command was correct in listing only 160 guerrillas and self-defense militia in the province. The colonel, according to Mr. Adams, said the actual number for the guerrillas alone was at least 2,000.

"I began to have this feeling that there was something funny going on," he testified. "The statistics didn't make any sense."

Later in 1966, at C.I.A. headquarters, Mr. Adams said, he examined some captured enemy documents for Binh Dinh province and soon concluded that the number of guerrillas and self-defense forces for all of South Vietnam was probably triple the 112,000 in the order of battle. And the enemy's total force, he decided, was at least twice the figure of 280,000 then used by General Westmoreland's command.

"I went running around C.I.A. headquarters, telling people about the problem," he testified. "Something was radically wrong with the order of battle."

Mr. Adams said key analysts for the military in Saigon agreed with him, and appeared, by mid-1967, on the verge of substantially raising the overall estimate in the order of battle. But, to his dismay and newfound "suspicion," he testified, such a move was successfully opposed by senior members of General Westmoreland's command throughout that year.