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STAT

'CIA misleading nation'

BY ANDY THOMPSON
Post-Crescent staff writer

During his first 17 years in the Central Intelligence Agency, Ralph McGehee was convinced that he was helping save the world in the name of democracy.

Now he sees the CIA as a covert action arm of the presidency, over-throwing or supporting foreign governments while intentionally misleading the public to justify its activities.

McGehee, who created some of this "disinformation" which eventually was relayed to the American public, tried in his last eight years in the CIA to convince the agency not to mislead citizens about the Vietnam War.

He left the agency in 1977, after 25 years of service in places like Japan, Taiwan, The Philippines, Thailand and Central America.

"Finally, I could no longer sustain my prior ideological outlook," he told a group assembled Thursday at the Appleton Public Library. He appeared here as part of Central American Information week.

McGehee, who warned the audience that many of his statements would seem unbelievable, became disillusioned with the CIA when he was not allowed to report the strength of the communist movement in Thailand in the 1960s. He also "had a real problem with the United States in Vietnam."

"I protested the Vietnam war from within for 10 years," he said. "The agency was lying in propaganda to the American people on what the war was all about."

McGehee, who once served as chief adviser to the head of the Vietnam special police (the equivalent of America's Federal Bureau of Investigation), left the CIA to write a book which explained the situation to Americans.

The book, "Deadly Deceits," took three years to write and even longer to bring to the public because of objections by the CIA.

In addition, McGehee's outspoken nature about his former employer has resulted in surveillance. From time to time, he said, his phone will be tapped, his mail opened or his garbage examined.

"But it is all done rather sloppily," he said at a press conference prior to his speech. "I think intimidation is the name of the game. It is my assumption that these various sting operations are directed at me to make me do something illegal."

If McGehee happened to identify a current CIA agent in one of his many speeches, he would face a 10-year prison sentence and a \$50,000 fine. He must abide by a secrecy agreement he signed when he joined the CIA and clear material to be made public with CIA officials.

"It does bother me," he said of the open surveillance. "My only defense is to be 100% legal."

After the book was published, McGehee traveled to Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua. He sees some parallels between the CIA's involvement in Vietnam and its presence in Central America.

"I'm surprised at how unoriginal things are," he said as he traced CIA tactics over the years.

McGehee said there is always a shipment of communist weapons where the CIA is involved. Those weapons are planted in a country and the assumption is made that the country is under communist attack, he said.

He pointed to the United States' invasion of Grenada as a "great example of misinformation."

Americans were told that six warehouses in that country were filled with communist weapons. But that dissolved to two warehouses by the time the media arrived in the country a few days later.

McGehee said he watched situation comedy reruns instead of the evening news during that period. "I think the realism was the same on both of them," he said.

His main fear about CIA involvement in foreign countries (he says the CIA is currently trying to overthrow governments in 10 countries) is that harsh militaristic regimes will rule.

"The CIA is destroying popular governments and replacing them with brutal military governments," he said.

Meanwhile, in El Salvador, President Reagan contends that we are supporting a democracy, and the CIA is disseminating information which supports a U.S. policy based on human rights violations in that country, McGehee said.

"We're not told that it's mandatory to vote and if they don't, they are a good target of the death squads," he said.

McGehee said every country in Latin America and Central America has at one time or another been influenced by the CIA in terms of over-

throw or support.

"Particularly if the country is small and weak, the CIA can practically dictate if the country can survive or not survive," he said.

McGehee said it is "very possible" that U.S. troops might wind up in Central American countries, "but I hope it's not probable."

When the decision was made to put American troops in Vietnam, the public needed to be convinced that we were needed there, according to McGehee. He cited several instances of CIA-produced disinformation relating to that conflict and added that the majority of American media were suppressing stories which ran against the policy of the United States and printing those stories favorable to the policy.

Evidence manufactured in Vietnam was designed to get Americans behind the effort to prevent a takeover by Ho Chi Minh when he in fact already had control, McGehee contended.

"Fifty-eight thousand dead Americans later...we began to see some of the impact of the CIA's dirty tricks," he said.

The "most threatening operation," according to McGehee, was in connection with Vietnam protesters, as attention began to focus domestically.

"We had become the enemy," he said. "It was totally illegal; we had no right to do any of it."

The overall aim is an economically based world empire, and the best step citizens can take is to educate themselves about the realities of U.S. involvement in foreign countries, McGehee stated.

"The best thing that can be done is to learn about everything and then disseminate this information," he said.