

Ex-agent defies CIA, tells of Viet withdrawal

By SHIRLEE IDEN

government never admits this," he said.

MANY OF those who were not saved were people Snapp knew well. And even today he explains: "Over 100,000 boat people are afloat on the ocean trying to find a country to take them in or crammed into hellholes called 'refuge camps' in Thailand."

For Snapp, an ex-CIA agent, the author of a book on the American evacuation of Saigon called "Decent Interval" and the subject of a long interview in the May issue of Penthouse magazine, his own experience there and subsequent events have made it impossible to forget.

A trim, youthful man, neatly dressed in a dark brown suit and striped shirt, Snapp told how he served almost five years in Vietnam as an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency. He was the agency's chief strategic analyst in the Saigon section. Following his two tours there, the CIA gave him the Medal of Merit for his performance.

He was born in Charlotte, N.C., son of a former Marine who is now a superior court judge. He worked in radio and on newspapers and was graduated from Columbia University. He earned a master's degree in international relations there.

"WHEN I was about to graduate in 1968, one of my professors recruited me for the CIA," he said. "I hadn't known he was an agent but he'd been watching me. One of the reasons he gave for joining was to avoid the draft."

Snapp thus joined the CIA to avoid going to Vietnam and ended by serving almost five years there. He was in Saigon when the end came on April 29, 1975 and he was one of the last Americans to leave.

"I was hoisted off the roof of the embassy onto a helicopter and shot at all the way up," he recalled.

Snapp said the government, particularly Henry Kissinger, had "impeccable intelligence" that the communists would move into Saigon in force and there would be no negotiated settlement.

"Yet Kissinger and the government turned their backs on that intelligence and it was tragic. They forgot to plan for the evacuation of our friends and ultimately, the leave-taking became a free-for-all," he said.

Snapp estimates that 30,000 Vietnamese had been trained by U.S. agencies including the CIA and they were just cut off and massacred by the incoming communist armies.

"Some young embassy officers and others mounted their own evacuation using cargo planes and they got thousands of people out," he said. "130,000 were finally evacuated but the embassy was only responsible for about half of those saved. The U.S.

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—Frank Snapp, ex-CIA agent

the legal moves against him is that the government wants to charge him with a breach of fiduciary obligation.

"This is a common law concept of the obligation of a servant to his master," he said.

"IF I LOSE, then any employee of a

bureaucracy could be bludgeoned with this sort of ruling. Every government employee who ever writes a book could be charged.

"It's an incredibly broad-gauged assault on the First Amendment."

He added that the government is also suing to get all the profits from

his book and a yet undecided amount of punitive damages.

"If they win, I would be restrained from writing anything, ever. They got an injunction on Marchetti and he's still under it. He can't write poetry, novels or anything without checking with the CIA. Of course, Marchetti did leak classified information in his book."

Additionally, Snapp charges the secrecy standards of the intelligence community are being applied selectively. Other agents who have written haven't been bothered either, because they were complimentary, only mildly critical or influential.

"John Haldeman unquestionably leaked information in 'The Ends of

Power' especially when he talks about conflicts between the Russians and Chinese and no one's suing him," he said.

Snapp charges that part of his problem is the personality of Stansfield Turner, the former admiral who is the current head of the CIA.

"Just yesterday in this city, Turner persisted in saying I'm a disreputable man," Snapp said.

Snapp said Turner fired about 212 employees who he called "surplus" last fall and intends to fire 400 more.

"The clandestine services indeed are bloated," Snapp said. "And they're going after me because my book came out just as the firings came on."

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