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IN THE MIDST OF WARS:

An American's Mission
to Southeast Asiaby Edward Geary Lansdale
Harper & Row, 386 pp., \$12.50

Reviewed by Jonathan Mirsky

With the exception of the Pentagon Papers, Edward Geary Lansdale's memoir could have been the most valuable eyewitness account of the internationalizing of the Indochinese war. Lansdale, a "legendary figure" even in his own book, furnished the model for the Ugly American who, from 1950 through 1953, "helped" Magsaysay put down the Huk revolution in the Philippines. He then proceeded to Vietnam where, between 1954 and 1956, he stuck close to Ngo Dinh Diem during Diem's first shaky years when Washington couldn't make up its mind whom to tap as the American alternative to Ho Chi Minh. Lansdale's support insured Diem as the final choice for Our Man in Saigon. While the book's time span is, therefore, relatively brief, the period it covers in the Philippines and Vietnam is genuinely important.

There is only one difficulty with *In the Midst of Wars*: from the cover to the final page it is permeated with lies. That Harper & Row finds it possible to foist such a package of untruths on the public—and for \$12.50!—several months after the emergence of the Pentagon Papers, and years after the publication of other authoritative studies, exhibits contempt for a public trying to understand the realities of our engagement in Vietnam.

The lie on the jacket describes Lansdale merely as an OSS veteran who spent the years after World War II as a "career officer in the U.S. Air Force." In the text Lansdale never offers any explicit evidence to the contrary. Indeed, on page 378—the last of the text—he states that at the very time Diem was being murdered in Saigon, "I had been retired from the Air Force."

For all I know Lansdale drew his pay from the Air Force and, as the photographs in his book attest, he certainly wore its uniform. This is irrelevant. Lansdale was for years a senior operative of the Central Intelligence Agency; on page 244 of the Department of Defense edition of the Pentagon Papers, Lansdale, two other men, and Allen Dulles are identified as representing

the CIA at a meeting of the President's Special Committee on Indochina held on January 29, 1954.

Why is this important? Because if there is one word Lansdale uses repeatedly it is "help"—and he uses it personally, simulating a Lone Ranger-like urge to offer spontaneous assistance. Thus, the first day he ever saw Diem, ". . . the thought occurred to me that perhaps he needed help. . . . I voiced this to Ambassador Heath. . . . Heath told me to go ahead." The informal atmosphere continues when Lansdale, upon actually meeting Diem, immortalizes him as "the alert and eldest of the seven dwarfs deciding what to do about Snow White."

Further desires to serve inform Lansdale's concern for the "masses of people living in North Vietnam who would want to . . . move out before the communists took over." These unfortunates, too, required "help." Splitting his "small team" of Americans in two, Lansdale saw to it that "One half, under Major Conein, engaged in refugee work in the North."

"Major" Lucien Conein, who was to play the major role the CIA had in the murder of Diem in 1963, is identified in the secret CIA report included by the *Times* and *Beacon* editions of the Pentagon Papers (see SR, Jan. 1, 1972) as an agent "assigned to MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] for cover purposes." The secret report refers to Conein's refugee "help" as one of his "cover duties." His real job: "responsibility for developing a paramilitary organization in the North, to be in position when the Vietminh took over . . . the group was to be trained and supported by the U.S. as patriotic Vietnamese." Conein's "helpful" teams also attempted to sabotage Hanoi's largest printing establishment and wreck the local bus company. At the beginning of 1955, still in Hanoi, the CIA's Conein infiltrated more agents into the North. They "became normal citizens, carrying out everyday civil pursuits, on the surface." Aggression from the North, anyone?

Lansdale expresses particular pleasure with the refugee movement to the South. These people "ought to be provided with a way of making a fresh start in the free South. . . . [Vietnam] was going to need the vigorous participation of every citizen to make a success of the noncommunist part of the new nation before the proposed plebiscite was held in 1956." Lansdale modestly claims that he "passed along" ideas on how to wage psychological warfare to "some nationalists." The Pentagon Papers, however, reveal that the CIA "engineered a black psywar strike in Hanoi: leaflets signed by the Vietminh, in which the Vietminh advised how to behave for the Vietminh take-

over of the Hanoi region in early October [1954] including items about property, money reform, and a three-day holiday of workers upon takeover. The day following the distribution of these leaflets, refugee registration tripled."

The refugees—Catholics, many of whom had collaborated with the French—were settled in the South, in communities that, according to Lansdale, were designed to "sandwich" Northerners and Southerners "in a cultural melting pot that hopefully would give each equal opportunity."

Robert Scigliano, who at this time was advising the CIA-infiltrated Michigan State University team on how to "help" Diem, saw more than a melting pot:

Northerners, practically all of whom are refugees, [have] preempted many of the choice posts in the Diem government. . . . [The] Diem regime has assumed the aspect of a carpet bag government in its disproportion of Northerners and Centralists . . . and in its Catholicism. . . . The Southern people do not seem to share the anticommunist vehemence of their Northern and Central compatriots, by whom they are sometimes referred to as unreliable in the communist struggle. . . . [While] priests in the refugee villages hold no formal government posts they are generally the real rulers of their villages and serve as contacts with district and provincial officials.

Graham Greene, a devout Catholic, observed in 1955 after a visit to Vietnam, "It is Catholicism which has helped to ruin the government of Mr. Diem, for his genuine piety has been exploited by his American advisers until the Church is in danger of sharing the unpopularity of the United States."

Wherever one turns in Lansdale the accounts are likely to be lies. He reports how Filipinos, old comrades from the anti-Huk wars, decided to "help" the struggling Free South. The spontaneity of this pan-Asian gesture warms the heart—until one learns from Lansdale's own secret report to President Kennedy that here, too, the CIA had stage-managed the whole business. The Eastern Construction Company turns out to be a CIA-controlled "mechanism to permit the deployment of Filipino personnel in other Asian countries for unconventional operations. . . . Philippine Armed Forces and other governmental personnel were 'sheep-dipped' and sent abroad."

Elsewhere Lansdale makes much of Diem's success against the various sects, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen. (At every step Diem was advised by Lansdale who, at one pathetic moment, even holds the weeping Chief

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continued

CIA's murderous role outrages the Filipinos

By WILLIAM J. POMEROY

LONDON

Publication of the Pentagon Papers that has blasted a gaping hole in the credibility of a string of American administrations has set off a secondary explosion in the Philippines, where the role of the puppet Magsaysay administration in aiding the American aggression in Vietnam has been exposed.

One of the main reports in the Papers is that by Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, in which he discusses in detail the actions taken by the CIA from before the Geneva Agreement of 1954 onward to promote suppressive counter-guerrilla warfare in Vietnam and Laos and to build up Ngo Dinh Diem as the American instrument to frustrate the Agreement. Lansdale was well-known before that in the Philippines, since he was the CIA agent who masterminded many aspects of the anti-Huk suppression campaign in the country and who groomed Ramon Magsaysay for the presidency and ran his election campaign.

In a number of the actions detailed by Lansdale in his report Filipinos who were part of the Magsaysay apparatus and with whom Lansdale had worked in the Philippines played a leading part. Magsaysay himself as honorary president, backed the setting up of an outfit initially called the Freedom Company, "a non-profit Philippine corporation," which had the assignment of recruiting Filipinos who had participated in the anti-Huk suppression for similar service in Vietnam and Laos.

After Freedom Company was organized in November 1954, it was apparently felt that its name did not sufficiently disguise its operations, so it was changed to Eastern Construction Company. (The CIA has created a maze of such "corporations" around the world, through which its espionage and subversive activities are carried on.)

As the Lansdale report states, "The head of Eastern Construction is Frisco 'Johnny' San Juan, former National Commander, Philippines Veterans Legion, and for-

mer close staff assistant to President Magsaysay (serving as Presidential Complaints and Action Commissioner directly under the President)" San Juan went on to a political career and is now a congressman from Rizal province.

Lansdale praised the almost untapped potential of Eastern Construction for unconventional warfare "which was its original mission." He wrote that "this cadre can be expanded into a wide range of counter-Communist activities, having sufficient stature in the Philippines to be able to draw on a very large segment of its trained, experienced and well-motivated manpower pool." After a few years, "It now furnishes about 500 trained, experienced Filipino technicians to the Governments of Vietnam and Laos, under the auspices of MAAG (MAP) and USOM (ICA) activities."

MAAG are the initials for Military Assistance Advisory Group, and MAP for Military Assistance Program in Vietnam; USOM stands for United States Operation Mission, and ICA for International Cooperation Administration.

The Freedom-Eastern Construction outfit was also assigned the task of running a training camp for anti-Communist Vietnamese para-military units in a hidden valley on the Clark Air Base reservation in the Philippines.

In addition the Magsaysay government agreed to operate a psychological warfare counter-guerrilla school called the Security Training Center, located at Fort McKinley on the rim of Manila. This, as the Pentagon Papers mentions, was secretly sponsored and financed by the CIA. This trained "anti-subversion" personnel for all of Southeast Asia.

Another Filipino-linked scheme

was the so-called Operation Brotherhood, which came about following a visit in 1954 to see Lansdale in Saigon by Oscar Arellano, a Filipino close to Magsaysay who was then vice president for Asia of the International Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees). Arellano came away from this visit to advocate the setting up of Operation Brotherhood, which was played up in the Philippines at the time as a semi-religious altruistic medical mission.

However, as Lansdale explains it, it was "capable of considerable expansion in socio-economic medical operations to support counter-guerrilla actions," and he says that "Washington responded warmly to the idea." According to Lansdale, the Saigon Military Mission that he then headed would "monitor the operation quietly in the background" and that "it has a measure of CIA control."

Oscar Arellano, following the publication of the Pentagon Papers issued a defensive statement claiming that "OB has always been a presidential program since the administration of President Magsaysay. OB's mission is the propagation of the conviction that all men are brothers, created by a Supreme Divinity to whom He gave His image and likeness and imbued with His spirit."

A third Filipino operation was headed by Col. Napoleon Valeriano, who was given the job of training a Presidential Guard Battalion for Ngo Dinh Diem, after having done the same for Magsaysay. Valeriano was selected, says Lansdale, for his "fine record against the Communist Huks." In the Philippines, Valeriano had commanded the most brutal and notorious of all anti-Huk units, called the "Skull Unit."


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NEWS

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Sylvan Meyer

Plots for a thousand novels rife in Pentagon papers

You could wear out your tri-focals pouring through the Pentagon documents, not to mention the 400 page official summary of Vietnam history read aloud the other night by Sen. Gravel of Alaska.

And you can hardly blame the senator for waxing emotional. What the senator did not reveal, though he probably knows, is what the U.S. is up to today in clandestine operations and in policy debates.

There are several novels hidden in the understated drama of the papers that have been released since the Supreme Court decision earlier this week. Perhaps the stories are too real today to be fictionalized.

One novel might be structured around the foreboding U.S. leaders felt in the early 1930s about a national commitment to keep communism out of South Vietnam.

Maxwell Taylor, in November 1961, informed President Kennedy that a commitment to protect South Vietnam from communism might pull us into an endless morass, but he recommended the commitment be made, anyway. Gen. Taylor's own struggle to decide the moral and military issues, if we knew the man's inner mind, would provide a dramatist all the material he could wish for a play or a book.

Our 1961 concern over Dien's

leadership, our final desperation with him as his own forces rebelled against him and our concluding offer to help preserve his personal safety, all revealed in detail by the papers, would have provided Shakespeare a plot equal to that of Richard III. Not many modern writers, with their contemporary fixation on individual introspection and revelation, would tackle a story of one leader's confrontation with almost cosmic forces.

And the spy writers have a bottomless well of source material in the stranger than fiction disclosures of the most recently published documents. A memo on unconventional warfare directed to Gen. Taylor, for example, shows intrigue and duplicity enough to baffle James Bond. Indeed, the fictional spies barely could earn a merit badge in espionage compared to the real thing.

This memo tells of clandestine training bases in Okinawa and Saipan, working under the cover of routine Navy and Army setups, teaching counter-intelligence, CIA support activities and psychological warfare. It tells of a small ship, ostensibly owned by a Baltimore company, with an American captain and a Philippine crew ready for "paramilitary activities" in the Far East area.

It tells of "Frisco" Johnny San

Juan, an old Buk guerrilla fighter of the Philippines, who working as head of a corporation known as Eastern Construction, directed "unconventional operations" in Indochina, helped write the Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam and for a while received clandestine U.S. support for his activities.

The old pulp magazines, whose authors in this day and age obviously have turned to TV script writing, could have a time with "CAT," an airline headquartered in Taiwan and referred to in the documents as "a CIA proprietary." CAT provided logistical support to CIA operatives and U.S. agencies in Asia, overflew mainland China frequently and "demonstrated its capacity to meet all types of contingencies or longterm cover air support requirements in support of U.S. objectives." Here is a ready made plot for daring pilots air dropping supplies to the French at Dien Bien Phu, which CAT actually did, we learn a decade and a half after the fact.

In detail, after detail the documents provide true stories of operations in advising foreign governments, organizing military units in Thailand and Laos, supplying them with arms for border raids and counter guerrilla fighting. But maybe fiction readers wouldn't believe such far out material.

KEY VIETNAM TEXT

THE KENNEDY YEARS

Following are texts of key documents accompanying the Pentagon's study of the Vietnam war, dealing with the Administration of President John F. Kennedy up to the events that brought the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. Except where excerpting is specified, the documents are printed verbatim, with only unmistakable typographical errors corrected.

U.S. Ambassador's '60 Analysis Of Threats to Saigon Regime

Cablegram from Elbridge Durbrow, United States Ambassador in Saigon, to Secretary of State Christian A. Herter, Sept. 16, 1960.

As indicated our 495 and 538 Diem regime confronted by two separate but related dangers. Danger from demonstrations or coup attempt in Saigon could occur earlier; likely to be predominantly non-Communist in origin but Communists can be expected to endeavor infiltrate and exploit any such attempt. Even more serious danger is gradual Viet Cong extension of control over countryside which, if current Communist progress continues, would mean loss free Viet-nam to Communists. These two dangers are related because Communist successes in rural areas embolden them to extend their activities to Saigon and because non-Communist temptation to engage in demonstrations or coup is partly motivated by sincere desire prevent Communist take-over in Viet-nam.

Essentially [word illegible] sets of measures required to meet these two dangers. For Saigon danger essentially political and psychological measures required. For countryside danger security measures as well as political, psychological and economic measures needed. However both sets measures should be carried out simultaneously and to some extent individual steps will be aimed at both dangers.

Security recommendations have been made in our 539 and other messages, including formation internal security council, centralized intelligence, etc. This message therefore deals with our political and economic recommendations. I realize some measures I am recommending are drastic and would be most [word illegible] for an ambassador to make under normal circumstances. But conditions here are by no means normal.

normal. Diem government is in quite serious danger. Therefore, in my opinion prompt and even drastic action is called for. I am well aware that Diem has in past demonstrated astute judgment and has survived other serious crises. Possibly his judgment will prove superior to ours this time, but I believe nevertheless we have no alternative but to give him our best judgment of what we believe is required to preserve his government. While Diem obviously resented my frank talks earlier this year and will probably resent even more suggestions outlined below, he has apparently acted on some of our earlier suggestions and might act on at least some of the following:

1. I would propose have frank and friendly talk with Diem and explain our serious concern about present situation and his political position. I would tell him that, while matters I am raising deal primarily with internal affairs, I would like to talk to him frankly and try to be as helpful as I can be giving him the considered judgment of myself and some of his friends in Washington on appropriate measures to assist him in present serious situation. (Believe it best not indicate talking under instructions.) I would particularly stress desirability of actions to broaden and increase his [word illegible] support prior to 1961 presidential elections required by constitution before end April. I would propose following actions to President:

2. Psychological shock effect is required to take initiative from Communist propagandists as well as non-Communist oppositionists and convince population government taking effective measures to deal with present situation. [word illegible] of hand. To achieve that effect following suggested:

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4. Permit National Assembly wider legislative initiative and area of genuine debate and bestow on it authority to conduct, with appropriate publicity, public investigations of any department of government with right to question [word illegible] himself. This step would have three-fold purpose: (A) find some mechanism for dis-