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Decent Interval

An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam
Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition

Frank Snepp

With a new foreword by Gloria Emerson

"A great service to everyone's understanding of what happened in Vietnam in the spring of 1975. . . . Other accounts of that time will have to be measured against what Snepp, from his unique and highly informed vantage point, has produced."

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"An astonishing book. . . . Brilliantly argued and elegantly written."

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Widely regarded as a classic on the Vietnam War, *Decent Interval* provides a scathing critique of the CIA's role in and final departure from that conflict. Still the most detailed and respected account of America's final days in Vietnam, the book was written at great risk and ultimately at great sacrifice by an author who had believed in the CIA's cause but was disillusioned by the agency's treacherous withdrawal, leaving thousands of Vietnamese allies to the mercy of an angry

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"Replete with important disclosures. Provides the most detailed account to date of the operations of the CIA inside South Vietnam, as well as giving a first-hand account of high-level disagreements between Washington and Saigon over the use and integrity of intelligence."—*New York Times*

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"Important revelations. The incredible history of the American role in Vietnam would have been forever poorer without Snepp's perspective."

—*Boston Globe*

"Those who read the book will shudder anew at the tragedy, confusion, and gross incompetence Snepp lays bare."
—John Barkham *Reviews*



Courtesy of Frank Snepp

enemy. A quarter-century later, it remains a riveting and powerful testament to one of the darkest episodes in American history.

"The value of Snepp's book is that it teaches us, in an absorbing and brilliant manner, where the mistakes were made in the CIA and in the highest ranks of officials. . . . Even the most ardent critics of the war could not have ever guessed what Snepp the [CIA] insider has revealed."
—Gloria Emerson, winner of the National Book Award

Frank Snepp spent eight years in the CIA, five of them as interrogator, agent debriefer, and chief CIA strategy analyst in the Saigon embassy. His second book, *Irreparable Harm* (see page 26), recounts the Supreme Court case that emerged from the CIA's efforts to punish Snepp for publishing *Decent Interval*. A freelance writer and cable television producer, he currently works as an investigative reporter for ABC's "20/20" television news magazine.

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The Vietnam War on Trial

The My Lai Massacre and Court-Martial of Lieutenant Calley

Michal R. Belknap

The military trial of William Calley for his role in the slaughter of five hundred or more Vietnamese civilians at My Lai shocked a nation already sharply divided over a controversial war. In this superb retelling of the My Lai story through the prism of the law, Michal Belknap provides new perspectives and keen insights into core issues about the war that still divide Americans today.

One of the most highly publicized trials of its day, the Calley case emerged at a time when protests against the war were growing larger, louder, and more intense. Well aware of this, the Nixon administration sought to downplay the My Lai incident, which military officers in Vietnam had tried to cover up in order to protect their own careers and reputations. It might never have come to light had it not been for the efforts of Vietnam veteran Ron Ridenhour and journalist Seymour Hersh. Their investigations revealed the full extent of the My Lai tragedy, further inflamed the antiwar movement, and brought to trial Lieutenant William Calley.

Unfolding the Calley case step by step, Belknap shows how our system of military justice actually works. His dramatic reenactment takes readers through every stage of the trial, from pre-trial investigations to actual courtroom exchanges among prosecutors, defenders, witnesses, and judges. In the process, he reveals how a court-martial conducted within the public eye transformed a purely legal proceeding into a political debate about the conduct of the war. Calley's trial clearly

demonstrated both how deeply the Vietnam War had divided our nation and how difficult it was for any court to deliver justice under such intense media coverage.

Scrupulously fair to all parties involved, Belknap portrays Calley as both criminal and victim—guilty of the crimes of which he stood accused, but also an unintended scapegoat of the American military machine. His court-martial, for hawks and doves alike, epitomized all that was wrong with our involvement in Vietnam.

By reopening the Calley case, Belknap helps a new generation of readers better understand why the Vietnam War was so controversial and damaging to national unity. His book, however, also provides insights that apply well beyond events of a particular war, suggesting that the grim lessons of My Lai will continue to shadow the conduct of America's present and future wars.

Michal R. Belknap, a lieutenant in the army during the Vietnam War, is professor of law at California Western School of Law. Among his other books are *American Political Trials* and *Federal Law and Southern Order: Racial Violence and Constitutional Conflicts in the Post-Brown South*.



National Archives

"A wise, discerning, and powerful account of a notable trial that illuminates the larger meaning of the Vietnam War. Belknap's extraordinary analysis of the My Lai story skillfully explores the atrocities, the cover-up, and the political manipulation of the affair, and takes us beyond contemporary journalism to the complex history of what happened—and why."

STANLEY KUTLER, AUTHOR OF
THE WARS OF WATERGATE

"I thought I'd overdosed on books about Vietnam years ago, but this one is terrific. It somehow manages to maintain its balance without losing its power to mesmerize. Vietnam junkies and novices alike cannot help but be affected by it."

JOHN HART ELY, AUTHOR OF *WAR AND RESPONSIBILITY: CONSTITUTIONAL LESSONS OF VIETNAM AND ITS AFTERMATH*

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