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[Main page](#)
[Contents](#)
[Featured content](#)
[Current events](#)
[Random article](#)
[Donate to Wikipedia](#)
[Wikimedia Shop](#)

Interaction

[Help](#)
[About Wikipedia](#)
[Community portal](#)
[Recent changes](#)
[Contact page](#)

Tools

[What links here](#)
[Related changes](#)
[Upload file](#)
[Special pages](#)
[Permanent link](#)

Article [Talk](#)

Read [Edit](#) [View history](#)

Frank Snepp

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Frank Warren Snepp (born May 3, 1943)^[1] is a journalist and former chief analyst of North Vietnamese strategy for the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) (CIA) in [Saigon](#) during the [Vietnam War](#). For five out of his eight years as a CIA agent, he worked as interrogator, agent debriefer, and chief strategy analyst in the [US Embassy, Saigon](#); he was awarded the [Intelligence Medal of Merit](#) for his work.^[1] He is currently a producer for [KNBC-TV](#) in [Los Angeles, California](#). He was one of the first [whistle blowers](#) who revealed the inner workings, secrets and failures of the [national security services](#) in the 1970s. As a result of losing a 1980 court case brought by the CIA, all of Snepp's publications require prior approval by the CIA.^[2]

Contents [\[hide\]](#)

- [1 Background](#)
- [2 Career](#)
 - [2.1 CIA \(1968 - 1976\)](#)
 - [2.2 Memoir](#)
 - [2.3 Journalism \(1980 - present\)](#)
- [3 Quotes](#)
- [4 Books](#)
- [5 Awards](#)

[Page information](#)

[Wikidata item](#)

[Cite this page](#)


Print/export

[Create a book](#)

[Download as PDF](#)

[Printable version](#)

Languages

 [Edit links](#)

[6 See also](#)

[7 References](#)

[8 External links](#)

Background [[edit](#)]

Born in [Kinston, North Carolina](#),^[3] Snapp studied Elizabethan literature at [Columbia University](#), graduating in 1965.^[3] After spending a year at [CBS News](#), he returned to Columbia's [School of International and Public Affairs](#), graduating in 1968.^[3]

Career [[edit](#)]

CIA (1968 - 1976) [[edit](#)]

Snapp was recruited to the CIA in 1968, by the Associated Dean of the [School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University](#), [Philip Mosely](#).^[3] Initially working on [NATO](#) and European security, he was sent to [Saigon](#) in 1969.^[1] Here Snapp worked as an analyst and counter-intelligence officer, coordinating agent networks and interrogation of captured enemy forces as well as preparing strategic estimates regarding the enemy.^[1] Snapp rejected the usual 2-year rotation, and stayed in Vietnam until the US was forced out in 1975.^[3] Snapp wrote in 2009 that he was "still haunted" by the "psychological manipulation and torment of a prisoner" he was involved with as a CIA interrogator.^[4]

Snapp was on hand for the [Fall of Saigon](#) and was one of the last Americans to leave the [US Embassy, Saigon](#) before the city fell to the North Vietnamese on April 30, 1975.^[1] Snapp was evacuated with other American personnel in [Operation Frequent Wind](#). On his return to the US Snapp was awarded the [Intelligence Medal of Merit](#) in December 1975, but he resigned from the

Agency in January 1976, upset at its refusal to rescue Vietnamese left behind in the pull-out, and its refusal to acknowledge mistakes made.^{[1][5]}

Memoir [\[edit\]](#)

Snepp wrote a memoir of the event, *Decent Interval*, published in 1977 without prior approval from the CIA Publications Review Board.^[1] The book excoriates the tardy, improvised nature of the evacuation and laments the many Vietnamese working for the Americans that were left behind. Snepp redacted all names, methods, and sources from the book. The book was based on an after-action report that he had written and which he had sent through CIA channels. The report was not accepted.^[6]

After the book was published, CIA Director [Stansfield Turner](#) pushed for Snepp to be prosecuted, and despite the objections of some [Department of Justice](#) officials, Turner prevailed. Since publication of the book could not be stopped under the constitutional law forbidding [prior restraint](#) of the press, the CIA sued Snepp for [breach of contract](#). Snepp was accused of violating the [non-disclosure agreement](#) he had signed when he joined the agency that forbade publication of any material about CIA operations without the prior consent of the agency.^[6] Ironically, President [Jimmy Carter](#) permitted the prosecution of Snepp at the same time he had proposed the creation of a special unit to provide protection for civil service whistle blowers. In a press conference, Carter said that Snepp did not qualify as a whistleblower as he did not "reveal anything that would lead to an improvement in our security apparatus or the protection of Americans' civil rights." Carter also claimed that Snepp had "revealed our nation's utmost secrets", even though he had not been charged with violating any security laws like the [Espionage Act](#).^[6]

Snepp accused the CIA of ruining his career and violating his [First Amendment](#) free speech rights. The CIA in return claimed that Snepp had violated his employment agreement by speaking out. They sued (*United States v. Frank W. Snepp III*). He enlisted the help of the [American Civil](#)

[Liberties Union](#) in his defense. In the end, the CIA won a court verdict against Snepp, with the US Supreme Court ruling that Snepp's book had caused "irreparable harm" to national security due to creating an appearance of a breakdown of discipline in the CIA.^[1] The royalties from *Decent Interval* (amounting to \$300,000 by the time Snepp lost in front of the Supreme Court^[3]) were surrendered to the CIA, and Snepp forced to clear all future publications with the CIA.^{[1][2]}

In 2001 Snepp published a second book, *Irreparable Harm*, about his court battle with the CIA.^{[1][7]}

Journalism (1980 - present) [\[edit\]](#)

In 1980, following the Supreme Court decision against him, Snepp became an investigative journalist, contributing to publications including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Village Voice* and others.^[3] Snepp also worked in television, including for ABC's *World News Tonight* (1987–92), CBS (2003–05) and NBC from 2005.^[3] At *World News Tonight* he got [Eugene Hasenfus](#) to confirm that he had signed a government secrecy agreement, confirming the government's involvement in the [Iran-Contra affair](#).^[3]

Snepp won an [Emmy Award](#) in 1997 for an investigation into Mexican drug trafficking. He won a [Peabody Award](#) in 2006 as producer on an investigation for [KNBC-TV-Los Angeles](#) of a Los Angeles housing development sited on a toxic landfill.^{[3][8]}

During the late 1980s, he taught a Journalism and the Law course at California State University, Long Beach.

He was a technical consultant for the comedy film *Spies Like Us*.^[1] [↗](#)

Quotes [\[edit\]](#)

"Disinformation is most effective in a very narrow context."

Christian Science Monitor, February 26, 1985

"We always leave the last war thinking we have all the answers, but we end up having more questions."

University of California, Irvine, May 12, 2005

Books [\[edit\]](#)

- **1977**: *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* by Frank Snepp [ISBN 0-7006-1213-0](#)
- **1999**: *Irreparable Harm: A Firsthand Account of How One Agent Took on the CIA in an Epic Battle Over Free Speech* by Frank Snepp, with foreword by [Anthony Lewis](#) [ISBN 0-7006-1091-X](#)

Awards [\[edit\]](#)

- [Intelligence Medal of Merit](#) (16 December 1975)^{[1][5]}
- [Emmy Award](#) (1997)^[3]
- [Peabody Award](#) (2006)^[3]

See also [\[edit\]](#)

- [Stansfield Turner](#)
- [John Stockwell](#)
- [Ralph McGehee](#)
- [Lindsay Moran](#)

- [Philip Agee](#)

References [\[edit\]](#)

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2. [^] [a](#) [b](#) Frank Snepp, *CNN*, 3 July 2013, [Snowden and a muzzled free press](#) [↗](#)
3. [^] [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#) [f](#) [g](#) [h](#) [i](#) [j](#) [k](#) [l](#) Ted Rabinowitz, [Frank Snepp '65, '68 SIPA Chases the Truth From Saigon to Los Angeles](#) [↗](#), *Columbia College Today*, Fall 2013
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7. [^] James Bamford, *New York Times*, July 18, 1999, [Spy vs. Spies](#) [↗](#)
8. [^] [KNBC-TV-Los Angeles](#), 11 April 2006, [KNBC Wins Peabody Award For 'Burning Questions'](#) [↗](#)

External links [\[edit\]](#)

- [Frank Snepp's Official Website](#) [↗](#)
- [US v Snepp](#) [↗](#), US Supreme Court, Feb 19, 1980

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| [Analysts of the Central Intelligence Agency](#) | [Historians of the Central Intelligence Agency](#)
| [People of the Central Intelligence Agency](#) | [1943 births](#) | [Living people](#)
| [American whistleblowers](#) | [Columbia University alumni](#)

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