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By LINDSY VAN GELDER

Daily Closeup

HE ALMOST JOINED THEM

McCOY

For the first 17 years of his well-bred, accomplished life, Alfred McCoy was an eager recruit for the military establishment. "My fondest dream," he now recalls with irony, "was to go to West Point. But I had bad eyes."

The eyes are now encased in wire-rims, and Al McCoy is slumped in a chair in his publisher's office after a hard day on the talk-show circuit. The boy who wanted to be a cadet is today the author of "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," and the military establishment is not pleased.

McCoy's book—based on first-hand research in the Golden Triangle where Laos, Burma and Thailand converge, and where 70 per cent of the world's opium crop is farmed—concludes, among other things, that the American-supported governments of Southeast Asia "are deeply and lucratively involved in the growing, processing, transport and distribution of narcotics." He also accused the CIA of supporting such elements and charged that American aircraft have been "knowingly" used for the transport of narcotics.

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As long as the U. S. continues to prop up these governments, he warns, there will be no pressure to end the drug trafficking; addicted GIs will continue to bring their habits home and Mafia syndicates who work hand-in-hand with the Asians will continue to flourish. "Indeed, in the final analysis," says the last sentence in the book, "the American people will have to choose between supporting doggedly anti-Communist governments in Southeast Asia or getting heroin out of their high schools"

Earlier this summer, the CIA contacted Harper & Row and demanded to see the book prior to publication. Over McCoy's objections, the publishers acceded, but were unconvinced by the CIA's charges that portions of the study were "totally false" and "distorted beyond recognition." The book was published with no changes, Harper & Row said.

Harper & Row also released a statement noting that McCoy "has supplied us with documentation for every material allegation of a controversial nature" and that the book had also been "read by independent authorities in the field. As a result, we are convinced that the work is scholarly and documented to an exceptional degree."

Alfred William McCoy was himself the son of a career Army officer, the late Alfred Mudge McCoy Jr., who was later director of the Defense Communications Satellite Program, and the author feels his research was aided by the fact that "I get on really well with military people. That's my upbringing." He came to Southeast Asia with "excellent contacts" and his interviews were conducted on the basis that he was doing a book about "politics" or "corruption." Only after talking for a while would he raise the subject of drugs.

Born in Concord, Mass. on June 8, 1945, McCoy came from a family that had distinguished itself in several fields. His mother, Margarita Piel McCoy ("You know Piel's Beer? That's the family") is now an urban planner with the University of Southern California and recently published a study showing that residents of Los Angeles' Watts ghetto pay proportionally more taxes than their more affluent suburban neighbors.

His sister, Margarita, is now a second-year law student at Harvard and an activist in women's liberation.

McCoy attended the prestigious Kent School in Connecticut, where "I was a jock," winning varsity letters in football, wrestling and rowing. He was on the freshman crew at Columbia, majored in Japanese and European history, and learned about anti-war politics first-hand in 1968 when SDS closed down the university.

Asked about his involvement in the Columbia dispute, McCoy offers a smiling "no comment" but he insists that his reporting on his current book was "unprejudiced" by his own political view of the war.

McCoy, who speaks "fair" Japanese and "reasonable" French, got his master's in Asian studies from Berkeley in 1969 and then went on to Yale.

He is currently living in a $70-a-month apartment in New Haven (he is separated from his wife, Cathleen B. Read, who was one of two researchers for the book) and is working on a Yale Ph.D. in Southeast Asian history. Research for the book took him away from his studies, and, he says, left him $1000 in debt.

A great deal of McCoy's investigation involved interviews with Asian government officials, some of whom, he remarks drily, "have tortured more people in their lifetime than I've shaken hands with." He also went into remote villages in the Golden Triangle, interviewed villagers, and on one occasion was fired on by troops.

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On one occasion, he maintains, the CIA had maneuvered to cut off rice supplies to an opium-growing village in Laos that was "terribly embittered toward the Americans" because of the combat deaths of its young men. The village had declined to send more men into battle, and, according to McCoy, was being starved out:

"They were in that distended-stomach phase. Appalled, McCoy went to the media and "after all kinds of denials by officials, 1000 pounds of rice were flown in."

McCoy, who is also the co-editor of another book, "Laos: War and Revolution," (Also Harper & Row) has testified in Washington about his findings and plans to return to Southeast Asia after he receives his degree. "It's a dynamic part of the world," he explains.

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