

THE WAR CORRESPONDENT IN VIETNAM:  
PROCEDURES AND PROBLEMS IN  
REPORTING THE WAR

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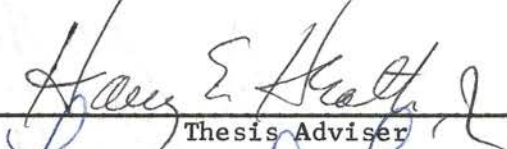
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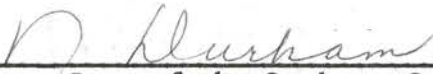
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## PREFACE

The investigation into the subject matter of this thesis began in June, 1970. Since that time an attempt has been made to try and gather as much information as possible in order to give this study a representative outlook. Yet, from the outset, a few obstacles have been encountered which have formed a barrier precluding the examination of some material.

It is regretted that the film "Why Vietnam?" could not be obtained for examination. This film was made by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. With the help of Ltc. John Rodolph of the Oklahoma State University Department of Military Science, it was traced from Ft. Sill, Oklahoma to Toby Hana Arsenal, Pennsylvania, to find that the only remaining copy is on record in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and cannot be released for viewing.

Telegrams were sent to selected war correspondents asking for telephone interviews. The only individual to consent was Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall (U.S. Army, Ret.), a former war reporter, author (Pork Chop Hill), and perhaps the most knowledgeable military historian living today. As a former Army officer myself, I would like to extend my appreciation for his time and frank expression of opinions about war correspondents.

Rarely is anything the work of one person. And this thesis is no exception. Many have contributed a part of themselves both in a

direct and an indirect manner. To them I raise my glass with the hope that in the future I may give back in multiple what I have received: to Dr. Harry Heath, Director of the School of Journalism and Broadcasting, Oklahoma State University, whose keen insight, and love of journalism has taught me the importance of detail and credibility in the profession; to my wife Barbara and my sons John and Matthew who, knowingly and unknowingly, sacrificed their time for mine and gave far more of themselves than I had the right to ask; and to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joe S. Williams, Jr., who taught me the value of a tear and a smile.

In the preparation of this thesis I have learned a great deal. However, in retrospect, the line separating enlightenment and confusion still looms very broad. To the correspondents who have gone before and to the Vietnamese who must go ahead:

A carpet lay on a  
Road traveled by many,  
And when evening came  
It was grey and dusty  
Like the road.

Thereupon I said unto my  
soul:

This is thy parable,  
O soul, when thou  
Endurest patiently the  
Market and the  
Incidents of the Market.

Fu-Kiang

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Never in the history of warfare has so much information been available to so many. At the peak of the combat, more than 400 correspondents in Vietnam turned out copy regularly for the mass media. It should not be surprising, then, that their output has seemed overwhelming on occasion, amplified as it has been by television, radio, and press into a cacophony of observations, opinions and official-but-sometimes-misleading statistics.

In the midst of this information explosion many people have had the feeling that they have not been getting the "true picture" of Vietnam (Arlen, 1967).

#### Post-World War II Background: A Brief Overview

A study of the war correspondent in Vietnam would be lacking without a general political background to set the tone of events in this much-troubled country.

Ho Chi Minh, hero to some and villain to others, proclaimed a Democratic Republic of Vietnam at Hanoi in 1945, in the wake of the Japanese surrender as World War II was concluded. But by 1946, the French had returned to Saigon and were engaged in hostilities with Ho's Viet Minh. In 1948, ex-emperor Bao Dai was installed as chief of state in Saigon by the French, who then obtained substantial financial

aid from the United States in 1950 at the time of the Korean crisis.

The Geneva agreements of 1954 ended hostilities and provided for a partitioning of Vietnam at the 17th parallel with reunification through elections to follow in 1956. The Bao Dai government did not accept the agreement or honor it; the United States created the SEATO alliance and included South Vietnam in the protected areas.

Premier Ngo Dinh Diem ousted Bao Dai, refused to allow the elections and obtained the help of the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group to train his army beginning in 1955. His opposition in South Vietnam formed the National Liberation Front and its guerrilla force, the Viet Cong.

By 1960 there were 686 U.S. military advisers in South Vietnam, a figure raised to 3,000 at the close of President Kennedy's first year in office (1961) as insurgency grew. Diem, his sister-in-law Mme. Nhu, and the ruling Catholic party became increasingly oppressive. The Buddhist uprisings of 1963 in Saigon and Hue, and the countryside insurgency, brought a November coup and the death of Diem.

The American advisory group, now a U.S. Military Assistance Command with 16,300 men, took over military affairs as 10 Saigon governments came and went in the next 18 months. In the United States, a new President was entering the White House just three weeks after the Saigon coup.

#### Framework for the Study

The Vietnam War has been termed "the best reported and least understood in history..." (Friendly, 1970). It is the longest war in U.S. history. In this century only World War II has cost this nation more



casualties. The tonnage of bombs dropped in Vietnam (North and South) exceeds that in Europe in World War II. Costs have mounted into the scores of billions of dollars.

It is within this framework that certain questions arise pertaining to the war correspondent in Vietnam: Have the U.S. correspondents described and explained the war? What were the procedures employed by the correspondents in reporting the war? What problems did they encounter? What were their relationships with the United States and Saigon governments and with U.S. military leaders? These questions are fundamental to the study of the war correspondent in Vietnam.

For the past 12 years Saigon has been the most important---and most difficult---dateline in the world. This undeclared war with far less than total backing at home is a curiously frustrating and unsatisfactory assignment. It is more than a military struggle. It also has other strategically important facets: political, diplomatic, economic and cultural. And, to complicate matters further, Asian values are vastly different from American values. Correspondents faced with reporting such a diversified war encounter numerous obstacles. And, in the end they are judged by their actions, their degree of understanding in conveying these complex segments, and their effectiveness in translating them to the American public. Rarely considered by critics is the degree to which media consumers apply themselves to a search for real understanding.

The members of the Vietnam-based American press corps play an extremely significant role in shaping public opinion about the war. What they report as well as what they fail to report can be the difference between a well-informed and knowledgeable populace and one that

is conflict-ridden and confused.

This study is concerned with the war correspondent and his position in Vietnam. It seeks to examine the role of the correspondent and to identify the problems encountered as well as the procedures employed in reporting the war. These problems cover a wide array of subjects. It is important to keep in mind that they are not independent, but are intrinsically related to each other, as they have been throughout the course of the war.

#### Method of Procedure

This study will attempt to synthesize selected books, articles, periodicals and other source material (i.e., a personal interview with Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall, a television special and various newspapers and theses) pertaining to the nature of Vietnam War correspondence.

A review of literature on this subject (see bibliography) indicated that other theses have dealt primarily with different facets of war correspondence and do not direct attention entirely to the problems and procedures of reporting the Vietnam War. The few studies that have been prepared, for example are concerned with such subjects as cold war censorship; comparisons between World War II, Korea and Vietnam coverage; public information officers and their work; news sources in Vietnam; and content analysis of various correspondents' works.

Due to the importance of war reporting and the lack of information on Vietnam correspondents, a study of this nature is needed.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY YEARS 1951-60

"One of the perplexing things about the war in Indochina is that a correspondent never knows whether he is safer at the front or at the rear!" (Durdin 1966). If specific mention of Indochina had not been made, this quotation might aptly have applied to correspondents in Korea or World War II. This remark was made in 1951 by one of the first American correspondents in Vietnam, when the French were trying to contain their colonial stronghold in Indochina.

During these early years, the correspondents primarily were concerned with being in the right place at the right time---and escaping the methodical Vietminh terrorists' grenades that were commonplace throughout Hanoi, which then served as command post for the French and home base for war correspondents.

The battle lines were more easily defined in those days, enabling the correspondent to jeep to the front in the morning and return in the evening "to a dinner of onion soup, grilled pigeon, chocolate souffle, and champagne." (Durdin 1966)

After the signing of the Korean armistice in the summer of 1953, the American press turned its attention to the long-ignored conflict in Indochina. It relied principally upon one basic source: the French army communiqués which were relayed to Paris by the Agence France Presse (AFP, French wire service). With their desire for economy, American

media relied on AFP rather than on staff correspondents in Hanoi to write the few daily war stories that were relayed by Associated Press, United Press and International News Service.

The French journalists and the few American free lance correspondents in Hanoi were limited in verbiage each week due to the expensive cable tolls. To some critics, their main purpose appeared to be that of providing enthusiastic stories with a byline and the magical dateline ---Hanoi. Otto Friedrich (1959) provides this insight:

When I was transferred to the Paris bureau that summer of 1953, I was only partly aware of how the war was being covered, and my first stories reflected the drabness of the French communiques...But I was soon taken aside by the assistant bureau chief...There was no point in even writing a story that just reported what was happening, he said, because such things usually ended on some editor's dead-spike. That verdict, I soon learned, was perfectly right. The story that got into the papers--and getting into papers was our reason for existence--was the one that showed "enthusiasm."

Friedrich defined "enthusiasm" as writing about something as though it were exciting even though one had no knowledge of it, or whether anything exciting was happening. Enthusiastic writing of this type relied on more than the usual adjectives and action verbs.

The AFP bureau in Paris sent an average of three stories per day to the United States. When the French army opened an offensive, the number would increase to six battle stories a day. But during a lull, the Paris bureau, with no incoming reports from Indochina, continued to file battle stories to the unknowing U.S. editors. Thus, it was not unusual for the bureau editors to create a false battle in which the French army---in "battlefront reports filtering through heavy censorship"---would be described as conquering heroes who "splash through the raging torrents in hot pursuit of the fleeing Reds." (Friedrich, 1959)

But why did the war correspondents and bureau editors of the AFP in Paris knowingly create these fantasies? One reason was that in 1953-54 the French officials did not subscribe to the philosophy that the public has a right to information and that the press should be separate from the government in order to represent the people. Instead, the officials had a policy of withholding news that would jeopardize their image. It was roughly a policy of "what the public doesn't know won't hurt them." (Friedrich, 1959)

At the other extreme, however, was the French Army's desire for publicity. And the war correspondents in Indochina---both French and American---were given press releases of turbulent offenses and hard-fought victories. If the French lost a village or town it was described as being "of no strategic value," but if they recaptured the same area it was played up as having "considerable prestige value." (Friedrich, 1959)

The war correspondent in Indochina---living the relatively good life of French colonialism before Dienbienphu---was the tool through which these apparent lies and denials were transmitted. American editors relied upon the wire services, and not their own reporters, to get the news. Because of the limited American manpower commitment, editors did not send their own personnel to Indochina. The expense involved in maintaining a correspondent some 8,000 miles away simply was thought to be too great. However, one year before, in June of 1952, the United States was contributing one-third of the cost of the war to the French and was becoming increasingly involved financially and politically.

## CHAPTER III

### THE UNREPORTED WAR: THE PRESS, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MILITARY

#### The Press Corps Forms: Trouble from the Start

The stage was set in 1961. President Kennedy, acting on the advice of General Maxwell D. Taylor's fact-finding mission to Vietnam, increased American military forces from 600 to 16,000. As the American mission did an about-face from an advisory role to a combat posture, the importance of this small Asian country and the American troop commitment quite naturally increased in the eyes of the U.S. editors. Newspapers and magazines began to take a more active interest in what was then termed the "Vietnam conflict."

American correspondents in Vietnam between 1961 and 1964 approached their jobs much as they had in the United States or elsewhere. The majority seemed to have perceived that their duty was "to report the news, whether or not the news was good for America." (Halberstam, 1965). The ambassadors and military officials, however, looked upon this kind of reporting as defeatist and irresponsible crusading.

Leading the correspondents' "crusade" were Malcolm Browne, who came to Vietnam in November of 1961 for the Associated Press; Neil Sheehan, who arrived in April, 1962, for United Press International; and David Halberstam, who joined them in May for the New York Times. Among others who appeared in 1962 were Horst Faas, photographer, and

Peter Arnett for the Associated Press; Peter Kalischer, CBS; Charles Mohr, Time; Beverly Deepe, Newsweek, who later joined the Christian Science Monitor; and Francois Sully, who had covered Dienbienphu and stayed on for Newsweek.

These correspondents were the first to report unfavorable news about the progress of the war, the weakness of the Diem government, and the inability of the U.S. government to achieve what it had set out to do: "...win the hearts and minds of the people."<sup>1</sup> Their reports were in conflict with official statements from military and political leaders sent from Washington on a variety of fact-finding missions.

When Neil Sheehan and David Halberstam viewed a military debacle at Ap Boc in January, 1963, they reported it as a failure of South Vietnamese arms, proving that U.S. military advisers had a long way to go to instill a winning spirit in their allies. And when the U.S. command described the battle as a victory, the undermining of the Vietnam-based press corps' reputation had commenced (Minor, 1970).

The primary reason for this journalistic-political-military tug-of-war in the early 1960s, stemmed from the correspondents' relentless questioning and investigating of the Diem government and the degree to which the United States supported it. In essence, when the U.S. administration publicly applauded the domestic policies of Diem, the press denounced and criticized them; when American military officials spoke of the war as being won, the correspondents stated that the war was not being won, only lost more slowly. To this was added the initial fear of U.S. correspondents by the Diem government, which looked upon the Western reporters as being largely responsible for Saigon's problems. As a result, Diem badgered, harrassed, intimidated, censored, and on

occasion expelled unfriendly correspondents.<sup>2</sup>

The most important expulsion case occurred in September, 1962, when Newsweek reporter Francois Sully (a French national who had lived in Indo-china for 17 years) was ousted by the Diem regime for his blunt reports on the government's dwindling support and the ineffectual war against the Viet Cong.<sup>3</sup>

Equally important to Sully's expulsion was the reaction of the American officials. Because of Sully's consistent "doomsday attitude" on the war, he had caused trouble for the American mission. As a result, the American officials were "not in the least unhappy to see him go" (Halberstam, 1965).

The relationship between the American mission and the American press in Vietnam thus began on an abrasive foundation. The correspondents, upset by the treatment of Sully yet still confident in their own purpose as reporters, were continually apprehensive and suspicious not only of the actions of the military and the American administration, but of the Saigon government as well. At the same time, the Diem government and the American mission in Vietnam were equally suspicious of the correspondents.

In order to understand some of the reasons behind the feuding, one must look more closely at the conditions which prevailed. By 1964, three years after the Kennedy troop build-up, there were only 13 employed correspondents working for United States news media in South Vietnam. There were only 60 correspondents in all of Vietnam. For the most part, the correspondents were young, agile, adventuresome and largely unable to speak Vietnamese without the aid of an interpreter (although some could speak French, the country's second language). As



with any small group engaged in similar work many miles from home, the correspondents tended to be drawn together in both their work and their social life. One theory is that the correspondents were too close:

They work hard and go their separate ways on separate assignments. But when they meet and unwind--in the field, in their homes or in the camaraderie of the Hotel Caravelle's eighth-floor bar--they pool their convictions, information and grievances. But the balm of such companionship has not been conducive to independent thought. The reporters have tended to reach unanimous agreement on almost everything they have seen. But such agreement is suspect because it is so obviously inbred. The newsmen have themselves become a part of South Vietnam's confusion; they have covered a complex situation from only one angle, as if their own conclusions offered all the necessary illumination.

As Buddhists set themselves afire and the pressures against the Diem government increased, the Saigon correspondents also found a new wave of conflict and agitation---within its own ranks. Stopping off in Saigon for periodic visits were syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop; Marguerite Higgins of the New York Herald Tribune, and Keyes Beech of the Chicago Daily News. Veterans of World War II and the Korean War press corps, these journalists were typified by their acceptance of the war as a necessary fact of life; they certainly were not activists probing into the humanness of military tactics and government policy. Higgins was an avowed "hawk" who had advocated the use of the atomic bomb if needed to repel the communists wherever they were. (Emory, 1971). David Halberstam, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and other newsmen were criticized by Alsop as being "young crusaders" who generally were accurate in their reporting but were responsible for the near psychotic state of mind among the inhabitants of Gailang Palace. Higgins prophesied that "reporters here would like to see us lose the war to prove they are right" (Halberstam, 1965). (Marguerite Higgins later

fell victim to an Asian infection from a 1965 trip and died a lingering death in 1966.)

The attacks mounted in 1963. The correspondents had repelled State Department press guidance by Carl T. Rowan in 1962 ("Newsmen should be advised that trifling or thoughtless criticism of the Diem government would make it difficult to maintain cooperation between the United States and Diem.") only to find in 1963 that Diem's police force would beat them over their heads and smash their cameras for covering a demonstration (Browne, 1964).

Aside from the criticism being echoed both by the administration and the correspondents, the pot boiled over in 1963 when Time magazine killed a pessimistic story filed from Saigon.

Charles Mohr, then Time's chief correspondent in Southeast Asia, and his colleague, Mert Perry, were asked by Time to do a wrap-up on the state of the war. The article began: "The war in Vietnam is being lost." The story, stressing the failure of American foreign policy in Vietnam, was not what the editors wanted to hear. They dropped the story and printed an optimistic piece that assured the public that "government troops are fighting better than ever" (Halberstam, 1965).

According to Stanley Karnow (Mohr's predecessor as Time bureau chief in Southeast Asia), Otto Fuerbringer, managing editor of Time then wrote an article for the magazine's Press Section with nothing but his own preconceptions to guide him. Karnow termed the article "a devastating compendium of bitter innuendo and clever generalities, all blatantly impeaching American correspondents in Vietnam for distorting the news" (Halberstam, 1965).

In effect, it hinted that the war was going better than one would

assume from the small clique of reporters who spent more time interviewing each other in the Caravelle Bar than they did in the field. The article not only seemed to indict other correspondents in Vietnam, but two of Time's own. As a result, both Charles Mohr and Mert Perry resigned.

Three years later, in 1966, when questioned on a National Educational Television program as to whether his material was being intelligently edited, Charles Mohr (then with the New York Times) replied:

I think, on the whole, the executives in the American press have, in the face of considerable threat and cajolery by public officials, stuck by their men out here (Vietnam). David Halberstam, who served here for the New York Times, was once asked what it took to cover a difficult story like this, what was the main quality a reporter needed; and he said a tough publisher.<sup>5</sup>

Also taking part in the NET broadcast was Malcolm Browne, one of the pioneers in the early 1960s with David Halberstam. His comments about the United States editors were sharp:

...having worked for a number of news organizations... I would say that editors and news directors and so forth at the desk level back in the States are very little above the average level of information than the rest of the American public. That is to say, they know practically nothing about Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

However, the correspondents themselves were severely criticized in an official mission white paper, prepared in January, 1963, for General Earl Wheeler, former Chief of Staff of the Army. The paper said, "The American commitment has been badly hampered by irresponsible, astigmatic and sensationalized reporting" (Halberstam, 1965).

And still further, in 1964, Arthur Sylvester, then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, spoke to newsmen about the press-Pentagon conflict. He stated, in effect, that American

correspondents had a patriotic duty to disseminate only information that made the United States look good. A network television correspondent said, "Surely, Arthur, you don't expect the American press to be handmaidens of the government."

"That's exactly what I expect," he replied (Safer, 1966).

David Halberstam relates that the criticism went even higher up the ladder:

The Kennedy administration--embarrassed by what was beginning to look like a major foreign policy failure, and angered by its ineptitude in allowing the pagoda crackdown to take place, in not having diagnosed it correctly when it did take place, and in not having any answer when it finally did analyze the situation correctly--took to attacking our reporting as inaccurate, the work of a handful of emotional and inexperienced young men. In addition, the President's press secretary, Pierre Salinger, and other White House staff members more interested in their chief's political status than the war in Vietnam, would knowingly inform White House reporters that we in Vietnam never went on operations (Halberstam, 1965).

The credibility gap that developed with the advent of American combat troops in Vietnam was one of differences between official statements, the war correspondents' reporting, and the extent to which they both were believed by the public. To many readers of the American press, the printed word is the truth. When the printed word is official, their convictions are reinforced. However, when the government was initially being attacked and doubted by the correspondents in 1961-64, the foundation was laid for what was to be seen later as a crumbling in credibility, not only within the government but the press as well.

The late Dr. Bernard B. Fall, (1968), an astute observer of many years in Asia who died doing his own research in Vietnam, offers a statement from former Embassy official (1962-64) John Mecklin that,

according to Fall, is an explanation that covers the period of French presence as well as the early 1960s:

The root of the problem was the fact that much of what the newsmen took to be lies was exactly what the United States Mission genuinely believed, and was reporting to Washington. Events were to prove that the Mission itself was unaware of how badly the war was going, operating in a world of illusion. Our feud with the newsmen was an angry symptom of bureaucratic sickness.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Charles Mohr, "At Issue #69: The Information War," National Educational Television Special (August 1, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>"Dateline Saigon: War of Words," Newsweek (October 7, 1963), pp. 98-99.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"The View from Saigon," Time (September 20, 1963), p. 62.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Mohr, "At Issue #69: The Information War," National Educational Television Special (August 1, 1966).

<sup>6</sup>Malcolm W. Browne, "At Issue #69: The Information War," National Educational Television Special (August 1, 1966).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GAP WIDENS----1964-1971

The decision to make the war in Vietnam a major United States war came in August, 1964, when the administration claimed that two U.S. destroyers on patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin had been attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats. President Johnson requested, and Congress quickly approved, a resolution giving him power to repel attacks and to prevent further aggression. It was the contention of Secretary of State Dean Rusk that an aggressor power was using force to achieve political goals; others contended that the war in Vietnam was a civil war, particularly with the actions involving the Viet Cong, guerrilla arm of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front. The Tonkin Gulf "incident" seemed to foreclose the issue.

At the time of the incident, 163 Americans had died in action in Vietnam, and the 16,000 American troops there as a result of the Taylor mission were serving more as advisers than combat soldiers. But within a year President Johnson had put to work the Congressionally approved "Tonkin Resolution." In the President's hands, the resolution became functionally equivalent to a declaration of war---one which ultimately saw more than half a million U.S. troops committed to Vietnam and more than 50,000 killed.

What really happened the night of August 4, 1964, was unclear when Congress voted President Johnson a free hand in the war. What came to

the surface after stateside newsmen questioned the crew members of the U.S. ships Maddox and Turner Joy gave a much different picture of the incidents than the administration version which was initially transmitted by the news media. (The Maddox, on an espionage mission, had violated territorial waters, and total damage in the "attacks" was one bullet hole in the Maddox.) The media did not investigate the administration's claims until it was too late (Stillman, 1970).

When U.S. troops began pouring into South Vietnam (160,000 by the end of 1965) as a result of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the build-up of war correspondents moved apace. Over the previous five years, clashes between the press and the military-government had been increasing in intensity. Now, with the growing media presence during the last half of the 1960s a more open criticism mushroomed.

Government spokesmen responded by questioning not only the competence and good judgement of reporters, but their patriotism as well. As a consequence, an undercurrent of doubt greeted much of the news from Vietnam. This crisis in credibility reached a peak between 1964 and 1968.

The problems that existed in the initial days of U.S. military involvement have changed only in degree of intensity to the present. It is a vicious circle. The press is accused of not supplying the people with the facts; the administration is attacked for trying to suppress information; the correspondents are treated as a nuisance; and the military is criticized for giving a false picture of the progress of the war.

One of the major complications that surfaced in 1965 was the correspondents' realization that the war was, to the Vietnamese govern-



ment, still essentially a Vietnamese war. According to Frank McCulloch, Southeast Asia bureau chief for Time in 1965, the Vietnamese government felt that it had a right to some voice in the reporting of the war. That fact complicated matters for the USIS. Said McCulloch(1965): "Not only is there the problem of two conflicting governmental views; there is also a marked difference between American and Asian concepts of freedom of information."

#### Army Information: Free or Closed?

By 1969, the difficulties between the correspondents and the Army had mounted. Since the early days of the war, the press had been considered bothersome to the military, tolerated but rarely trusted. The cooperation that did take place was usually formal. Since the war in Vietnam had no well-identified battle lines, many of the encounters were short lived and unknown to most but the military. Other operations were held secret until after the fact, unless detected by the press. Therefore, the correspondents were at least partially dependent on Army information channels for news. Figures on body counts, skirmishes, sorties, bombs dropped, raids and lost planes were compiled exclusively by the Military Office of Information.

The Vietnam press corps generally considered the Army's information open to question. Objective reporting by public information personnel may often bend to the desire of one's military superiors. The Army had its own doubts. It claimed that the press sought big news even at the cost of "abetting the enemy and prolonging the war" (Fox, 1969). During the April 1972 North Vietnamese offensive, about 100 American soldiers balked when ordered to move through what they considered to

be a booby trapped area. Lt. Frederick P. Mitchell, (the Battalion) commander, said: "All you press are bastards---I blame you for this and you can quote me on it." The press responded that only objective reporting can justify the correspondent's role in the war.<sup>1</sup>

In 1969, the first unified action taken by the press corps saw 11 bureau chiefs (representing the three major television networks, the New York Daily News, Visnews, UPI, Metromedia, the Scripps-Howard Alliance, Westinghouse Broadcasting Corporation, National Catholic News Service and the British Broadcasting Corporation) send a letter of protest to Col. Gordon Hill, chief of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Office of Information in Vietnam. The letter complained about the lack of pertinent information on U.S. military activities and charged the Military Assistance Command, Office of Information (MACOI), with attempting to suppress news by the use of evasion, refusal to comment without explanation, and refusal to answer legitimate questions (Fox, 1969).

The letter detailed ten examples from a list of 50 incidents of managed news. One example follows:

Recently, enemy forces launched an assault against what an official MACOI communique and spokesmen called a "night defensive position." Newsmen recognized the location as, in fact, the headquarters of a brigade of the 4th Infantry Division. Only through tedious questioning at a briefing did the spokesmen reluctantly admit that rather than a "night defensive position" the Communists had, in fact, assaulted a U.S. brigade headquarters. This would appear to be another clear case of deliberate omission in an attempt to play down significant enemy attacks (Fox, 1969).

The 11 bureau chiefs further insisted that MACOI was deliberately withholding information, not for reasons of security but because the

release of such information would produce unfavorable publicity.

Paradoxically, the U.S. Army Public Information Officer's Guide contains this statement governing the release of news: "The Army is accountable to every American for its actions. Therefore, it is the policy of the Department of the Army to make available to the public, either directly or through the various news media, all unclassified information of news value" (Fox, 1969).

#### The "Five O'Clock Follies"

The credibility gap between the military and the correspondents seemed to broaden every afternoon after Vietnamese and American press corpsmen flocked into the Vietnamese Office of Information in Downtown Saigon. There the press would listen to military and government spokesmen give briefings on the war's progress during that day. These briefings---termed the "five o'clock follies" by newsmen---varied from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on the business of the day.

Most correspondents complained about these briefings, saying that all they were good for was to establish where the major activities took place that day. When the briefing officer was unable to provide details about certain operations, the newsmen often perceived this as further evasion. More likely than not, however, the officer giving the briefing was in the dark as to information other than that which he may have had in front of him. Like the correspondents in the audience, the briefing officer was not a witness to the activities about which he was speaking. The briefing officer may have been the second, third, or fourth in the communications chain of command.

Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall (U.S. Army, Ret.), a military

historian, author, and war correspondent, discussed the daily military briefings in an interview. General Marshall (1970) assessed them as largely a waste of time:

There is usually a spokesman for each of the services who tells what has happened in his service that is of interest that day and, as I recall, there is also a civilian spokesman. I've only been to them two or three times because that is pretty much a waste of a correspondent's time if he takes his work seriously. The sessions last for half an hour and there are questions of the speakers provided anyone is curious about some of the points raised. Now the beef is that these things are inaccurate...that they are just an exercise in nailing cranberry jelly against the wall and they are not specific enough. But this is no worse in Vietnam than it is in any other war. It was just as bad in Korea. It was just as bad in World War II and in any theater you visited, because the fact of the matter is that the further you are removed from the fighting line, the more inaccurate the information is. You see, it isn't because the higher levels want to gloss the thing over or want to make it look good. The news just doesn't get up there.

All these differences have had a complex side effect, for they have raised questions about the credibility of the press as well as that of the administration. The alleged information gap really boils down to discrepancies between press reports and government reports on the progress and nature of the war. These in turn have focused attention on the correspondents in Saigon. Their integrity, fairness and detachment have been seriously challenged. Surprisingly enough, some of the harshest criticism has come from the press corps itself. President Johnson had reservations about the Vietnam press coverage, especially on political developments. During the 1966 Vietnam elections, Johnson said he was "encouraged by the progress" there but that he couldn't follow this progress "in the press as fully and in [as great] depth as I would like to." He added, "I have to go back and dig up

some of the cables from day to day, because the progress that the committee is making in the electoral developments is not as headline grabbing as some of the other distressing incidents" (Fritchey, 1967).

#### Marshall's Criticism

Still further criticism of correspondents came from Brig. Gen. Marshall, who stated that:

Individual battles, ever the mainstream of the fighting story in Vietnam as in any other war, continue to be ignored solely because the majority of U.S. correspondents...don't give a damn about them. Perhaps the reporters are ignorant of war and do not wish to expose their innocence, or so fearful of the front that they cannot endure the thought of staying with it.

The overwhelming majority of correspondents do not get to the front; and in that regard, at least, the American press continues to be derelict in its main responsibility. The story of the war is not being told in its daily columns; there we find only tangents and sidebars (Marshall, 1970).

Marshall contended that the average correspondent "...prefers a piece that will make people on the home front squirm and agonize...any demonstration or riot, especially a Buddhist demonstration-riot, is sure-fire copy..."

General Marshall is known for his blunt and harsh indictment of war correspondents in Vietnam. Being an authoritative source, he has aroused strong feelings among the correspondents. Some journalists share Marshall's views, but there are those who do not. Wes Gallagher, general manager of the Associated Press, pointed out that the AP had more than 30 men in Saigon (in 1967), including 16 who rotated in the field with the troops. "Correspondents," Gallagher stated, "have covered both political and military developments, and every military

man and public leader has emphasized that winning the political battle is at least half of winning the military battle in Vietnam" (Fritchey, 1967). Robert Shaplen, of the New Yorker believes that war remains political and that it is proper that the riots and demonstrations be fully covered, not because they are "sure-fire copy" but because they are a vital part of the whole picture (Fritchey, 1967).

#### The Impact of Pictures

If this period can be said to have had a major highlight, a strong contender would be "The Burning of the Village of Came Ne," filmed in 1965 by Morley Safer of CBS News. U.S. Marines had received hostile fire from this village and in retaliation---after the Viet Cong had slipped away---leveled the 150-home hamlet. The camera showed Safer standing in front of the burning huts as he said, "The Viet Cong were long gone--the action wounded three women, killed one baby, wounded one Marine and netted four old men as prisoners." When Walter Cronkite used the film, a fury erupted. Critics said it was too realistic and that American soldiers should not be criticized.<sup>2</sup>

The military, however, has probably caused considerable damage to its own image during the mid 1960s by the operation names used for its combat patrols. Titles such as "Operation Masher" and "Operation Hamburger" seemed to have a diverse effect on the American public. This was especially true when film was sent via satellite from Vietnam showing Vietnamese parents running from a burning cottage with children in their arms, or a newspaper picture showing a mother sobbing over a dead child with the operation title in the cutline. In this manner the

military, by its own hand, created dissonance and alienation in the American populace.

Salisbury: Dateline Hanoi

New fuel for the controversy came in 1966, when Harrison Salisbury, a senior editor-correspondent for the New York Times, filed a story from Hanoi which read:

Contrary to the impression given by the United States communiques, on-the-spot inspection indicates that American bombing has been inflicting considerable civilian casualties in Hanoi and its environs for some time past--there is damage attributed by officials here to raids, as close as 200 yards from the hotel.<sup>3</sup>

Not only had Salisbury, the first U.S. correspondent granted a visa by the North Vietnamese, scored easily the biggest news beat of 1966, but his dispatches, filled with detailed observations, directly contradicted much of the claimed success of the U.S. bombing program. The bombing had not always been pin-pointed on military targets; small villages had been reduced to ruins; bombs sometimes were dropped indiscriminately by fliers; and the bombing scarcely made a dent in the transportation and war-supplies capability of the North Vietnamese. In some sectors, the credibility of the press suffered (it should not use material favoring the enemy), but in the long run it was the Pentagon which received the sharpest blow.

In 1967, General Thieu was elected president in South Vietnam and, with U.S. troop strength at 485,000 men, the administration was claiming a victory. Journalists such as Joseph Alsop and Hanson W. Baldwin were assessing the North Vietnamese as badly hurt and incapable of winning.

But others in the profession saw a different score. Peter Arnett of the AP said General Westmoreland was "in a critical position." Ward Just, Washington Post correspondent, said all the statistics reported by the government gave a false picture of conditions, for the country was not pacified when you could not safely travel on its roads. R. W. Apple, Jr. of the New York Times said: "Victory is not close at hand. It may be beyond reach." Robert Shaplen, the New Yorker magazine's correspondent who is widely respected by both his colleagues and Washington observers, and Denis Warner of Reporter magazine added their estimates of what they considered to be the stalled effort in Vietnam (Minor, 1970).

Saigon press corps members had not been off target in their assessments. When the Tet offensive of late January, 1968, occurred, the National Liberation Front assault on Saigon put the U.S. Embassy under seige, held the city of Hue for 25 days, and wiped out most of the pacification program in the countryside. General Westmoreland asked and received an additional 25,000 troops from President Johnson, topping off at a total of 538,900. A reassessment of the Vietnam war policy had inevitably been set in motion.

#### Press Corps Dissent

There have been additional arguments both for and against the manner in which the war has been reported. What was startling to some, however, was how divided this far-away press corps itself had become. In Vietnam, the American correspondents were split in much the same way as the people back home. There were hawks, doves and owls. While one might hope that most made an effort to be detached in their repor-



ting, there was bound to be tension amidst such strong emotions.

Undoubtedly the sharpest schism was over the military versus the nonmilitary aspects of the war. The veteran journalists who acquired valuable military experience in earlier wars seemed to like being with the troops, and there is little doubt that their dispatches have been distinguished by an understanding of the soldier in battle. Yet on the other hand, many of the younger correspondents have been absorbed in the intricate politics of the situation. They have come to know most of the ropes and their reporting often reveals shrewd insights. It seems that the argument over where the coverage should be need not trouble the American people, for it has been getting reports from all parts of the spectrum in Vietnam. Perhaps, as Robert Shaplen has said, the American people have become confused due to such a mass coverage from so many different angles (Fritchey, 1967).

#### Age Old Conflict: Censorship

Conflict between the press and the government seems to know no season. It flourishes in peacetime as well as in war. The nature of the democratic system, with its conflict between the public's right to know, as represented by the press, and the government's duty to maintain national security, creates tensions. Yet when the government seeks to block the legitimate function of the press or when the press either distorts its own role or shirks its obligation, democracy faces serious perils.

While there has been no formal military censorship in Vietnam, as there was in World War II, there has been expressed concern over security in the reporting of the war. The press has been asked to follow certain

rules of self-censorship. These guidelines pertain primarily to troop unit identification, locations and planned deployments.

The absence of formal censorship has both good and bad points. On the one hand, it facilitates fast communication; on the other hand, it allows for misrepresentation. For example, a correspondent in the field may interview a few soldiers on the aftermath of a battle and file his story. But the information obtained from these individuals may comprise just a minute portion of the entire operation. His article may be dispatched and in the news that evening, but it may misrepresent the particular operation described, since it was not verified. By that time the initial impression on the public has already occurred.

#### Correspondent Suspended

A case that has been described as "one of the harshest disciplinary actions ever taken against an American reporter"<sup>4</sup> occurred on June 24, 1968. John Carroll, a 26-year-old correspondent for the Baltimore Sun, broke the embargo and wrote a story on the evacuation of Khe Sanh. Due to Carroll's article, General Creighton W. Abrams, who had just taken over as U.S. Commander in Vietnam, suspended Carroll's press credentials. The case against Carroll was that he broke the military's embargo against the release of information on troop movements. Carroll argued that the purpose of the embargo on Khe Sahn "...was political, not military. Rather than have daily coverage of the abandonment, the military wanted to hold everything until it was over. Then they would have only one bad day in the press."<sup>5</sup>

Whether Carroll's suspension was justified is debatable. General Abrams contended that the embargo was to insure protection for his men.

But to numerous correspondents, the suspension merely increased the already growing hostility between the press and the military.

In some respects, voluntary censorship is more damaging and dangerous than overt government control. By definition it is more pervasive and insidious. For example, before censorship was abolished in the Saigon newspapers, it was obvious that an item was deleted by a government censor due to the glaring white space. Censorship in Saigon now has become less open, for every newspaper operates "by anticipating governmental action against it, not only for content but also for tone and editorial direction" (Minor, 1970).

In one instance, the Saigon Daily News, an English-language paper, was closed by the government because it did not display a governmental announcement with sufficient prominence. Since the days of President Diem, it has been the policy of the Saigon government to control newspapers with an all-powerful hand, free to close them whenever something is printed that is not to the authorities' taste.<sup>6</sup>

(In the previous section, correspondents pointed out that one of the principal reasons for conflict between reporters and the Diem government was the inability of the government to control the American correspondents. This led to mistrust and aloofness on the part of the Saigon government as well as on the part of the correspondents.)

The few restrictions that have been imposed on correspondents came in 1965, when the United States began air strikes over North Vietnam. During that initial period, newsmen could not interview Air Force pilots unless escort officers were present. Pilots who flew outside Vietnam could not be interviewed at all.<sup>7</sup>

Restrictions such as these are necessary, says the Pentagon.

"The other morning," said a Pentagon press officer, "the bombers took off from Da Nang. Before they were over their targets--actually 12 minutes after take-off--one of the wire services had the story on the wire."<sup>8</sup>

Wes Gallagher, general manager of the Associated Press, remarked that "AP correspondents, if given unfettered access to the Da Nang military complex, would be willing to submit all copy to formal U.S. Army censorship."<sup>9</sup> It is Gallagher's contention that the barring of correspondents from free access to air bases and other military installations is clearly aimed not at security matters but at controlling what the American fighting men might say.<sup>10</sup>

#### Censorship and the American Serviceman

American servicemen in South Vietnam depend mostly upon the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) and Stars and Stripes for their news. In 1964, according to the late Jim Lucas, whose correspondence from Vietnam began in the closing days of French rule, servicemen were being told "...next to nothing." He contended that "censorship apparently is based on the idea we can't risk offending an eavesdropping audience of a million Vietnamese who understand some English."

Barry Zorthian, who in 1964 was head of the U.S. Information Service (USIS) in Vietnam, called the AFRS "the Commander's and the Ambassador's link with the American community." Zorthian said, "It must be maintained. The answer to the problem is not silence. We know that. I hope the new system [a plan under which a key person rushes to the studio in emergencies and decides what goes on the air] works. If it doesn't, we'll try something else" (Lucas, 1967).

A contrasting event occurred in early 1970 when a group of young service newsmen raised the specter of censorship. The charge was interference with the so-called McNamara Doctrine of 1967, in which the then Secretary of Defense emphasized that servicemen are entitled to the same unrestricted flow of information as all other citizens. The officers in charge of the Saigon Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) claimed that the newsmen were confusing censorship with editing. This conflict was highlighted when Specialist 5th Class Robert Lawrence commented at the end of his regular telecast: "A newscaster at AFVN is not free to tell the truth." He added, "We have been suppressed, and I'm probably in trouble for telling you tonight the truth."<sup>11</sup>

Lawrence's charges were based upon his claim that film clips about racial disturbances in the United States had to be cleared with an officer. However, the film was aired, according to Time Saigon correspondent Burton Pines. Pines contended that the Military Assistance Command Office of Information (MACOI) constantly harassed and meddled with AFVN news (MACOI is the immediate supervisor of AFVN). More importantly, however, Pines stated that "when MACOI casts the same protective eye on news film supplied to AFVN by CBS and ABC---film that has been shown in the United States---it sometimes dents the McNamara Doctrine."<sup>12</sup>

The Vietnam War has posed many problems pertaining to the release of information. Because of the American investment in manpower, money, and equipment, the public has a right to know the facts concerning American involvement in war.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the government is obligated to make the facts available. Because there has been no formal official imposition of censorship in South Vietnam, the question of censorship

has been left up to the individual correspondent and his employer. The restrictions that have occurred have, for the most part been few.

### Distortions

While the correspondents have tolerated self-censorship, they cannot ignore distortions. Such distortions have marred government information policies on Vietnam for years. A few examples are apropos:

(1) Early in the war, American correspondents reported that it was going badly. They got their information primarily from American military advisers in the field. Yet in October, 1963, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, fresh from a trip to Vietnam, announced that most American troops would be home by the end of 1965.

(2) At the same time, the correspondents reported that the South Vietnamese hamlet fortification program was making no progress and that official statistics on these fortifications were exaggerated. Here, again, the press got its information from American military advisers in the field and presumably the White House and the Pentagon had the same sources. Yet the correspondents were assailed by officials (Raymond, 1966).

(3) The handling of the 1966 Christmas cease-fire further reinforced press skepticism of the official word. Throughout the truce period, information officers in Saigon insisted there were no truce violations. When the truce was over, on instructions from Washington, they released information of violations apparently known to them all the time (Raymond, 1966).

Several correspondents have voiced their feelings regarding information officers as sources of information:<sup>14</sup>

"My experience has been that a good part of the information officers here really present a picture of Vietnam in pastel colors, which are very unreal." Dean Brellis, NBC News.

"An information officer is basically no different from any kind of press relations officer. It's our job to unmask him when he's lying, which they do." Malcolm Browne, free lance correspondent.

"...you have, in Saigon, a different kind of information officer, who is more interested in policy than facts, and above all, is interested in the effect of stories. He's constantly worried about what the effect of a story will be rather than its accuracy. But I don't say that they constantly misprint things." Charles Mohr, New York Times.

(4) One of the most frequent complaints throughout the war has dealt with the "body count" or "kill ration," which refers to the method of counting dead bodies of the enemy following a battle. South Vietnamese estimates of enemy dead were found to be grossly exaggerated. American estimates have been frequently questioned as well.

In one incident, a military spokesman reported that 90 enemy bodies had been counted hanging on barbed-wire fortifications. But a reporter who went to take pictures while the battle was still on was told by troops on the scene that there never had been bodies on the wire. In another instance, a reporter offered to show a briefing officer a picture of a disabled Marine Corps tank that the officer said had not been knocked out (Raymond, 1966).

#### The Investigations of My Lai 4

Ironically, one of the biggest stories of the war in Vietnam escaped the American correspondents. This was the massacre of civilians at My Lai 4 on March 16, 1968, by U.S. Troops, for which Lt. William

Galley was convicted of murder in 1971. Despite the fact that military pictures were taken at the massacre site, and stories of the "Pinkville" affair were passed from G.I. to G.I., the news did not break until October, 1969, when Seymour M. Hersh, a free lance writer in Washington and former AP Pentagon correspondent, was tipped to the Army's investigation of the atrocity (Hersh, 1972).

Hersh's investigation revealed that the defense department, in order to avoid damaging pre-trial publicity, would not release any of its material (20,000 pages of testimony and more than 500 documents) until the legal proceedings against the accused men had been completed. Army officials acknowledged that the process might take years. In addition, it was explained, when the materials were released they would have to be carefully censored, to insure that no material damaging to America's foreign policy or national security would be made available to other countries.

After a period of 18 months, the Army lifted the lid. Hersh was provided with transcripts of the investigating committee. After examining the testimony and related documents, Hersh found that military officials had deliberately withheld important but embarrassing information about My Lai 4. Hersh (1972) said:

...the Army has steadfastly refused to reveal how many civilians were killed by Charlie Company [Americal Division] on March 16, 1968--a decision that no longer has anything to do with pre-trial publicity, since the last court-martial [that of Col. Oran K. Henderson, the commanding officer of the 11th Brigade] has been concluded. Army spokesmen have insisted that the information is not available. Yet in February, 1970, the Criminal Investigation Division, at the request of the Peers Commission [officially called the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations into the My Lai Incident], secretly undertook a



census of civilian casualties at My Lai 4 and concluded that Charlie Company had slain 347 Vietnamese men, women and children in My Lai 4 on March 16, 1968--a total twice as large as had been publicly acknowledged.

United States correspondents in Vietnam are provided with a limited number of reliable news sources. There appears to be no particular place where newsmen can obtain complete and accurate accounts of what is happening. Correspondents must depend on a number of different kinds of information sources and their own observations and judgements to obtain a perspective on events.

The news media have by no means all been paragons of professional competence. They have been guilty of their share of inaccurate reports. It is important to recognize that many of the current difficulties in the press coverage of the war would exist even with formal censorship. And it is important to recognize that while the "crunch" between press and government is inevitable in American affairs, the hope of easing its consequences is dependant upon the attitude of the government as upon the self-restraint of the press.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>"Balking GIs Agree to Take Position," Stillwater News Press (April 12, 1972), p. 1.
- <sup>2</sup>"The Press in Vietnam," Time (October 14, 1966), p. 80.
- <sup>3</sup>"Behind Enemy Lines," Newsweek (January 9, 1967), pp. 61-62.
- <sup>4</sup>"Suspended Judgement," Newsweek (August 12, 1968), p. 79.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>"Censorship," Time (June 5, 1964), p. 59.
- <sup>7</sup>"The Lid in Vietnam," Newsweek (March 29, 1965), pp. 58-59.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup>"Newsmen Complain About War Press Curbs," The Daily Oklahoman (March 18, 1965).
- <sup>11</sup>"Flak From Officers," Time (January 19, 1970), p. 60.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup>"Vietnam, Fact or Fiction," Nation (March 2, 1963), p. 62.
- <sup>14</sup>"At Issue #69: The Information War," National Educational Television Special (August 1, 1966).

## CHAPTER V

### BAO CHI

Wars, by their very nature, are difficult to cover. The war in Vietnam, however, presents unusual problems for the correspondent. "...it is almost impossible to perform the reporting function of reducing diversity to identity. All you can do is try to illustrate just how complex human, political and military relations are in this part of the world."<sup>1</sup>

#### Covering Wars: Yesterday and Today

About 300 correspondents were accredited to headquarters in Saigon between 1966 and 1970 (Raymond, 1966). However, in mid-1964, there were only 20 foreign resident correspondents in Saigon (Braestrop, 1969). "No newspapermen can be very proud of the American press in this show," wrote Jim Lucas of the Scripps-Howard Alliance in 1966. "In the six months I lived in the Delta [in 1964] I was the only correspondent regularly assigned to--working and living with--combat troops...this is the only war in recent memory which has not been covered to saturation" (Lucas, 1967).

Tardy in dispatching more correspondents, the U.S. press seemed to do little to prepare them for their tour of duty in Vietnam. Peter Braestrop, who covered Vietnam for the New York Times in 1966 and 1967 and was Saigon bureau chief for the Washington Post in 1968 and

1969, sheds light on this situation.

No American newsman, to my knowledge, spoke Vietnamese; none were sent to learn it prior to assignment to Vietnam. Nor were those men who lacked previous contact with the military given an opportunity to brush up at Fort Bragg on the differences between a machine gun and a howitzer, battalions and regiments. No sports editor would permit a greenhorn to cover the World Series without knowing baseball. We sent plenty of reporters to Vietnam who had never before been in uniform or out of the United States, let alone involved with politics and conflict in the Third World (Braestrop, 1969).

Because of this lack of experience and preparation, the correspondents sent to Vietnam appeared to rely heavily on (1) a handful of experienced Vietnam newsmen, most of them operating outside Saigon (i.e., Charles Mohr, Jim Lucas, Neil Sheehan, Mert Perry, Ward Just and Robert Shaplen); (2) the Embassy's political section; (3) a few Vietnamese politicians, and (4) Vietnamese stringers (Braestrop, 1969).

In previous wars a correspondent knew where the likely action was---at the front. He got his stories by following a unit to which he was assigned. On dull days he wrote features, but there was a geographic and quantitative coherence to the campaign and its battles. When territory was taken, cities captured, strongpoints demolished, casualties collected and prisoners rounded up, one could assess the degree of military success.

Yet in the Vietnam War, not only are there no battle fronts, there are relatively few battles. The commitment of North Vietnamese Army units and terrorism of the Viet Cong has been designed in the main to harass the people and shake their confidence in governmental and military security. Despite the increasing number of military clashes,

most of the war has consisted of relatively small-scale attempts to counter Viet Cong propaganda, arson, kidnappings, terror raids, murders and various forms of sabotage.

Correspondents refer to most of these with statistical summaries. Thus, while they compete to cover the large-scale activities of the American combat forces, many of them are nagged by their consequent neglect of the wider role of the South Vietnamese military and civil guard in coping with the enemy (Braestrup, 1969).

On a 1965 trip to Vietnam, Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Cartoonist Bill Mauldin, a former World War II Army sergeant famous for his Willie and Joe cartoons, quickly discovered that war correspondence is not what it used to be. In World War II, said Mauldin, newsmen joined a combat unit, slogged along with the men, lived the combat life for weeks or even months. But Mauldin was the only correspondent at Pleiku. "These boys," he said of the troops, "are sitting out there like outposts in Indian country--visited only rarely by correspondents, who fly up from Saigon, stay a day or two and fly back again."<sup>2</sup>

Yet in contrast to Mauldin's criticism, one correspondent stated:

We realize that the canard exists that most reporters sit in Saigon and do not get out in the field. This is pure poppycock and without support in fact. Most travel extensively and often, checking facts for themselves. At any one time, probably one-third to one-half of the press corps is in the boondocks. Indeed, the problem is more often that the correspondents are not keeping an eye on the overall situation in Saigon while roaming around the back country (Hagley, 1968).

Of these correspondents who do not go to the field, U.S. military officials recommend they not carry arms; but field commanders often

ask newsmen to carry weapons on hazardous operations. Said Charles Black of the Columbus (Georgia) Enquirer:

When you operate with a small unit, it's not fair to be a burden. You have to carry your own chow, your own gear and your own weapon. If you don't you're a straphanger, a VIP. And when you're a VIP you're never really one of the bunch, you never get that Pfc's story.<sup>3</sup>

Chasing down stories in Saigon itself becomes so exasperating that, for many of the press corps, a chance to go into the field with the troops comes as welcome relief.

"It may sound corney," explained Los Angeles Times correspondent Jack Foisie, "but it's refreshing to get out where people say what they mean."<sup>4</sup>

Bernard Fall, the distinguished historian of the Indochina War who was a 1967 casualty, believed that the correspondents in Vietnam were doing a one-dimensional reporting job. Fall granted that correspondents were diligent and courageous and that most of the reporting was fair and objective; yet in his view it lacked depth and breadth. "Most of the newsmen settle for reporting the battles, the blood and thunder, instead of the economic, social and political problems created by the war," Fall believed. His assessment that everybody wanted to be "a junior Ernie Pyle and write about Joe Schmo from Kokomo" seems to many professional journalists an inaccurate view (Fall, 1968).

#### The Correspondents View Their Work

By mid 1960, a great many Vietnam correspondents agreed that there had been an overemphasis on day-to-day activities and that more time should be spent on background stories. But as difficult as it was for

correspondents to evaluate success or failure in jungle warfare--- primarily because relatively few newsmen understood tactics, or tried to learn---it was easier to explain and report than was pacification, politics or social reforms (Braestrup, 1969).

One of the biggest frustrations of newsmen in Vietnam has been getting the story out of the country and back to their papers in the United States. Correspondents must live in two worlds of time: the foreign desk's and their own. This is exceedingly difficult in Saigon, which is 12 hours ahead of New York. And Saigon is the only place in the country from which to file news copy. If correspondents are fortunate they can get their copy off by 10:00 p.m. Saigon time---after putting in an investment of usually four or five 10-hour days for a single 800 word story (White, 1967).

In many respects, a war correspondent occupies a precarious position while in the field with the troops. Like a soldier, he is dressed in Army fatigues. He moves with, in and about the troops. And in the midst of a fire-fight or ambush, he is subject to equal attention from the enemy's land mines, small arms fire and artillery barrages.

Neil Sheehan, who went to Vietnam in April, 1972, for United Press International, then later for the New York Times in 1964, was instrumental in the 1971 publishing of the book Pentagon Papers. Sheehan wrote in 1966:

There have been times, in the two and a half years of covering this war, when I have envied the soldier. The soldier is just as frightened as I am before he goes into battle, but the soldier has no choice. Whether he is afraid or not, and all sane men are afraid here, his superiors decide what he will do. He can only hope, as he climbs aboard a helicopter and takes off for some battlefield, that he will

return alive.

The correspondent, however, usually has a choice. No one will order him to expose himself to bullets. He himself must carefully weigh the risks against the magnitude of the story. Then, when he has made his decision, he must discipline his nerves and gamble his life for what he will be able to cable to New York a few hours later...unfortunately, a correspondent in Vietnam often cannot calculate the risks. There are no frontlines here and death is dispensed with a strange whimsicality.

The worst moments for a correspondent in Vietnam seem to be those just before the battle begins, when the fear is greatest. Once the action commences a correspondent is usually too busy trying to keep his head down and compile material for his story to think about much else. R. W. Apple, Jr., hitched a ride on a medical evacuation helicopter with the assumption that it would probably---by its very nature---take him where the action was. He found what he was looking for in an hour-long firefight. During these minutes, in which bullets were whizzing by his helmet, Apple did two unusual things: (1) he removed his watch and (2) recorded the names, ages and hometown addresses of the soldiers who were pinned down with him. "After the shooting finally stopped, and I stood up, I almost lost my trousers. It took a moment or two to realize that a bullet had slit them down the back" (Apple, 1966).

While there may be no inherent journalistic value in getting shot at---and even less to be said for getting hit---it is difficult to avoid, even if a journalist is trying hard to be cautious. But if the correspondent is doing his job in the field, it is almost impossible to avoid. When the Pleime Special Forces camp was under



seige, eight correspondents drew numbers out of a helmet to see who would occupy the two places on a medical evacuation helicopter being sent in to pick up the wounded. Simon Dring of Reuters and Charles Mohr of the New York Times won.

"You guys must be absolutely insane," said a gunner who knew how bad the ground fire at Pleime was. Mohr and Dring came into the camp at about 30 feet altitude at 100 knots downwind with tracer bullets following their trail all the way. It proved to be a good introduction, for over 2,000 rounds of enemy fire hit the Special Forces barracks during the three days the correspondents were there.

Mohr pointed out that "no sensible reporter deludes himself that he is being heroic in this war. The heroics are reserved for the troops, who do not enjoy the supreme privilege that any reporter can exercise at any time. That is the chance to say, 'I'd love to stay fellas, but I've got to get back to Saigon and file.'"<sup>5</sup>

Covering the war in the field---below battalian level---is dangerous work; but trying to cover the skirmishes in and around the cities is more dangerous and difficult than covering jungle warfare.

A good example of the problems encountered in covering street action was in Danang in 1966 when Buddhist monks lured newsmen to the Tinh Hoi pagoda as hostages against a final attack by the Saigon government.

George P. Hunt (1966), managing editor of Life, described the action in this way:

Inside was sheer bedlam--troops, clusters of scared women and children, Buddhist boy scouts-- as machine gun and rifle fire broke all around the pagoda. Several reporters started back for the government lines. Now only shadows in the street, they held their hands in the air and

yelled, "Bao Chi, Bao Chi (press)! No shoot!" Then suddenly everything erupted. Up and down the street, from both sides, automatic weapons blasted away. From behind them came a rebel grenade which exploded in mid-air, felling photographer Tim Page [of Life] and two others...it was the second time Page had been wounded in 16 months in Vietnam.

Two days later, Page was back in Saigon celebrating his 22nd birthday; but too late to attend the funeral service for his friend Sam Castan, Look magazine correspondent who was killed by a mortar blast three days earlier.<sup>6</sup>

In 1968, the number of foreign correspondents killed in the war reached 17 when UPI photographer Charles Egleston, 23, was killed while covering South Vietnamese paratroopers in Saigon street fighting. As the fighting moved into Saigon and other cities at that time, correspondents were in more danger than ever before. The week of May 10, 1968, saw four correspondents lose their lives: Time correspondent John Cartwell, 30; Michael Birch, 24, Australian Associated Press; Ronald Laramy, 31, Reuters; and Bruce Pigott, 23, assistant bureau chief of Reuters in Saigon.<sup>7</sup>

Street fighting was as new to most correspondents as it was to most of the soldiers. It is a different kind of fighting altogether... inevitably close in with the chances of getting caught in a crossfire immeasurably greater. What is secure at 9:00 a.m. may be hostile at 10:00 a.m.

By now, most journalists can handle themselves fairly well in the field; they know when to duck, when to run, what to listen for, when to dig. In the cities, however, we forgot about ricochets and flying glass, about the ability of an enemy to pop out of a burning shack and then disappear. If you move too slowly, you get cut off from

allied troops, and if you go too quickly, you suddenly find yourself in the middle of it.<sup>8</sup>

Correspondents have gone on patrols, flown medical evacuation helicopters into firefights, and followed troops through bullet-ridden cities. Many of their actions are termed unwise, dangerous and ill-fated. [The first American correspondent to die in Vietnam was Robert Capa in 1954. As of 1972, 51 other United States correspondents have died.] Yet it appears that these are the prerequisites for covering a war of this nature.

#### The Female Correspondents

Psychologists have claimed that women, when presented with hardships, are the stronger sex. Doctors have asserted that most women are able to bear pain better than men and that they are less susceptible to fear. During World War II, female correspondents such as Mary Welsh, Helen Kirkpatrick, Eve Curie, Marguerite Higgins, and Margaret Bourke-White set the tradition that anything the men could do, they could do as well or better (Reynolds, 1962).

Whether the women correspondents have been newcomers or old hands, their presence in the field usually has been met with varied reactions both from the GIs and fellow correspondents (male).

"You'll wear fatigues all the time," said a Marine company commander. "We don't want women with legs down here."

"Will you please just say something? I haven't heard an American woman speak in five months," begged a battle-weary Army sergeant.

"It's a delightful change to have them around," admitted AP's Peter Arnett.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most famous and best loved of the female correspondents was Georgette Louise "Dickey" Chapelle. A veteran in every sense of the word---World War II, Korea, Quemoy, Hungarian revolt, Lebanon, Cuba, Northeast India, Ladakl, Algeria, Laos, Dominican Republic--- she fell with six Marines on November 4, 1965, when her foot tripped a concealed nylon fishing line attached to a booby trap. At the age of 47 she became the first American woman correspondent to die in action.

From 1935, when at the age of 16 she entered Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a scholarship, Dickey Chapelle became part of a man's world. She became a pilot, a parachutist, a combat photographer. She was not one to tolerate favors in the field because of her sex. She hid her figure in loose khakis. Her hair was kept up under an Australian bush hat. To keep in condition, and not to be a burden on the men she photographed and wrote about, she ran two miles a day when in New York between assignments (Garrett, 1966).

Two other female correspondents, Michele Ray and Kate Webb, also flirted with danger when they were captured by the Viet Cong.

Michele Ray, a young French journalist for Le Nouvel Observateur and former Elle magazine cover girl, has been known for her daredevil operations. In order to film a documentary movie, the former House of Chanel model was captured while driving from Ca Mau, in the nation's southern tip, to the demilitarized zone in the north along 600 miles of ragged road and partly through Viet Cong territory.

"They tied my arms behind my back, but they didn't know what to do with me, I think," Ray told reporters upon her release from 20 days in captivity. "I kept saying 'Bao Chi' [press], the only Vietnamese

I know."

Why didn't the Viet Cong simply release her? "They told me 'You are a guest, not a prisoner. We must make sure you are what you say you are.'"<sup>10</sup>

According to Ray, she was always treated as a guest, given anti-malarial and vitamin pills, fed a plain but adequate diet, given shelter and not mistreated. When she was released, her luggage and money were returned.

But as glad as American officials were to have her back, they were still annoyed. There was some speculation that she had not fallen into VC hands, but had knowingly placed herself in a position where she was certain to be captured. "The Viet Cong knew who she was and they were smart," said one official. "They used her to make propaganda capital. I might also point out that lives were probably lost as the result of her actions. The Vietnamese Army mounted operations to hunt for her and there were ambushes."<sup>11</sup>

Kate Webb, 27, from New Zealand, became United Press International bureau manager in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh when Frank Frosch was slain in a Viet Cong ambush in October, 1970. In April, 1971, Kate Webb, together with a Japanese newsreel photographer and four Cambodians (a newspaper cartoonist, a photographer, and two driver-interpreters), disappeared while covering a battle 56 miles southwest of Phnom Penh.

It should be noted that while Michele Ray, Richard Dudman, Elizabeth Pond and Mike Morrow were travelling independently in enemy territory, Kate Webb was with a Cambodian army unit when the fighting that resulted in her separation broke out.

As in the other cases, the Communists marched them over long distances and subjected them to interrogations and questionnaires.

The questionnaire asked for details of our families, salaries, addresses and occupations of friends, biographies and details of our capture...The second section asked for our opinions of the war. I re-wrote from memory the last stories I had written for UPI on the military situation in Cambodia.

I found that day-long interrogation tough and worrying. It was hot. There was tea and cigarettes. It was interesting, and confusing:

"Why were you following the Lon Nol troops?"

"Why do you work for the American Imperialists?"

"You cannot be a neutral observer in this war. Everyone is on one side or the other."

"We do not believe you put yourself in dangerous military situations if you are not CIA. Why would you risk your life if you were not?" (Webb, 1971)

In addition to Kate Webb, Dickey Chapelle and Michele Ray, Vietnam has seen scores of other girls in fatigues covering the war. They were [in 1966] mostly young and independent, with qualifications equal to or better than many of their male competitors. In the following, four of these women are described by Time magazine.<sup>12</sup>

Denby Fawcett, 25, a Columbia University alumna, followed her boyfriend when he was sent to Vietnam by the Honolulu Advertiser. When he left Saigon, Fawcett stayed on to run the paper's bureau alone. When she was not covering political upheavals in the city, she was in the field with the troops. Once the sound of a not-too-near mortar shell prompted four Marines to fling themselves over her "protectively." Said the blue-eyed blonde: "They're always doing cute things like that in the field."

Betsy Halstead at 24 was one of the youngest and yet most

experienced female correspondents in Vietnam. A graduate of Temple University, she went to Vietnam in 1964 with her husband Dirck---he to run UPI's photography desk, she to report for the bureau. She was the first reporter to witness and photograph a B-52 raid, and was the first to interview the mayor of Danang after Premier Ky called him a Communist and erroneously announced that he had fled the city. "I've learned to keep quiet and not to argue," said the 5'2" redhead. "You can always sweet-talk someone into doing something for you."

Beverly Deepe, 30, became a free lance writer after the New York Herald Tribune ceased publication. She has logged more continuous time in Vietnam than any other correspondent. On her way around the world in 1962 she stopped off in Saigon and stayed. She developed valuable contacts with the Vietnamese. Deepe finds the biggest challenge as a woman correspondent is that "most of the troops expect me to be a living symbol of the wives and sweethearts they left at home. They expect me to be typically American, despite cold water instead of cold cream, fatigues instead of frocks. Always it's more important to wear lipstick than a pistol."

Esther Clark, 46, has been covering military affairs since 1948, when she jetted through the sound barrier. Like most others, she has studiously resisted being toughened into "one of the guys." She is in Vietnam because "I felt I had to try explaining to the people at home what is going on." To do this she based herself in Danang. "I detest Saigon," she explained. "The war seems so remote from there." She spends most of her time talking to the troops. "After five minutes," she said, "they get the idea I'm not a greenhorn."

FOOTNOTES

1. "The Pundit and the Prole," Newsweek (September 6, 1965), pp. 49-50.
2. "Up Front Once More," Time (February 19, 1965), p. 51.
3. "Git or Git Got," Newsweek (December 10, 1965), p. 88.
4. "Covering Vietnam: Grud, Fret and Jeers," Time (June 10, 1966), pp. 54-55.
5. Ibid.
6. "A More Dangerous War," Time (May 17, 1968), p. 71.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "Femininity at the Front," Time (October, 28, 1966), pp. 73-74.
10. "Michele is Missing," Time (February 3, 1967), p. 58.
11. "Out of the Woods," Newsweek (February 20, 1967), pp. 88-89.
12. "Femininity at the Front," Time (October 28, 1966), pp. 73-74.



## CHAPTER VI

### CAMBODIA: THE FREE-FOR-ALL

On June 30, 1970, the last of 14,000 U.S. soldiers crossed back into South Vietnamese territory after spending 60 days in Cambodia. And, at a cost of 339 American casualties, questions arose as to whether or not it was really worth it all.

Equally in question was the loss of correspondents in the Cambodian operation. Out of 24 newsmen who were listed as either dead or missing, seven were Americans.

Reporting the war in Vietnam always has been a dangerous and difficult assignment, as has been pointed out. But in May and June of 1970, it became riskier than ever before and far more confusing. Correspondents discovered that unlike Vietnam, where heavily travelled roads were usually well protected, the situation inside Cambodia was highly unpredictable. Travelling in an area where U.S., South Vietnamese, Cambodian, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units were scattered about, no one knew from hour to hour whether a road was safe or not. Situations such as this make for captured correspondents.

The first captured correspondents to return from the Cambodian war zone were Elizabeth Pond of the Christian Science Monitor, Richard Dudman, Washington bureau chief of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Mike Morrow of Dispatch News Service International.

These three, who spent 40 days in captivity, were driving a

scout car up Route 1 from Saigon to the Cambodian village of Suay Rieng (near Phnom Peng) in order to get a "first-hand look at developments across the Cambodian border."<sup>1</sup>

At first their captors believed they were United States government officials or CIA agents, and the three had to endure a harrowing day. In one town, they were taken from the truck, blindfolded and marched through a gauntlet of jeering Cambodian villagers. Then, Dudman said, he and Morrow were "tied to a motorbike, forced to run a half a mile still blindfolded, knocked to the ground with a blow on the head, and left in a darkened room."<sup>2</sup>

This treatment soon ended once their credentials were examined by an officer. From that point on they were treated as "good people" and friends by their captors, although they were kept constantly on the move, staying in the homes of ten different Cambodian villagers. At one point they were asked to tape-record (apparently for the so-called Liberation Radio or Hanoi) statements about their experiences, "but none that conflicted with our own views."<sup>3</sup>

The three reporters, each having been known to criticize United States military involvement in Indochina, were given a farewell party of sorts. "We left the liberated zone [North Vietnamese-held area] of Cambodia as honored guests at a meeting of 1,000 villagers," Dudman said. "Speakers expressed their gratitude toward those American people who oppose aggression by the Nixon administration in Indochina. They asked us to write the truth about the situation in the front-held areas."<sup>4</sup>

CBS correspondent George Syvertsen, pursuing an inclination that something was up on the road to Takeo, picked up Gerald Miller, a CBS

reporter-producer, and headed south, followed by a blue Mercedes containing another CBS crew. Syvertsen's jeep, which could have been mistaken for a military vehicle, came under Communist fire, went off the road, crashed into a tree and burned, hit most likely by a grenade. A badly maimed body found in a freshly dug grave near the jeep was identified later by a CBS newsman as Syvertsen's. Miller and the other occupants of the jeep were presumed dead or taken captive. Those crewmen in the trailing Mercedes were captured.

Syvertsen, 37, a graduate of Columbia College and fluent in several languages, was known as an intelligent and thoughtful newsman. He had had more than two years of experience as a combat reporter in Vietnam, and consistently spent one out of three months in the war zone.<sup>5</sup>

It appears that the reason for the soaring casualty rate among correspondents in Cambodia was that the geography of the conflict had broadened. Unlike the fighting in South Vietnam, where correspondents were briefed in Saigon and travelled in U.S. helicopters, the Cambodian operation put correspondents on their own, mainly on unsecured roads in new areas of operations.

One veteran newsman questioned whether roving about the Cambodian countryside was necessary at all. Yet in Cambodia there seemed to be some merit in covering the shooting war, if for no other reason than that it allowed newsmen to observe the performance of South Vietnamese troops. It also provided a base for the evaluation of the administration's Vietnamization program. The correspondents provided a system of check-and-balance by verifying the military's discovery of caches of enemy arms and supplies.

No war can be covered without some danger to correspondents, and it seems that an enterprising combat reporter sometimes will incur additional risks on his own initiative. Such gambles became more frequent when correspondents were not allowed to fly into Cambodia with South Vietnamese troops. But on the death of Syvertsen and the disappearance of another newsman from CBS, one from NBC, and five non-Americans serving on camera crews, CBS News President Richard S. Salant issued an order forbidding his network's newsmen from travelling on Indochina roads without military escort.<sup>6</sup>

An Editor & Publisher editorial also called for rewarding discretion as well as valor by saying:

The frustration of reporters "behind the lines" and unable to obtain information of what is happening at the fluid or non-existent front has been well documented as the reason why they have taken off on their own at great personal risk to get a story.

We question this waste of brilliant manpower, however noble as it may be, and suggest that desk-bound editors at home issue orders stating that a story bottled up in the brain of a captured or dead correspondent, isn't worth the risk, or words to that effect.

During an interview with Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall (U.S. Army, Ret.) the writer asked him his feeling, as a former war correspondent and military officer, about the reporting during the Cambodian operation.

When the Cambodian thing blew open there were penetrations of different points along the frontier, so there's nothing to keep a correspondent from getting in a jeep and barreling through--and getting into enemy country. This would seem a little unusual, but it's always this way in war. It was this way in Europe during World War II and in Korea when we were in movement. Anytime a unit is in movement,

if a person wants to dash out and get killed he can sure do it, because there's nobody to stop him and say, "This is the front line, don't go any farther." That is the reason so many of them get captured. They were just taking ridiculous chances. And in the case of these correspondents, they said they could not imagine themselves in an adversary situation. There's only one other relationship and that's a friendly one. Now that doesn't mean that they necessarily gave information that was worthwhile, but what it does say is that they should certainly have no reservation about doing so if they think of themselves as dealing with friends. (Marshall, 1970).

Richard Dudman (1970) one of the captured correspondents, offered a rebuttal to the reasoning of General Marshall and others of like mind in Columbia Journalism-Review:

In covering several U.S. foreign interventions over the last sixteen years, I have come to believe that a news correspondent must try to be a detached observer, a neutral who can report what he can learn about the aims and actions on both sides without the burden of thinking "we" and "they."

The Indochina War is a classic case where the responsibilities of a correspondent go far beyond merely reporting "our" side as a special adjunct to the U.S. military forces.

According to Dudman (1970), there are limits to what this kind of reporting can do to explain the war.

Of course, a reporter accompanying a military unit on an operation has to go by the rules and, whether accompanying a military unit or not, a reporter certainly should avoid writing anything that would breach military security, such as giving details on the makeup or position of U.S. forces while a battle is in progress or disclosing that a plane has been shot down while there is still hope of rescuing

the crew. Beyond that, he takes on an unnecessary burden and is not doing his job properly if he feels bound to support current American policy and let himself be made, in effect, a public relations man for a group of American officials.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Missing in Cambodia," Time (May 25, 1970), pp. 56-57.
2. "Forty Days," Newsweek (June 29, 1970), pp. 55-56.
3. "Three Came Back," Time (June 29, 1970), p. 60.
4. "Missing In Cambodia," Newsweek (May 25, 1970), pp. 56-57.
5. "Beyond the Checkpoint," Newsweek (June 15, 1970), p. 65.
6. "The Record," Quill (July, 1970), p. 34.
7. "Captured Newsmen," Editor & Publisher (June 13, 1970), p. 6.

## CHAPTER VII

### TELEVISION CORRESPONDENTS

Television has found its niche as a dominant--if not predominant-- news medium for the Vietnam War. Through its screen comes an almost ceaseless blare of data that can immerse the viewer in an array of scenes ranging from slain villagers and burning hamlets to wounded GIs and rescue operations. All this can create quite an indigestion, particularly since the prime viewing time is the 5:00-6:00 p.m. dinner hour.

The television coverage may be disturbing to some, but a Harris survey for Newsweek in 1967 found that most people have widespread confidence in what they see about Vietnam. Of those surveyed, 75 percent expressed satisfaction with TV coverage and 17 percent found it unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup>

Even with this high endorsement by the Harris poll, TV has caused special problems to authorities. As with the adventurous print correspondents, television's cameramen have gone into battle wherever they could find it.

In Vietnam, TV crews ride helicopters, slice through jungles and splash across rice paddies. They film anything they can hear or see: a Viet Cong mortar attack, an American search-and-destroy mission, a MIG losing its wing, a man losing his leg.

And because the photographers followed the action, death struck



heavily in their ranks: Kyoichi Sawada of UPI, who was a 1966 Pulitzer winner for a picture of a Vietnamese family swimming together in a river current, was killed in 1970 in Cambodia; Larry Burrows of Life, in Vietnam since 1962 and twice a Capa award winner, and Henri Huet, who had worked for both UPI and AP and had won a Capa award, died together covering the 1971 Laos invasion. UPI lost three other staff men: Hiramichi Mine, Kent Potter and Charles Egglerton. Bernard J. Kolenberg of AP and Dickey Chapelle of the National Observer died in 1965 and Robert J. Ellison of Empire/Black Star was killed at Khesanh (Emory, 1971).

As with their journalist counterparts, television newsmen do not have a smooth time covering the war. Most of them are in Vietnam for only six-month tours of duty, which is hardly enough time to become aware of the situation. But this first war to be covered by television has been most perilous for the TV crews. To the men in the field, network managing editors in New York seem obsessed with asking for coverage of every bit of action. "Editors are so afraid of missing one story that to protect their flanks they have been asking us to risk getting our tails shot off."<sup>2</sup> "The trouble is," says Michael Arlen (1967), "Vietnam isn't a fast-breaking news event most of the time. The TV stations have their scheduled news broadcasts. The TV correspondents try to feed the stuff back---there's usually something to feed back, some of it technically useful, and now and then it's good; sometimes it's ridiculous---and a lot of chatter comes out of the picture tubes, but sometimes nothing really happens."

Another difficulty is that television poses many inherent technological problems. As do print correspondents, TV correspondents carry

their standard infantry pack while in the field. In addition, they must tote a tape recorder; the sound men lug some 20 pounds of amplifiers and other equipment; the photographers are burdened with close to 40 pounds of cameras, batteries and film. On top of this they must keep pace with the troops. While filming the correspondents' commentary, the three must be linked by a cable less than ten feet long, end to end, in order to synchronize the film. This in itself makes them a large target.<sup>3</sup>

Of the same 400 U.S. correspondents in Vietnam at the peak of action in mid-1968, the Vietnam shooting war became the particular province of the news photographers and TV cameramen. On the three-men teams, the cameraman is in most constant danger. "A lot of guys take chances in covering this dirty, shifting war, but the camera boys take the biggest chances and take them most often."<sup>4</sup>

The living legend of the TV troops is a wiry Vietnamese named Vo Huynh, 35, a native of Hanoi who mans a camera for NBC while his brother handles the sound equipment. Since he joined NBC in 1961, he has covered every major battle. "You can't stay in one place like a reporter," he pointed out. "If you stay in one place, you get one picture. We have been very lucky. During a firefight, you can't lie down and shoot. You have to sit up every so often for at least ten seconds."<sup>5</sup>

Peter Arnett and Horst Faas, both of the Associated Press, represented a curious double-threat before Arnett left Vietnam in 1970 after spending eight years reporting and photographing the war. Since AP's primary job is the day-to-day detailing of events, Arnett and Faas spent most of their time in the field; they saw more fighting

than the average GI.<sup>6</sup> "A photographer has to be where the action is."<sup>7</sup>

According to James Burnham (1969), the Vietnamese War has been the first war produced for television. Michael Arlen (1967) emphasized that:

For the most part, television in Vietnam has operated on a level not much more perceptive than that of a sort of illustrated wire service, with the television crews racketing around the countryside seeking to illustrate the various stories that are chalked on the assignment board in Saigon, constantly under pressure to feed the New York news programs news stories (ideally, combat stories), moving in here, moving out, moving in there the next day.

Television, of course, is no more guilty than any other news medium in seeking out the best stories. But compounded with the print newsman's battle for column inches of space, the TV correspondent is prodded by a more acute competition with expensive television diversissement. Therefore, he specializes in brief scenes with tremendous emotional impact. Besides this, his very presence among the troops may be far more noticed than that of a print correspondent and may create news angles where none otherwise exist. As one reporter remarked: "Some persons will do things in front of a camera that they would not do in front of a pad and pencil" (Reynolds, 1966).

According to James Burnham (1969), TV people have their own idea of what makes a good war:

It must be able to keep ratings up. You've got to arrange your war for spectacle, action, and especially lots of human interest at the intellectual and emotional level appropriate to TV--that is, the soap opera level. And what with the contemporary taste for that sort of thing, you won't overlook plenty of horror, pain, blood, terror, and other sadistic-masochistic tidbits.

Scenes such as the South Vietnamese police chief shooting a

non-uniformed Viet Cong guerilla without benefit of trial; the Marines' deliberate burning of a South Vietnamese village; the killing of civilians in Hue while trying to evict Viet Cong snipers; and the immolation of Buddhist monks in the streets of Saigon are indicative of some of the footage television has aired (Reynolds, 1967).

In a 1966 National Educational Television broadcast, "The Information War,"<sup>8</sup> four correspondents were interviewed on the problems they faced in reporting and evaluating the events of the Vietnam War.

Malcolm Browne, free lance writer, formerly of the AP stated:

I think that television has a tendency to produce the script around the footage that you have. If you have--everybody likes to watch howitzers firing or machine guns, things of that sort, they like the spectacular shots that illustrate the war in graphic, bloody terms, or whatever--and the correspondent is more or less duty-bound to build his speil around what's appearing on camera, which is perfectly all right, this is good television.

Although American television correspondents can show this "inhumanity" of the American side of the war freely, they cannot match these scenes with pictures of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese terrorism. Television can show the viewing public pathetic mothers running from a hut blasted by U.S. Forces, but it is unable to show any of the VC torturings and executions of village elders, school teachers and farmers.

Television correspondents differ in one great respect from their print counterparts, in that they have the option of inserting some sort of verbal point of view by the manner in which they edge their voice.<sup>9</sup>

Michael Arlen (1967) described this as a method in which the TV correspondent sharpens a topic and allows for a slight intrusion of irony. He asserted that:

If you show film of a combat situation, what you are really doing is adding another centimetre or millimeter to what is often no more than an illusion of American military progress. And to stand up there afterward [after battle], microphone in hand, and say, with all the edge in your voice you can muster, as [Morley] Safer used to do, "Another typical engagement in Vietnam...A couple of battalions of the Army went into these woods looking for the enemy. The enemy was gone. There was a little sniper fire at one moment; three of our men were hit, but not that seriously. It was pretty much the way it usually goes." [That] doesn't pull the picture back quite straight--or perhaps to be a bit more accurate, it focuses one's eyes on a picture that may not really have any useful connection with the situation it claims to be communicating about.

Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall (1970) offered these observations regarding television correspondents:

There are people in the field who want to get blood on the moon every night...you see, they want to get a shock story. And there are all kinds of stories that go begging over there, wonderful stories that they don't want to look at simply because there is something constructive about it [sic]. The television correspondents in the first place try to show how a war is going in two or three minutes of time. Well, you can't do that. You can just get a very small piece of what is happening when you are that limited, and since they have just those few minutes, what they want to do is make a big impact, and so they want a shocker, they want a grabber. It gets the whole thing out of focus. I'll give you a good example by the action of the press during the Viet Cong raid on Saigon [1968]. These were flea bites and absolutely unimportant. There was never any danger to the city and there was very little damage done. But this thing was played up by the television correspondents as if the city was really rocking and as if the populace was frightened to death. Absolute nonsense.

John McLaughlin was in Saigon on August 18, 1968, when the Viet Cong conducted their rocket attacks on the city. McLaughlin

asserted that correspondent David Culhane of CBS described the early morning rocket attacks as "sounding like the whole world was coming apart," and that CBS cameras graphically recorded the strewn glass, bricks, metal and sections of galvanized tin roofing blown off the parliament building. Tony Sargent of CBS reported on a Japanese correspondent who was killed by shrapnel. Commenting on that report McLaughlin said:

The cameras drained from the scene all its living (and dying) color, relentlessly fixing on the correspondent's oozing blood, a neighbor's curious face, a woman overcome with grief, the doctor massaging the newsman's chest and, mercifully, the arrival of the jeep ambulance.<sup>10</sup>

According to McLaughlin, what Sargent did not stress was that the rocket that killed the newsman spent its fury on a garage, that only one person was killed, and that there were no serious injuries. What Culhane did not stress, McLaughlin said, was that the parliament building was not as seriously damaged as the edited footage suggested.

By McLaughlin's standards, both Culhane's and Sargent's reports left one with the impression that Saigon was paralyzed by the Viet Cong assault.

"My point," said McLaughlin "is that they [Viet Cong shellings] must be seen in perspective...what the CBS correspondents failed to do was relate these events in any meaningful way to the larger context of the war."<sup>11</sup>

Another case in perspective is brought out by Dale Minor (1970) in his book, The Information War. It occurred in 1968 in Hue, when a television crew remained with the unit in reserve and had it go through the motion of clearing a house. For the sake of pictorial realism the unit---now "hollywood Marines"---moved down a road and threw a smoke

grenade into the house.

According to Minor, "This staging is a vice common to every form of journalism...but the vice seems more strongly motivated in television and is certainly more dangerous, because of the medium's power and because it purports to show reality, not just describe it."

"The television people work like hell in Vietnam--Saturdays, Sundays, all the time. One can whoosh eight cans of 16mm film two-thirds of the way around the world in less than twenty hours. For around seventy-five bucks, one can buy thirty minutes' worth of satellite time and relay the film in from Tokyo" (Arlen, 1967).

According to NBC's New York-based News Operations Head, Bill Corrigan, the television correspondent is in action from the moment his plane touches down at Tan Sin Nhut Airport. The big trouble is that even a rotation system such as NBC's--a stint working out of Danang, then equal time in Saigon--no longer affords a man any rest. "There's nowhere to hide anymore. There are no soft assignments."<sup>12</sup>

Television has given the correspondent a new dimension for his work, even though he may not yet know enough to take full advantage of it. Perhaps the TV correspondents' most grievous fault in Vietnam has been the tendency to focus on the action and uproar in the foreground and overlook the necessity for reporting on the ideas behind them. The situation could be improved by loosening up and expanding the evening news programs so that correspondents could handle larger themes and pursue them in a more investigative method. (Hohenberg, 1968; Arlen, 1967).

FOOTNOTES

1. "Room for Improvement," Newsweek (July 10, 1967), pp. 76-77.
2. "The Men Without Helmets," Time (March 15, 1968), p. 58.
3. Ibid.
4. "Covering Vietnam: Crud, Fret and Jeers," Time (June 10, 1966), pp. 54-55.
5. "The Men Without Helmets," Time (March 15, 1968), p. 58.
6. "Looking Back on the War," Newsweek (July 20, 1970), p. 56.
7. "The Men Without Helmets," Time (March 15, 1968), p. 58.
8. "At Issue #69: The Information War," National Educational Television Special (August, 1966).
9. Ibid.
10. "Saigon Newsgathering," America (November 2, 1968), pp. 418-419.
11. Ibid.
12. "The Men Without Helmets," Time (March 15, 1968), p. 58.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate the role of the war correspondent in South Vietnam. It was hoped that this thesis would provide some insight into the many facets of war reporting in Vietnam and shed some light on the problems the correspondents encountered as well as the procedures used to report the war.

Findings on these matters were these:

(1) In the early days of the Vietnam War (1951-60) American correspondents assigned there were sparse; newspapers relied chiefly on the French wire service for information about the war. Reporting methods during this period were lax and correspondents looked for sensational stories rather than putting the war into context through in-depth reporting about the country, people and politics.

(2) When U.S. involvement began to build up between 1961 and 1964, a tough-minded band of journalists took it upon themselves to report the news, whether or not this news was palatable to Americans and their government. Leading the crusade were David Halberstam of the New York Times; Malcolm Browne and Peter Arnett of the Associated Press; Charles Mohr of the New York Times; and Francois Sully of Newsweek. Their reporting started a tug-of-war between the press, the military establishment and the U.S. administration which later produced what was

to be called a "credibility gap" for all parties involved.

(3) The problems that began in the early 1960s grew in intensity from 1964 on. Even though correspondents such as Halberstam and Browne were no longer filing from South Vietnam, there were some 400\* correspondents in the country to take over where they left off. The crisis in credibility reached a new height between 1964-68 in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The correspondents were accused of not supplying the people with the facts on the true progress of the war; the administration was attacked by the correspondents for trying to suppress information on everything from body-count methods to military activity; the correspondents were regarded as a nuisance---and a threat---to the South Vietnamese government and often to high ranking U.S. Army officers as well; and the military in turn was criticized for attempting to give a false picture of the war.

(4) Correspondents on the whole had no knowledge of the Vietnamese language, save a few essential words or phrases. Nor was any real attempt made by them or their employers to engage in an adequate orientation program---if any at all---prior to assignment.

(5) Many correspondents had never served in the armed forces and were sorely lacking in an understanding of military procedures.

(6) There have been few battle fronts in Vietnam; the war could be in Saigon one day and in a distant village the next. To assist correspondents in covering the war, the Army has allowed them to hitch rides in military transports and helicopters. In effect, the press

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\* This estimate also has been set at 250 and 300. The writer of this thesis believes 400 to be the most accurate estimate.

card was a free transportation ticket. The correspondents have been criticized by the military as well as some colleagues for not going into the field with the troops. The contention is that too many reporters have remained in Saigon where they have received their information solely from the daily briefings and secondary sources.

(7) Others have countered this by saying that the correspondents frequently have gone to the field with the troops. They assert that there has been too much blood-and-guts coverage and not enough economic, social and political reporting.

(8) While war coverage is still a man's job, several women correspondents have made their presence known on the scene.

(9) The Cambodian intervention in late June, 1970, saw 24 newsmen listed as dead or missing, seven of whom were Americans. The reason for such staggering losses in only a 60-day period was primarily the manner in which the correspondents tried to cover the action. At the outset of the intervention, reporters, denied on this occasion permission to fly in with South Vietnamese troops, took to the road. Of those captured or killed, none was accompanying a specific military unit; all were travelling about Cambodia in jeeps or cars trying to find a story.

(10) Actions such as this received harsh criticism, yet coverage on the shooting war in this instance also was seen as an opportunity to observe the performance of the South Vietnamese Army and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vietnamization program.

(11) Television has been the dominant news medium in the coverage of the Vietnam War.

(12) Television has special difficulties, for its correspondents must carry heavy recording and camera equipment while in the field and

at the same time keep pace with the troops. Because of this, they are larger targets than other reporters, and have taken a greater loss of life than have their print counterparts.

(13) Television has brought scenes of tremendous impact into homes across the nation, but has been criticized for this blood-and-thunder treatment and admonished for not going into enough depth on Vietnam and its problems.

### Conclusions

Based upon the detailed information this writer has studied in the preparation of this thesis, the following conclusions are made about the war correspondent in Vietnam:

(1) There were too few correspondents in Vietnam early in the war when political and military foundations were being established.

(2) In general, correspondents in Vietnam have been ill-prepared for the assignment. They have lacked the proper background upon which to base their reports and over the course of the war have spent too little time dealing with the social, cultural and political dimensions.

(3) Not enough newspaper space has been allocated for in-depth reporting. Too much attention has been given the "blood-and-guts" coverage.

(4) The attitude of both government and military officials has been negative towards the press throughout the war. Correspondents have too often lacked reliable sources upon which to base their accounts.

(5) Saigon government officials, unable to exert control over the correspondents, held themselves aloof and at a distance. No friendly

or even workable relationship existed.

(6) Except for a few "specials," television failed to present in-depth stories. Too much of the coverage was routine without adequate background information.

(7) The correspondents, while they have not been without fault, should not bear sole responsibility for the failure to present the Vietnam complexities in a more understandable manner. The military, United States government and Saigon government must share this responsibility, for they too were an integral part in the credibility gap.

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