

This is true not only of my trips there, but every major official, to my knowledge, that has gone there has had this on his docket and understands instructions.

The Embassy press attaché and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Public Information Officer are experienced and competent individuals who devote full time to the reporters' requests for information. Our public affairs officer, John Mecklin, is a former newspaperman, with more than 20 years experience.

The U.S. Government recognizes that reporters should be given the widest possible access to news and information on Vietnam. At the same time we believe that military considerations and winning the war are also important. Where providing certain information would assist the enemy or disrupt sensitive negotiations, we have withheld that information until such time as it is no longer sensitive.

I think all reasonable men recognize that press accounts could assist the Viet-Cong if advance information was published on government plans. A free society is always under this disadvantage when fighting a war, cold or hot, with an enemy that spurns a free press. This does not mean that the U.S. Government favors restricting U.S. or other newsmen in Vietnam; the policy in fact is just the opposite—to be as forthcoming as the dictates of military security will permit.

We have tried to assign the most able information officers available to duty in Vietnam to help reporters get the information they want. We have instructed our officials, particularly the Ambassador and the commander of our military forces there to make themselves available to the press as frequently as possible.

We have also provided a great deal of military transportation for reporters, and have helped them, whenever possible, to visit combat or other areas. All correspondents resident in or visiting Saigon are afforded an equal opportunity to use Government air transport. Each correspondent is accredited by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam's Public Information Officer for the purpose of covering American activities and by the Government of Vietnam, for covering Vietnamese military activities. Correspondents ride on helicopters and other aircraft and accompany troops in the field. They are given space on troop-carrying land vehicles, including the highly successful M-113's and M-114's. The Vietnamese Air Force frequently provides transportation in their L-19, T-28, and C-47 aircraft. Correspondents are also able to accompany naval units during exercises and operations. I believe that the reporters are generally satisfied with the cooperation which they have had from our people, particularly in terms of getting where they want to go when they want to go there.

We recognize that the ban on newsmen covering the operations in zone D last November—in which dozens of U.S. helicopters and up to 150 Americans took part—aroused strong feelings among U.S. reporters in Vietnam. This was a specific mission in an area where the enemy was strong. As a matter of fact, it was the first time the Vietnamese forces had gotten into zone D; and as you know, the French never did get into zone D. Chances of casualties were high. There were casualties. The decision was made by the Government of Vietnam military leaders not to permit correspondents. U.S.