

Tuesday, September 19, 1967
3:30 p.m.

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MR. PRESIDENT:

Herewith Westy's reaction -- and action --
in relation to Arnett's story on ARVN weaknesses.

Pres file

Kaplan's press committee is discussing it this
afternoon.

W. W. R.

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Tuesday, September 19, 1967

TEXT OF CABLE FROM GENERAL WESTMORELAND (MACI 30002)

SUBJECT: Arnett Story

Full text of Arnett Story received. The story has many flaws and is generally most misleading since the ARVN are definitely improving, not becoming more inefficient. However, the story also hits close to the truth in some areas.

The facts are that more ARVN units have shown more improvement in the last six-eight months than at any time in recent years. Nonetheless, there remain a sizable number of ARVN units which tend to fit Arnett's characterization. Moreover, measurement of improvement in some instances is primarily subjective and therefore subject to valid argument.

In view of the above, a point by point rebuttal is not possible. A strong general rebuttal is possible, but in view of the general press knowledge here of ARVN weakness, a general rebuttal would be viewed primarily as a whitewash and further weaken already strained credibility. I conclude therefore that dignifying the story with an official MACV rebuttal would serve only to keep the story alive without disproving it.

Action is already underway here to try to convince in-country press leaders that the ARVN actually is improving. At present, the program is concentrating on individual press members via in-depth briefings, backgrounders which stress actual unit improvement and the likelihood of eventual overall success due to thoroughness of the training program, effectiveness of supervision, and willingness of top Republic of Vietnam commanders to cooperate. The leadership problem still plagues the ARVN but the story is quite similar to the Republic of Korea Army only circumstances are far more difficult. The test case may be the next NEWSWEEK story on the ARVN, due out soon, since an in-country contributor was given in depth treatment on a similar story. A field trip program for non-believers is also underway with participation of all elements of my command. Progress in the ARVN is always pushed by MACV personnel when dealing with newsmen, but it must be handled carefully as progress has not occurred in many areas. We are working on a fact sheet to reinforce the effort with concrete proof of progress and will provide the text if a convincing case can be made on paper.

I strongly urge Washington spokesmen not to oversell or overstate ARVN progress since past over-enthusiasm is one of the key sources of the so-called "credibility gap" problem.

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.3

DA Memo Jan. 5, 1988

By *EC* NARA Date *1/5/88*

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