

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

October 8, 1963

Subject: "Press Conference"

1. There appear to be certain misstatements in circulation concerning an alleged press conference at my house. This memorandum places on record the facts of the meeting to which these rumors apparently pertain.

2. I have never had a "press conference" in my house, or at any house, since coming to Vietnam as Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, USOM. I have repeatedly entertained in my house various correspondents as personal friends, often of many years standing. (I have similarly entertained there civilian and military officials and private citizens of the United States, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other countries.)

3. I was disturbed in July, by apparently deteriorating relations and failures in communications between US officials and foreign correspondents. This had been publicly evidenced by stories reflecting misinformation about USOM operations which actually merited broad favorable publicity. I wish to emphasize that these stories were erroneous, not because of any malice of the correspondents, but because too many did not know where to go to get, or did not feel that they would receive, the truth. Worse, they were giving the people of the United States an inaccurate over-emotional and, I believe, unduly pessimistic picture of the progress of the counterinsurgency operation here.

4. Accordingly, on or about 24 July, I invited a number of correspondents to drop in my house after supper, to meet with some of my people, and discuss with them the Provincial Rehabilitation program.

5. Present that evening from USOM/RA, in addition to myself, were: George Melvin, Ralph Harwood, C T R Bohannon, Robert Burns, Earl Young, John O'Donnell, Dave Hudson.

6. The correspondents present were: Mal Browne, AP; Jim Robinson, NBC; Pete Kalischer, CBS; Dave Halberstam, NY Times; Nick Turner, Reuter; Neil Sheehan, UPI. Also invited, but unable to attend were: Mert Perry, Time; and Paul Garvey, USIS.

7. The evening was informal, and with the clear understanding that nothing was being said "on the record" unless specifically authorized. (This, to the best of my knowledge, was scrupulously observed by the correspondents.) The rather lively conversations and question-and-answer exchanges sometimes wandered a bit away from province rehabilitation, but always returned to progress being made outside Saigon at that time. While I certainly did not hear everything that was said, I equally certainly have no reason to believe that any information was improperly given to, or improperly used by, any correspondent.

Rufus C. Phillips