

Thomas J. Dodd

SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT

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SENATOR DODD URGES MORE BALANCED PRESS COVERAGE OF VIETNAM.

Cleveland, May 6, 1965 - Senator Thomas J. Dodd (D. - Conn.), in a speech before The Cleveland Press Club today said that he was convinced on the basis of what he saw and learned in the course of his recent visit to Vietnam that the press had failed to convey a balanced or truly representative picture of the situation in that country.

"I believe that the overwhelming majority of the American correspondents in Vietnam are competent and conscientious reporters who are trying to do their best under difficult circumstances," said Senator Dodd. "But the hard fact remains that, taken in its totality, American press coverage of Vietnam has created a public image of the situation in that country which is in certain respects inaccurate, in other respects imbalanced and in still other respects inadequate or even blank."

Senator Dodd gave examples of "stories that should not have been told," "stories that should have been told differently," "stories where the truth was completely obscured by sensationalism," "stories that lack balance," and, "stories that have not been told."

Referring to the stories about the use of gas against the Viet Cong, Senator Dodd said "No one would have been excited, no one would have protested, if the lead sentence in each story had read approximately as follows: "It was revealed today that Vietnamese Government forces, in an effort to avoid injuring women and children in villages where the Viet Cong is entrenched, are now using tear gases of the type commonly used for riot control in all countries....Here is a situation where a slight shift of emphasis, a change of sequence, a somewhat more thoughtful handling by the headline editors, would have resulted in immediate public understanding."

"While the press has been devoting personalized attention replete with photographs, to the maltreatment of Viet Cong prisoners," said the Senator "for some strange reason it has dealt with the massive systematized terror of the Viet Cong against the Vietnamese people in a manner so perfunctory, so impersonal, so statistical as to be virtually meaningless."

Among the stories which have not been told adequately, Senator Dodd listed the Government's smashing victories over the Viet Cong in the Mekong Delta; the major activities of the Vietnamese Air Force which, he said, will soon number 1,000 pilots; the nighttime airborne alert that now protects hamlets and outposts against Viet Cong attacks under cover of darkness.

"There are stories to be told about the many evidences of improved morale on the Government side;" said Senator Dodd "about people buying real estate and opening stores; about bus runs to Saigon, which had virtually been suspended six to twelve months ago, now operating on regular schedules; about residents who have long been intimidated by the Viet Cong, coming forward with information on the location of communist units and supplies; about the fact that more than 80% of all those fighting against the communists are volunteers and that, even in the case of the regular Army, 75% of the recent entrants have been volunteers."

In his closing remarks, Senator Dodd appealed for a more balanced presentation of news from Vietnam. "My plea is for a broader view," said Senator Dodd "for treatment in depth, for more balanced presentations"

REMARKS OF SENATOR THOMAS J. DODD
AT THE PRESS CLUB OF CLEVELAND ANNUAL AWARDS LUNCHEON
CLEVELAND, OHIO, THURSDAY, MAY 6, 1965

THE AMERICAN PRESS AND VIETNAM

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen of the Press:

I have looked forward to an opportunity such as this for many years.

The press of our country has a healthy tradition of cynicism, iconoclasm, and general disrespect for officialdom.

In pushing their exposures, in developing their critiques, in hurling their barbs, our working press and our editorialists recognize no sacred cows.

This is the way it ought to be.

I say this even though it seems to me that the press is sometimes over-diligent in the pursuit of members of Congress. I have myself received at least my share of barbs, and perhaps more than my share. Perhaps because of this, I have the impression that if taxidermists could be persuaded to undertake the job of stuffing Senators, every member of the Washington Press Corps would sport a skinned and mounted Senator as a trophy over his fireplace.

I want to repeat that I do not deprecate your diligence in criticizing government officials or members of Congress when you think they are wrong.

No person and no institution should be immune to criticism. And there is nobody in public life so modest or so virtuous that he cannot benefit from a public examination of his foibles and his weaknesses, or a public challenge to his viewpoint.

I have often said about myself that the good Lord knew what he was doing when he made me 5 feet 7, because if he had made me six feet tall, I would have been intolerable.

And, although we may complain about the excessive acidity of the press, I believe that every member of Congress, in his more philosophical moments, would be prepared to concede that it does our souls good to be cut down to size occasionally.

But what is true for government, also holds true for the press. As newspapermen, I think you would be the first to agree with me that the press, like all human institutions, is fallible, and that it has no more right to be regarded as a sacred cow than government or Congress.

For understandable reasons, however, the press does not criticize the press. For understandable reasons, too, it is considered unwise for people in public life to criticize the press.

While I consider our press to be the best and the most democratic in the world, I believe that it has suffered from this lack of criticism.

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The press enjoys a year-round open season on members of Congress. I wish to submit to this meeting the proposition that it would have a wholesome effect all around if, on one day of each year, the situation were reversed and members of Congress were granted open season on the press.

I have some doubt that this proposal will ever be accepted by the press, or for that matter, by Congress. However this may be, it is my intention to violate all the rules of politics and diplomacy today and to speak to you about certain serious shortcomings of the American press.

As you may know, I have recently returned from an extensive tour of the Far East. About a week of my time was spent in Vietnam and Laos, hopping around from point to point by helicopter and plane, and meeting with as many people as possible.

On the basis of a careful reading of the American press over many months, and on the basis of what I was able to see and learn at first hand in Vietnam, I must say in all frankness that there has been something seriously wrong with American press coverage of the Vietnamese War.

In every situation there are bound to be differences of opinion and differences of evaluation. But it is a fact to reflect upon that every single person to whom I spoke in Vietnam--in the Embassy, in AID, and in the military--felt that the press had failed to convey a balanced or truly representative picture of the situation in that country.

It is also a fact to reflect upon when an officer from my home state serving as an adviser in the field receives a letter from his wife telling him that she just couldn't believe the accounts contained in his letters because they were completely contradicted by what she read in her press.

Specifically, I came away from Vietnam with the impression that the war is going much better for our side than can be gleaned from a reading of the press, that Government morale is higher and Viet Cong morale lower, that the outlook for the future is more promising.

Other people, more knowledgeable than myself, who have taken the trouble to visit Vietnam, have come away with precisely the same impression. P. J. Honey, the foremost British expert on Vietnam, stated roughly a month ago that American press coverage failed to reflect the remarkable progress that had been made on the Government side.

More recently, Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker, special representative of the British Labor Party, who visited Vietnam just after I did, told the press that he "hadn't realized quite how well the war was going."

I believe that the overwhelming majority of the American correspondents in Vietnam are competent and conscientious reporters who are trying to do their best under difficult circumstances. I met many of them while I was in Vietnam, and I was greatly impressed by them.

But the hard fact remains that, taken in its totality, American press coverage of Vietnam has created a public image of the situation in that country that is in certain respects inaccurate, in other respects imbalanced, in still other respects grossly inadequate or even blank.

To the extent that it has failed to convey to the American people an accurate appreciation of what is going on in Vietnam, the American press has gravely complicated the task of the Administration.

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I have tried hard to understand this failure of the American press to convey a balanced picture of Vietnam. I have discussed the matter with many people in Vietnam and in this country since my return. I do not pretend to have the entire answer. I have the impression, however, that the fault lies in part with the general traditions and working habits of the American press, in part with the tyranny of the daily deadline, in part with our correspondents, in part with our foreign news editors, in part with the headline editors, in part with our information officers.

I believe that if everyone concerned with the gathering and presentation of news on Vietnam could take time off for a critical evaluation of American newspaper coverage of the Vietnamese crisis, it would automatically result in a more balanced presentation of the news.

Before I discuss what can be done about it, let me give you some specific examples to illustrate my argument.

1. The Stories that Should Never Have Been Told.

In category number 1, there are the stories that should never have been told for reasons of security. Fortunately, the American press has not often been guilty of this type of infraction in Vietnam. But it has happened.

For example, two weeks ago, a story from Da Nang Air Base mentioned the operation from the base of the "Blue Streak" reconnaissance drone. This was a top secret matter. The correspondent in question was legally within his rights because there is no military censorship. In such situations the American Mission cannot go beyond remonstrating with the offending journalists.

If the press cannot display more self-discipline than this in covering military operations, then it seems clear to me that the only alternative is military censorship.

2. The Stories that Should Have Been Told Differently:

In category number 2, there are the stories which, while intrinsically accurate, conveyed a false public impression because of misplaced emphasis, or because of the sequence of presentation, or because of headline treatment.

As all of you will recall, there was an international uproar when it was revealed in the month of February that we had used "gas" in an engagement with the Viet Cong.

If the headline and the lead sentence in each story had made it clear that we had used "tear gas" and not poison gas, there would, in my opinion, have been no uproar--because the use of tear gases as a minimum force instrument for the control of mobs and rioters is internationally accepted. Indeed, the use of such gases in the control of rioters is so routine a matter that the fact would hardly warrant inclusion in any riot story headline.

No one would have been excited, no one would have protested, if the lead sentence in each story had read approximately as follows: "It was revealed today that Vietnamese Government forces, in an effort to avoid injuring women and children in villages where the Viet Cong is entrenched, are now using tear gases of the type commonly used for riot control in all countries."

I think the reaction of most people would have been that this was an eminently sensible and humanitarian innovation, and that it would represent substantial progress if all wars could be fought with weapons no more lethal than this.

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But, instead, the lead sentences, as I recall them, simply spoke of "gas" being used for the first time in Vietnam -- leaving the clear impression that what was involved was poison gas of the World War I type.

The headlines further confused the situation. Most of them read simply, "Gas Used Against Viet Cong."

If you read further, you soon discovered that what was involved was not chlorine or mustard gas, but tear gases. But the fact is that many people do not read beyond the headline and the first few sentences of an article, while even those who read further are so conditioned by the headline and the lead sentence that they cannot be unconditioned by what follows.

I believe that every honest newspaperman and every honest editor will recognize the validity of this observation.

The result of this treatment of the story was that America was put on the defensive before world opinion and that Administration leaders were obliged to go on the air to explain their position to irate citizens who accused it of violating the Geneva Convention.

Here is a situation where a slight shift of emphasis, a change of sequence, a somewhat more thoughtful handling by the headline editors, would have resulted in immediate public understanding. Instead, a few thoughtless phrases and devices, designed to give the story a slightly more sensational twist, played into the hands of the communist propaganda apparatus, and created completely avoidable and unnecessary difficulties for the Administration.

3. The Stories Where the Truth Was Completely Obscured by Sensationalism:

In category number 3, there have been stories in which the truth has been completely obscured by sensationalism. Perhaps the outstanding example in this category were the harrowing accounts of the persecution of the Bhuddist religion which were featured by the American press on an almost daily basis for some six months before the overthrow of President Diem.

I want to make it clear here that, in this instance as well as in other instances where I refer to the American press, I do not mean the entire press. There were a number of distinguished correspondents who swam against the stream, and who reported that, whatever the weaknesses of the Diem regime, the issue of religious persecution was completely fraudulent. Their voices, however, were drowned out by the much larger chorus of correspondents writing in frequently lurid terms about the supposedly intolerable persecution of the Bhuddist religion by the Diem Government.

In the month of November, 1963, at the invitation of the Diem Government, the United Nations General Assembly decided to send a fact-finding mission to South Vietnam to look into the situation. President Diem was assassinated as the mission was completing its investigation. Because of this, the mission came up with no formal findings. But the published summary of the testimony taken by it in Vietnam pointed strongly to the conclusion that the persecution of the Bhuddists was either non-existent or vastly exaggerated and that the agitation was essentially political.

Ambassador Fernando Volio Jiminez of Costa Rica, who had introduced the motion calling for the setting up of the UN mission, and who served as a member of it, told me that this had been his personal conclusion. Ambassador Pinto of Dahomey, another member of the mission, publicly expressed himself in similar terms.

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Men of long experience in Vietnam are agreed that prior to the Buddhist agitation of 1963 there was no serious religious division in Vietnam and that relations between the various religious communities were on the contrary, remarkably harmonious. The exaggerated accounts of the alleged persecution of the Buddhist religion which appeared in the American press were played back to the Vietnamese people by USIA and by their own press and radio. Inevitably, they served to further embitter relations. In this sense, they contributed to the unfortunate division between Catholics and Buddhists that today exists in Vietnam and to the continuing political instability in that country.

The self-immolation of the Buddhist monks made exciting newspaper copy and grade A headlines. But I cannot help wondering whether the situation in Vietnam would not be different today if the American press corps as a whole had investigated the alleged persecution of the Buddhist religion as assiduously as did the U.N. Commission, and if it had reported in the same temperate terms.

4. Stories that Lack Balance:

I believe that untold damage has been done to the democratic cause in Vietnam by stories that lack balance or which serve to create an unbalanced impression of the over-all situation.

I am not suggesting that these stories are in themselves untrue. But, as you all know, it is possible to write the truth every day for an entire month--and if one has concentrated too narrowly on certain aspects of the situation and overlooked others, what will emerge at the end of that time is a completely imbalanced picture.

A sense of balance, or proportion, is the key to sanity. It is also the key to sound political and moral judgments. But the citizens of our country cannot be expected to make balanced judgments on complex issues, if they are not provided with a balanced presentation of the facts.

Let me give you one example of what I mean.

Over the past six months I recall seeing at least half a dozen different photographs of Viet Cong prisoners being subjected to the water torture, or being kicked, or being otherwise maltreated by their Vietnamese captors in an effort to extract information from them. There was even a five- or six-page full-color spread in one of our major magazines on this theme.

These photographs and stories have resulted in widespread indignation. There have even been voices demanding that we discontinue our support of the Vietnamese Government if it insists on treating prisoners in this inhuman manner.

While the press has been devoting this kind of personalized attention, replete with photographs, to the maltreatment of Viet Cong prisoners, for some strange reason it has dealt with the massive, systematized terror of the Viet Cong against the Vietnamese people in a manner so perfunctory, so impersonal, so statistical, as to be virtually meaningless.

Every once in a while, one sees a reference to the fact that Viet Cong terrorists have been assassinating and abducting many thousands of victims every year--village chiefs, local administrators, teachers, wives and children of government militiamen, teenage boys and girls. But only on the rarest occasions do American correspondents take the trouble to visit villages where Viet Cong atrocities have occurred and to gather material and photographs for an on-the-spot story.

While I was in Vietnam, there was a major terrorist attack on a village south of Da Nang. It was mid-day, and the men were working in the fields, and the Viet Cong, therefore, knew that their only victims would be women and children. Knowing this, they opened up with heavy mortar fire on the village, killing some ten women and children and seriously injuring eighty.

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I know that there was some minor reference to this incident in the American press. But I also know that there was no rush of American correspondents to take photographs and to interview victims for an on-the-spot story.

The maltreatment of prisoners on the Government side no doubt does take place occasionally. For that matter, I doubt very much that there ever has been a war situation in which prisoners on both sides have not been subjected to some kind of physical duress in an effort to extract intelligence from them. But such incidents are certainly not characteristic of the general treatment accorded Viet Cong prisoners or defectors.

In line with its "open arms" policy, the Vietnamese Government has, in fact, placed a very heavy emphasis in its troop directives on the importance of treating prisoners humanely.

The Viet Cong terror, in contradistinction, has from the beginning been a matter of general policy, claiming thousands of innocent lives every year. In 1964 alone, 11,000 Vietnamese civilians were killed or kidnapped by the Viet Cong. On a proportionate scale, this would be equivalent to 143,000 victims in one year in the United States.

Because of the heavy photographic emphasis on the maltreatment of Viet Cong prisoners, however, I am willing to wager that you will find a much greater public awareness on this point than you will of the massive and merciless Viet Cong terror.

I recall seeing an article recently which was captioned approximately as follows: "Atrocities Abound on Both Sides in Vietnam War." In the opening paragraphs, the author described the water torture of a Viet Cong prisoner in graphic detail. And then, in a single following paragraph, he made the point that there has been several thousand victims of Viet Cong terrorist assassinations over the previous year.

In this way, I suppose, the correspondent was endeavoring to display his even-handed repudiation of all brutality on either side.

I reject the moral implications of this equation.

It is simply not true that the physical abuse of one Viet Cong prisoner, most probably in an effort to extract vital information from him, is an atrocity on the same scale as the deliberate assassination and abduction of thousands of innocent civilians.

It is impossible for the American people to understand what is involved in Vietnam and why the Vietnamese people are fighting, without a comprehension of the scope and nature of the Viet Cong terror.

They cannot get this from statistics, because statistics are meaningless. And, in my opinion, the American press has failed to report on the Viet Cong terror in the countryside in a manner that brings it to life and makes it meaningful and comprehensible to the American people.

Most of the thousands of Viet Cong atrocities that occur each year are on a small scale. But through USIA, the American press corps in Saigon receives daily reports listing some of the incidents -- a village chief assassinated in one district, three young men kidnapped in another district, a mother and child killed when a hamlet was fired upon, and so on.

Sometimes, the villages in question are difficult to reach. But not always. It seems to me that it would give balance and drama and new meaning to American press coverage of the Vietnam war if every American correspondent in Vietnam took it upon himself to visit the site of one Viet Cong atrocity once a week or even once a month and do a human interest story based on conversations with the victims or with their relatives, supplemented wherever possible with photographs.

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5. Some Stories That Have Not Been Told:

It seems to me, too, that the press has failed to tell many stories that could and should be told that would cast a more benevolent light on the Vietnamese war effort and on our own role in Vietnam.

I have told some of these stories to highly knowledgeable friends since my return and their reaction has invariably been one of amazement. They told me that they had not realized these things are going on in Vietnam. And a few of them who had been skeptical before said that, if these things were so, they would have to revise their thinking about the Vietnamese situation.

I intend to tell you a few of these stories so that you may check them against your own reading of news from Vietnam.

(a) The Situation in the Mekong Delta.

There are regions of Vietnam where the situation is still precarious and the Viet Cong is still strong. But there are other regions where the government forces have in recent months tremendously strengthened their position and where they now have the Viet Cong on the run.

Perhaps the most dramatic improvement has taken place in the Fourth Corps area, with headquarters in the city of Can Tho, in the heart of the Mekong Delta. I know that the press has reported on one or two government victories there. But nowhere have I seen an overall evaluation of the remarkable progress achieved in the Fourth Corps area in the course of the past six months.

The 4th Corps area used to be considered one of the real hot spots of the war. But since last December 11, the government forces have inflicted a series of 6 major defeats on Viet Cong forces, in operations that involved as many as 3 Viet Cong main force battalions at a time.

In the last engagement, which took place on April 4, 276 Viet Cong bodies were counted on the battlefield and there is now hard information that the Viet Cong casualties were, in fact, much heavier.

The serious drop in Viet Cong morale in the 4th Corps area is attested to by the steadily increasing number of defectors to our side.

In the middle of last year there were only about 10 a month coming over.

In December, 100 came over.

In March, 160 came over.

The defectors include not merely conscripts but a lot of hard-core Viet Cong. Just before my visit, in fact, an entire squad of hard-core Viet Cong had come over to the Government side, bringing their weapons with them.

I think it important to point out that this was the first time in the history of the insurgency that an entire squad of hard-core Viet Cong had come over voluntarily to the Government side.

It seems to me that if I were a newspaperman, I could write not merely one, but a series of perhaps three or four articles on the improved situation in the Can Tho area, on the remarkable increase in the rate of defection from the Viet Cong, and on other aspects of this singularly encouraging situation.

(b) The Vietnamese Air Force.

Another story which, in my opinion, has not received the attention it merits is that of the build-up of the Vietnamese Air Force.

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The average American newspaper reader, is, I am certain, under the impression that virtually all of the sorties flown against the communists, both in North Vietnam and South Vietnam, have been flown by the U.S. Air Force and Navy. If he is at all aware of the existence of the Vietnamese Air Force, he is almost certainly under the impression that 90% or more of the work in the air has been done by American boys.

The truth is, however, that the Vietnamese Air Force, although it got off to a slow start, has now become a formidable power in its own right.

In 1961, the Vietnamese Air Force was virtually non-existent. By March, 1963, it mustered 227 pilots all told. Today its pilot strength is approaching the 1,000 mark; and, by the end of next year, it is my understanding that it will be close to 2,000.

The growth in the number of aircraft mechanics has been just as sensational. In March of 1962 there were only 25; but in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year, more than 1,500 personnel completed on-the-job training as aircraft mechanics.

According to the American advisers with whom I spoke, the efficiency and morale of the Vietnamese Air Force are extremely high. Its pilots are skilled and aggressive and they are flying as many sorties as our own. Their maintenance record also compares very favorably with that of the U.S. Air Force.

The exact number of sorties flown by the Vietnamese Air Force in recent months is for some reason classified. But I have been given permission to say that the number of sorties flown in January, 1965, represent a 1,000 per cent increase over the number flown in January, 1962.

(c) Airborne Alert to the Rescue.

There is yet another story I heard in Vietnam, which, in my opinion, merits telling, but which I do not recall having seen in print.

Viet Cong attacks on hamlets and outposts used to rely heavily on cover of darkness. The continuing nighttime airborne alert now flown jointly by US and Vietnam aircraft has deprived the communists of this advantage over a large area within reach of the 2nd Air Division's headquarters.

Under this system, one plane, equipped with flares, is constantly in the air ready to respond to appeals for help from hamlets or outposts under attack. The minute an appeal is received, the plane takes off--and another plane takes to the air to respond, should there be a second call for help.

By completely depriving the communists of the advantage of darkness, flare-dropping operations have been incredibly successful in reducing the effectiveness of their night attacks.

In the month of March, aircraft flying the airborne alert flew 152 sorties in response to 69 appeals for help. Only 2 of the outposts and hamlets under attack were actually overrun by the communists.

I could go on and on listing stories which have not been told at all, or else in my opinion have been told inadequately.

There are stories to be told about the many evidences of improved morale on the Government side; about people buying real estate and opening stores; about bus runs to Saigon, which had virtually been suspended six to twelve months ago, now operating on regular schedules; about residents who have long been intimidated by the Viet Cong, coming forward with information on the location of communist units and supplies; about the fact that more than 80% of all those fighting against the communists are volunteers and that, even in the case of the regular Army, 75% of the recent entrants have been volunteers.

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And much more could be written than has been written about the heroism and dedication of the AID representatives who carry on their work of village assistance and reform, unarmed and frequently at the risk of their lives.

The Reasons Why

I believe that a large part of the reason for the inadequacy of American press coverage of Vietnam is the traditional tendency of the American press to compete by focusing too narrowly on the sensational.

In Vietnam, this has meant focusing, on the one hand, on genuinely dramatic "big" stories like the bombing of American billets or the American Embassy or on the massive American air strikes against the north; and, on the other hand, it has meant focusing on things like the mistreatment of prisoners and coups and rumors of coups.

The competitiveness of our wire services and papers is such that correspondents are under pressure to be the first, to be as sensational as their conscience permits, and to come up with the standings daily in a situation where progress cannot truthfully be measured on a day by day basis.

All this is done on the assumption that this is what the public wants, that it does not have much interest in the thoughtful balanced evaluation or in articles written with restraint and perspective.

There is also the fact that the majority of the American correspondents in Saigon must function as one-man bureaus. Since Saigon is the seat of the American Embassy and American military headquarters, since it is the chief source of news and a favorite target for Viet Cong terrorists, and since coups and rumors of coups are still considered top news, there is a tendency for these one-man bureaus to spend most of their time in Saigon, perhaps supplementing this with an occasional visit to Da Nang and an even more occasional visit to the Vietnamese countryside.

The tendency to stay put in Saigon is in some cases fanned by the fear that they may be hauled on the carpet by their editors if they happen to be out of the city when a big story breaks.

But it is absolutely impossible to obtain a balanced and comprehensive view of the Vietnamese War from the vantage point of Saigon.

The Vietnamese War is not a single large war with a front line separating contending armies, but a war made up of many smaller wars which go on every day in the remote isolated villages and hamlets of Vietnam. It is in the Vietnamese countryside that the war will be won or lost--and all the indications are that it is today being won there.

Partly because of the pressures to focus on the big and the sensational, partly because of the "Saigon complex," partly because some of them lack the experience or maturity to understand this enormously complex political situation, partly because the political and military situations in Vietnam when combined, constitute a subject almost too big for the ablest reporter, the American correspondents in Saigon, with notable exceptions, have paid inadequate attention to the many little wars which constitute the real war--to the daily acts of Viet Cong terrorism against the people of South Vietnam, to the hundreds of small but grimly fought battles which take place every week between village and district militiamen and the Viet Cong forces, to the hundreds of air sorties flown every month by the Vietnamese and American Air Forces in support of minor hamlets and outposts under attack, to the drab but heroic work carried out in the countryside of Vietnam by American AID advisors seeking to help the Vietnamese people to improve their lives.

Finally, as I heard from a number of people, there is a history of antagonism between the Government and the press going back to the

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last years of the Diem period. Whatever the merits of the controversy at that time, it is generally agreed that the press corps felt that they were not getting the straight news from either the Vietnamese Government or the United States Embassy; and whenever an opportunity arose to show that the Government or the Embassy was wrong, the press was wont to seize upon it.

In this way, a tradition of concentrating on the negative aspects of the war grew up, and some of it persists to this day.

What Can Be Done.

I hope that no one here will construe my remarks as meaning that I favor censorship of the press, or even a voluntary censorship which ignores the bad and concentrates on what is good in reporting on our own side.

My plea is for a broader view, for treatment in depth, for more balanced presentations, for less insistence on the sensational on the part of cable editors, for more thoughtfulness in the formulation of lead paragraphs and headlines.

I do not suggest that every correspondent in every article should seek to present a balanced and comprehensive view of the situation in Vietnam. This is clearly impossible.

But I do not think it improper to suggest that correspondents and editors should seek to organize and balance their coverage of Vietnam so that at the end of one month's time, let us say, their articles, taken in aggregate, do present a balanced picture.

I do not think it is too much to suggest that correspondents--even the one-man bureau correspondents--be encouraged to spend more time in the countryside, interviewing province chiefs and American district advisers, and AID officials in the field and simple Vietnamese peasants, and Viet Cong defectors, and victims of Viet Cong terror.

I am convinced that such a balanced presentation of the news would enable the American people, and Congress as well, to make more balanced judgments about the situation in Vietnam.

I am convinced that it would help us to better explain our position to the Free World, and that the clarification of the issues would dispel much of the confusion that is today undermining public support for our commitment in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Competence, diligence, and conscientiousness can be found in abundance among the American press corps in Vietnam. As for the conscientiousness of American editors, about this I can speak from personal experience because I am proud to count many of them among my friends. The one ingredient necessary to assure a more effective presentation of the Vietnamese situation is a determined effort to seek for balance. There have been correspondents and editors who have, despite the very great difficulties, managed to achieve a remarkable degree of balance in their handling of Vietnamese news. As of this moment, however, they are still in the minority. I would like to see them become the majority.

I do not pretend to any finality in my remarks. I have broached a subject which I believe requires public discussion. I also happen to believe that this discussion can best be pursued by the members of the American press themselves.

I leave you with this thought, knowing that from this day on I shall probably be considered an outcast by your society.

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