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USAWC RESEARCH PAPER,

1
PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE UNIFIED COMMAND
IN LIMITED WARFARE IN VIETNAM 1921-8

A CASE STUDY

10 by
Colonel Woodburn J. Mickel, Jr
Infantry

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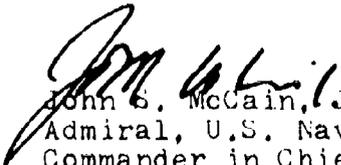
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↳ This case study provides an overview of the conduct of public affairs by the Unified Commander, CINCPAC, during the Vietnam War. The time frame covered is essentially from the initiation of the Tet 1968 Offensive to the current date. The study examines the US public affairs effort in competition with the censored information tactics of the enemy. The validity of invoking censorship in an undeclared limited war of insurgency is considered. The Tet 1968 Offensive and the Cambodian and Laos cross-border incursions are examined at length as cases in point. The fragmentation of the US public affairs effort among numerous agencies and at varying levels is defined as a major deficiency. The enemy integrated his military and political efforts and spoke with one voice while the US spoke with many. The effects of an uncensored press in history's first televised war are examined to determine their effect, which was monumental, on US public opinion and subsequently the loss of US public support for the Indochina War. The study concludes that there can be no separation between the military commander's obligation to perform the operational mission and his responsibility to report on that operation. Therefore, he must have the authority to establish a centrally controlled information program as an operational arm of the unified command. ↗

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(U) PREFACE

Public affairs aspects of the Vietnam War are unique in the annals of our history. Never before have so many heard and seen so much about a war in the history of mankind. Reporting from the battlefield and the pro and con of US involvement there were instantaneous and continuous. The basic national decisions that set and shaped American information policy and practice impacted strongly upon world-wide reporting by the news media and greatly influenced public opinion of the Vietnam War.


John S. McCain, Jr.
Admiral, U.S. Navy
Commander in Chief Pacific

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CHAPTER 1 (U)

INTRODUCTION

By appropriate directives the Secretary of Defense has assigned overall responsibilities to unified and specified commanders for public affairs matters concerning assigned forces within their respective geographic areas. The overall public affairs objective is to support the mission of the command by providing US and foreign publics an understanding of the responsibilities and activities of the command. This then was the mission of the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) in whose area the Indochina War was and is being waged.

CINCPAC considered his specific public affairs objectives to be:¹

1. To support national policy by keeping the US public informed of the capability and combat readiness of ground, air, and naval forces of the Pacific Command as they accomplish their missions as members of a unified team.
2. To develop and maintain good relations with foreign publics of Pacific and Asian nations and to create a climate of public understanding favorable to the presence of US forces, the Military Assistance Program and contingency operations during emergency periods.

The US public was kept informed of the Vietnam War as no other war in history. It shaped national policy to the extent that three US presidents repeatedly reaffirmed our Indochinese commitment in the face of enormous opposition and staked their political futures on the outcome of the war in Indochina. One fell before an assassin's bullets before he could be proved correct. Many argue that

the New Hampshire primary and the Tet Offensive of 1968 were such a blow to President Lyndon Johnson that he could never recover his political prestige. The third, President Nixon, is attempting to satisfy the desires of the American public by the accelerated withdrawal of US forces and Vietnamization of the war.

Why the disaffection of the American public? How did they come to feel this way about their presidents and a war in which Americans had taken up arms to stem a Communist insurgency? During World War II in the Battle of the Bulge, 4000 US officers and men were killed, seventeen thousand were missing, and twenty thousand were wounded in a little more than two weeks; but the nation's confidence did not crumble. Less than twenty men staged the attack against the US Embassy at the outset of Tet 1968. As stated by Don Oberdorfer in his book entitled TET:

This little group, numbering three hundredths of one per cent of the total nationwide attack force, was destined to receive about three quarters of all the attention of the outside world in the first stunning hours of the Tet Offensive. An American officer called the Embassy engagement "a piddling platoon action," and in conventional military terms, it was.²

In political and psychological terms, however, the "piddling" action was among the most important engagements of the war. As Mr. Oberdorfer goes on to say,

For once, newsmen could observe a celebrated battle while it was still in progress and send the report around the world without delay. Through the magic of international electronics, the news would travel at 300,000 times the speed of a bullet.³

Vietnam was America's first television war, and the Tet Offensive was America's first television superbattle. At the outset of Tet 1968, there were nearly 100,000,000 television sets reaching sixteen of every seventeen US homes with a potential audience of 96 percent of the US population. In 1968, Roper Research Associates conducted a study wherein respondents were asked where they usually get most of their news of "what's going on in the world today." Their reply was: from television, 59 percent; newspapers, 49 percent; radio, 25 percent; magazines, 7 percent; "other people," 5 percent.⁴ Thus it is not difficult to determine the major sources which the American public utilizes to obtain its views and shape its opinions. The mass media's two major representatives are its television and its newspapers--the television providing the most instantaneous and "vivid" news.

According to the Nielson rating service, during the January and early February Tet 1968 period, Walter Cronkite was seen in 20.3 percent of 11.2 million homes while the Huntley-Brinkley Report was viewed in 18.8 percent of 10.5 million.⁵

Whether pro or con, never before had so many heard and seen so much about a war some 8000 nautical miles from US shores in the history of mankind. Via satellite, the daily combat operations in Vietnam became the TV evening special of ABC, NBC, and CBS in the American home and elsewhere. Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, USN, former Commander in Chief Pacific stated: "The Vietnam War has had

the most intense press coverage and has been the most thoroughly documented, most centrally controlled, most computerized, and most statistically analyzed in history."⁶

Wesley R. Fishel in his preface to Vietnam Anatomy of a Conflict notes that:

Indeed, this is the first war we have ever watched from the dinner table. . . . Now, with the addition of television to the channels of mass communication, and most recently the blessing (?) of "live" coverage of the war via satellite, war has come to the American fireside in all of its gore and viciousness.⁷

The reporting of the Vietnam War--regardless of the tide of battle and controversy over US involvement--was both instant and continuous. Thus it was that warfare was no longer purely a matter of military victory or defeat. It had become a matter of public acceptance or rejection, understanding or uncertainty, of this victory or defeat. The public view of the war was to impose a direct relationship on the men fighting the battles, the tactics and strategy of the conflict, and the expenditures for the equipment and weapons to wage the battles.

Never before in any warfare had public affairs played such a predominant role. This study proposes to examine the "how" and the "why" of the manner in which the American public was informed of the Indochina War by the mass news media; the manner in which the enemy was able to influence American public opinion and the restrictions placed on the US Unified Commander to wage a similar battle of words and ideas to combat the enemy. The study concludes

with the authorities which should be granted to the Unified Commander in the public affairs arena in future limited wars.

The general time frame of the study is from Tet 1968 to the present. This period is considered to be the prime candidate for consideration since it was during this period that the real public affairs battle--the support of the American people--was lost. The 1968 Tet Offensive and the Cambodian and Laos cross-border incursions are examined as prime cases in point.

Methods of conducting the study have been by individual research, letters, and interviews. Distance factors made many of the major commanders who were "on the ground" during the time frame in question currently unavailable. Therefore, the major source of such information was from their personal letters to the author.

CHAPTER I (U)

FOOTNOTES

1. Commander in Chief Pacific, CINCPAC Instruction 5720, 4B; Responsibilities and Policy Guidance for Public Affairs in the Pacific Command (8 October 1966), p. 8 (hereafter referred to as CINCPACINST 5720. 4B).

2. Don Oberdorfer, TET (1971), p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 6.

4. Edwin Emery, et al., Introduction to Mass Communications (1971), p. 137.

5. Oberdorfer, p. 240.

6. Admiral U. S. G. Sharp and General William C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam (1968), p. 1.

7. Wesley R. Rishel, et al., Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict (1968), p. ix.

CHAPTER II (C)

HANOI PUBLIC AFFAIRS VIS-A-VIS WASHINGTON (U)

(U) From the outset of the war in Vietnam, the enemy realized that he must win the battle, which his adversaries called "Public Affairs" if he was to gain the public support required to successfully conclude his military and political campaigns. The Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) has fully understood that there can be no separation of national policy and the release of information concerning military operations. With a skill unparalleled in history, North Vietnam has used political, psychological, and information techniques as integral operational elements of its war campaigns. The enemy has used combat troops in operations specifically instituted to provoke information response and reaction by the news media to influence public opinion. In so doing he has added a new psychological and propaganda dimension to combat operations.

(U) POLITICAL POWER FROM THE BARREL OF THE GUN

Addressing the politics of uprising, Oberdorfer states:

While the Party believed (in Mao Tse-Tung's phrase) that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, there was also never any doubt that the gun was to be wielded only for clear and specific political purposes. Thus the Tet Offensive, while largely military in nature, was ordered by the Political Bureau of the Lao Dong Party to achieve political ends in South Vietnam, the United States and the rest of the world. Without political success, military gains were likely to be fleeting.

However, even the wildest dreams of the planners in the Lao Dong Party could never have envisioned the political results they were to attain from their military unsuccessful attack on the US Embassy during the initial stages of Tet 1968. But the realization came quickly when, within three days of President Johnson's post-Tet speech, the Hanoi regime broadcast an official government statement declaring its readiness to begin preliminary contacts with the United States looking toward a total bombing cessation and substantive negotiations. The statement also said that,

The general offensive and uprising of the South Vietnam armed forces and people early this year have inflicted on the US aggressors and their lackeys a fatal blow. . . . The Vietnamese people's fight for independence and freedom has entered a new period. The US defeat is already evident.²

(U) COSVN: ONE REFRAIN WITH ONE VOICE

It must always be borne in mind that Hanoi's war is planned and prosecuted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. One voice, and one voice only, speaks for North Vietnam's military-political-information and propaganda fronts. In North Vietnam the message is the medium.

We must go all out in developing the propaganda motivation, and organization roles of the newspapers of the Party and the (mass) associations at the various levels. Only if the foregoing is accomplished can we create a united strength to struggle strongly with the enemy on the political-ideological front.

--Resolution Issued by the Ninth
Conference of Central Office
for South Vietnam, July 1969

Neither before nor after the introduction of combat forces into Vietnam did the US Government ever make a clear statement of US objectives there. Such was not the direction of the enemy to his people and his army.

. . . toward the glorious fulfillment of our immediate mission: The winning of a decisive victory, which is the very fundamental condition for progress toward the realization of the objectives of the Revolution in the South, namely independence, democracy, peace and neutrality, as a step toward the reunification of our country.

--Central Office for South
Vietnam Resolution

(U) THE UNITED STATES: MANY REFRAINS
WITH MANY VOICES

While COSVN has sung one refrain with one verse, the US has sung many refrains with many voices. In the US the war was not initially termed a war. Within the prevailing political atmosphere, the US Department of Defense and Department of State established the fundamental policy for the information media in Vietnam. The public view of US efforts in Vietnam that was eventually to be formed was essentially determined by decisions made at the national level at the initiation of the conflict.

Political decisions at the outset of US involvement subordinated COMUSMACV conduct of ground operations and CINCPAC control of air operations to political exigencies.³ These same exigencies also dictated that the ultimate authority for determining public affairs programming and policy in-country would be the Department of Defense in consort with the Department of State.

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In 1965 the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) was established under Mr. Barry Zorthian of USIA.⁴ Initially this office tightly controlled all information activities with execution assigned to both military forces and civilian agencies. Today the JUSPAO has primary responsibility for psychological operations and State Department policy briefings while the US Embassy Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, under the Ambassador, exercises authority for the total US information effort in the Republic of Vietnam.⁵

At MACV a Joint Staff Public Affairs Office acting under policy directives of the Defense and State Departments, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV is responsible for military information matters. CINCPAC, the Unified Commander, was and is essentially relegated to little more than a transmitter of Defense Department public affairs policy directives insofar as Vietnam public affairs policies and programs are concerned.

(FOUO) In an attempt to provide some public affairs guidance on a continuing basis, CINCPAC initiated a "Policy-Gram" system in October of 1966.⁶ Policy-Gram 2-66 covering the authority for release of information in Vietnam stated,

The Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, US Embassy Saigon, exercises responsibility and authority over the total US public affairs function in RVN. Under the guidance of the Minister-Counselor and of CINCPAC, COMUSMACV is the sole authority for the clearance and release of information concerning US military operations in Vietnam or adjacent waters.

The US Unified Commander was competing against an enemy who consistently spoke with one voice through a censored press using

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words and ideas as an extension of warfare. To further complicate the Unified Commander's mission, neither CINCPAC nor COMUSMACV controlled psychological operations. This most important aspect of the information war in a combat setting was administered by a civilian agency.

(C) IMPROVING THE VIETNAMESE IMAGE-- FURTHER FRAGMENTATION (U)

Yet another element contributing to the fragmentation of the US information effort was the situation which existed relative to the Republic of Vietnam and its forces. While the US State Department and US Information Agency were responsible for improving the Republic of Vietnam Government image in the eyes of the American public, COMUSMACV was responsible for a like mission insofar as the armed forces of Vietnam were concerned. The current atmosphere in the US lends little credence to either goal ever having been achieved, improvement of the Thieu Government image or US recognition of the armed forces of Vietnam's long fight against insurgency. In fact, the problem has only been compounded by the difference in information philosophies and public affairs techniques of the two governments.

(C) SERVICE COMPONENT POLICIES (U)

Individual military service information policies and programs in respect to their operations further fragmented the overall US information effort. Lacking a clear statement of US objectives and

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intentions in Vietnam, by the US Government, fundamental military public affairs policy and operational considerations were not clearly defined for a limited war such as Vietnam. Therefore, each military service initiated its own information policies and programs and was responsible for coverage of its individual operations from the outset of its commitment. Inter-service rivalries and traditional service pride to "blow one's own horn" did not always foster the effectiveness desired and required to compete with a skilled enemy. The Unified Commander lacked the authority to prevent inter- and intra-service rivalries and parochial information activities by component commanders which is essential for a coordinated information effort.

(C) MILITARY OPERATIONS VERSUS POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS (U)

In the final analysis, Washington's initial reluctance to make clear statements of US goals and objectives at the outset of the war was not always matched when the administration viewed certain objectives as contributors to its cause. In the early part of the Cambodian cross-border operations, the President billed COSVN Headquarters as one of the major objectives of that operation. In actuality, it was not and never had been.⁷ Publicly stated intentions had not been coordinated with US military actions in the field, and once again too many US voices singing different refrains caused embarrassment at home and provided more ammunition for the enemy in his warfare of words and ideas. The facts of military

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operations in Vietnam were subordinate to the political decisions and considerations which determined the substance of the information about the war which was released to the US public and the world.

(C) INFORMATION AND THE TOTAL WAR (U)

Continued US reliance upon five levels of communication in Vietnam by the State Department, the US Information Agency, COMUSMACV, and the Republic of Vietnam and its armed forces have meant that many voices were raised and few heard. This experience has unmistakably shown that a centrally controlled, cohesive, simultaneous information action program must be an operational arm of the military commander. Only in this way can a credible array of facts that will stand the test of challenge from any source be presented to gain international support for the operational actions. The warfare of words and ideas cannot be a support function or reports of events after the fact. Information must be an integral part of the total war.

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CHAPTER II (C)

FOOTNOTES (U)

1. (U) Don Oberdorfer, TET (1971), p. 60.
2. (U) Ibid., p. 323.
3. (U) Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, when he was Commander in Chief Pacific, stated "As late as 24 November 1966, however, the rules of engagement prohibited employment of artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in the Demilitarized Zone north of the Demarcation Line. This facilitated the establishment of extensive enemy field fortifications with particular emphasis on antiaircraft artillery." Admiral U. S. G. Sharp and General William C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam (1969), p. 49.
4. (U) Ibid., p. 237.
5. (U) Commander in Chief Pacific, CINCPAC Instruction 5720.4B, Responsibilities and Policy Guidance for Public Affairs in the Pacific Command (8 October 1966), p. 7 (hereafter referred to as CINCPACINST 5720.4B).
6. (U) Commander in Chief Pacific, PACOM Public Affairs Policy-Gram 2-66: Release of Information in the Republic of Vietnam (22 October 1966), p. 1, FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY, (hereafter referred to as PACOM Public Affairs Policy-Gram 2-66).
7. (C) "Early on in the Cambodian thing we took some needling from the press about our inability to capture COSVN Headquarters. Again, our Administration set itself up for this when the President billed COSVN Headquarters as one of our major objectives. In actuality, it was not and never had been. Here again we have an instance of publicly stated intentions not matching our actions in the field." Michael S. Davison, GEN, US Army, letter to author, 30 December 1971, CONFIDENTIAL, (hereafter referred to as "Davison letter").

CHAPTER III (U)

FREEDOM OF THE US MASS MEDIA

Chapter II dealt with COSVN's ability to integrate its military and political operations and Hanoi's adeptness to have one voice alone speak for North Vietnam's military, political, information, and propaganda fronts. It would be unfair to proceed and leave the impression that such a system could be duplicated in toto in our military environs which originate from a free society. Therefore, this chapter will consider the freedoms and methods of the US mass media which are the ultimate shapers of public opinion. As such, their modus operandi should be of prime consideration to every military officer. In the final analysis, public opinion and public support is the end product and goal of public affairs whether it be in CONUS or Vietnam.

The impact of the mass media is brought into realistic focus by Edwin Emery in his statement,

Men today learn almost everything they know through some medium of mass communications--television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and film. . . . Instantaneously learning, men react with equal celerity. Wars, riots, changes of governmental policies--these and other actions of great import stem from the impact of news transmitted by the mass media. Our environment, for better or for worse, is mass-media oriented.¹

The mass media used particular situations and incidents which occurred in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to shape US public opinion of the war in Indochina. These are more specifically dealt with in Chapter V. This chapter provides some of the ground rules,

methods, and the thinking that determined how and why the war would be presented to the American public as it was.

THE TRADITIONAL INFORMATION BATTLE
BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS

Conflict between the press and the government is, of course, inevitable. The public's right to know, represented by the press, and the government's duty to maintain necessary security are opposing imperatives that provide one of the built-in tensions of any truly democratic system in our complex and difficult world.²

The aforementioned quote of Mr. Dale Minor reflects the attitude, and is representative, of the majority of the mass media in the US society of today. The mass media's real feelings are more aptly portrayed in the title of Mr. Minor's book, The Information War. The majority of the media really do feel that they are at war with the government, and the military, as never before in history.

The struggle of the government's need for secrecy versus the public's right to know has been unending since the forefathers specifically drafted Article 1 of the Bill of Rights for that very purpose, "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech. . . ."

Despite the cries of Mr. Minor and numerous other members of the media, that theirs is a generation which is being tested as never before, the electoral process, the central nervous system of democracy, still holds forth and still provides the US public with the capability to dispense with those whom the media claims are the oppressors of true freedom of speech in our generation.

De Toqueville proved the problem was never-ending when he stated more than a century ago:

In this question, therefore, there is no medium between servitude and extreme license; in order to enjoy the inestimable benefits which the liberty of the press insures, it is necessary to submit to the inevitable evils which it engenders.³

THE FOURTH BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT

Since James Madison and the other Founding Fathers added freedom of speech and press in the first amendment to the Constitution, and deemed that Congress could not violate it, the press has considered itself to be the fourth branch of government. "The gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm."⁴

Not infrequently the members of the fourth estate or branch have not only asserted their equality with the other three branches but have claimed that it is only they who can objectively evaluate the performance of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. They consider themselves to be the only true defenders of the people.

There are many members of the fourth branch who no longer feel that theirs is an "after the fact" role, but that instead of reporting to the people on the formulation of policy by the other three branches, they should be active participants in its formulation.

Joseph Alsop summed up the fourth branch's suspicion of both government and military officials when he said:

There is a strange new theory that all American officials and most American military officers are joined together in a vast conspiracy to gull the home folks which it is the reporter's duty to attack and expose . . .⁵

THE FOURTH ESTATE VERSUS TELEVISION

It is impossible to comprehend the complete picture of how the mass media influenced the war in Vietnam without briefly examining the charges of selectivity and bias which are so frequently lodged against them.

A former reporter for the New York Times mused,

I used to work for the New York Times, which every day on its front page carries that wonderful slogan, "All the news that's fit to print." It's a splendid slogan, but it is a total fraud. If you think about it for a moment you'll know that it's a fraud, because even the New York Times, with the amount of space and the amount of staff resources that it can devote to covering the day's news, cannot begin to report all the words and all of the events of significance . . .⁶

Thus, that which is to be printed and that which is to be left out must be selected.

"Selectivity--the decision to include or exclude information--is the essence of a news operation."⁷

While "selectivity" is a prime factor in both press and television, both of these media are faced with somewhat peculiar problems. The first amendment gives the press the right to be biased.

The New Yorker magazine once summed this up by saying,

There is nothing in the Constitution that says the press has to be neutral. Nor, for that matter, is there anything that says it has to be objective, or fair, or even accurate or truthful, desirable though these qualities are.⁸

But broadcast news organizations are in a totally different legal situation. Broadcast news is explicitly denied the right to be biased by the Congressionally enacted FCC regulation known as the Fairness Doctrine. If a broadcaster airs an attack on an issue or a set of ideas, he is expected to provide a "balance" by airing a defense or an affirmative analysis of that issue or set of ideas.

On 9 June 1969 Supreme Court Justice Byron White sanctioned the Fairness Doctrine as follows:

The networks are required to select and broadcast contrasting and conflicting views on the major political issues--regardless of their truth or falsity.

This selective process is to be "nonpartisan" and "non-one-sided," i.e., favoring neither side.

And the selected opinion must be presented in an "equal" and "equally forceful" manner.⁹

The second problem of selectivity is most pertinent to the news broadcast media. Daily prime networks news time is restricted to 22 minutes a night. Thus, the selection of the prime news to fill this time requires an incredibly selective process. The editorial culling process that determines the events of the universe which are of the greatest importance to the majority of the people and which can be packed into 22 minutes is critical.

Lieutenant General W. G. Dolvin, former MACV Chief of Staff and currently Commanding General of XXIV Corps in Vietnam has said:

As a general statement it has become quite obvious that the television medium has been the least objective. (In Vietnam.) Because the camera can focus only on a very narrow segment of any activity in a brief span of time the tendency of television reporting has been to generalize or extend what the camera is showing at a given moment to an entire unit or operation, whether or not that particular scene is truly represented.¹⁰

The latter portion of Chapter V will illustrate by positive research that the mass media in Vietnam were biased in their selectivity and did not adhere to the Fairness Doctrine in their coverage of US armed forces activities.

THE PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

The "Fourth Branch," as the self-appointed defender of the people's rights, seems to be giving ground to a new guardian knight bearing the standard of "the people's right to know." This phrase and its psychology has become ever more evident in the early 1970s. Whereas the fourth branch's cry was that "the people have a need to know," the advocates of new and greater journalistic freedom contend that nothing is sacrosanct and that the people have a given right to know all in "real" time. In effect, their thesis is that a government should have no security, that they (the media) should be privy to all and should be the judges of what the people should know. Speaking in a Washington Post commentary entitled "The People's Right to Know," Nicolas von Hoffman states,

A new principle has established itself in American journalism. It is that the people have a right to know. The people's right to know was the newspapers' major defense in justifying the publication of the Pentagon Papers, although they were classified documents . . . yet people want it, they demand it in so many words when they insist their paper be objective; and American journalism implicitly recognizes that demand and tries to meet it when it talks about this new idea, and the people's right to know.¹¹

It is quite evident that the advocates of "the people's right to know" feel that their role in behalf of the people includes their

personal determination of what is in the national interest. Jack Anderson was interviewed by a Washington Post staffer following his disclosure of the National Security Council's secret papers on American policy in the Indo-Pakistani War. In the Washington Post front page article that followed, staffer Ungar said of Mr. Anderson's comments:

Invoking his own view of what might harm national security, he said he would not release the exact texts of cables, just in case they would be useful to cryptographers.¹²

An overwhelming number of letters subsequently appeared in the "letters to the editor" section of the Washington Post which condemned Mr. Anderson's actions. The majority objected on the basis that Mr. Anderson had violated their personal constitutional rights, an interesting viewpoint from the body for whom Mr. Anderson and his colleagues portend to be the upholders of constitutional rights. A portion of a typical letter stated,

I object to the arrogant substitution of the untrained and biased judgement of the press and other private sources on matters affecting national security for the qualified and experienced judgement of those who have been placed in position of authority and responsibility by constitutional processes. . . .¹³

In the introduction to his book, The Information War, Dale Minor questions at great length the attacks on the mass media which he feels are coming from all quarters.¹⁴ Perhaps Messers Minor, Anderson, von Hoffman, and their co-writers fail to comprehend the message of the American people reflected in letters such as the aforementioned in reference to the Anderson papers. The American people have not yet chosen to abandon the electoral process. They

have not chosen to elect members to the fourth branch through the electoral process. Until such time as they deem to do so, the fourth branch must accept the fact that the American people have placed their trust, confidence, and "right to know" in their duly elected officials.

Max Way's comment regarding the mass media's aversion to self criticism is worthy of note.

Journalism readily judges everything from the conduct of war and the exploration of space to finger painting and horse racing. It readily judges almost everything except its own performance.¹⁵

CHAPTER III (U)

FOOTNOTES

1. Edwin Emery, et al., Introduction to Mass Communications (1971), p. 3.
2. Dale Minor, The Information War (1970), p. 5.
3. Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1959), p. 120.
4. Ray E. Hiebert, The Press in Washington (1966), p. 62.
5. Joseph Alsop, "Press Can't Win in Vietnam," Washington Post (Washington) (12 May 1968), p. B-1.
6. Richard W. Lee, et al., Politics and the Press (1970), p. 61.
7. Edith Efron, The News Twisters (1971), p. 9.
8. Ibid., p. 19.
9. Ibid., p. 5.
10. Welborn G. Dolvin, Lieutenant General, US Army, letter to author, 18 January 1971, (hereafter referred to as "Dolvin letter").
11. Nicholas von Hoffman, "The People's Right to Know," The Washington Post (Washington) (12 January 1972), p. C-1.
12. Sanford J. Ungar, "Secret US Papers Bared," The Washington Post (Washington) (5 January 1972), p. A-1.
13. John C. Shillock, "The Anderson Papers," The Washington Post (Washington) (12 January 1972), p. A-23.
14. Dale Minor, The Information War (1970), pp. X, XI.
15. Max Way, "Journalists Rap Agnew for Speech," The Washington Post (Washington) (16 November 1969), p. 2.

CHAPTER IV (C)

CENSORSHIP AND THE PUBLIC NEED TO KNOW (U)

(U) "Censorship" is a provocative word, at best, in a free society. So provocative that the Department of Defense (DOD) issued a special reprint on 21 May 1970 of its program 5230.7.¹ The reprint was designated as change three, and its only difference from change two was that it changed the name of program 5230.7 from Censorship Planning to the more attractive title of Wartime Information Security Program (WISP). A more attractive acronym for a subject more shunned than discussed.

(U) This chapter is primarily directed to a discussion of field press censorship and whether it should have been invoked in Vietnam. It considers the problem of how much and how soon the public needs to know of military operations and concludes with an examination of some of the reporting that emanated from an "uncensored" Vietnam and how its biased nature shaped US public opinion.

(U) FIELD PRESS CENSORSHIP

Field press censorship is defined as the security review of news material subject to the jurisdiction of the armed forces of the United States, including all information or material intended for dissemination to the public.²

The hue and cry about censorship and news leaks is nothing new. In 1777 General George Washington complained that leaks were harming the Continental Army and he wrote:

It is much to be wished that our printers were more discreet in many of their publications. We see in almost every paper, proclamations or accounts transmitted by the enemy of an injurious nature. If some hint or caution could be given them on the subject, it might be of material service.³

Field press censorship of information, whereby the press is denied the right to transmit news material which has come into its possession, is an infringement upon the freedom of the press. It is strictly an emergency measure which is enacted in order that military operations may be more effective. That delicate balance between two conflicting tenets is ever present: the public's right to know and the public's right of security protection for its combatants.

Mission security is the valid test of the necessity to invoke censorship. The joint manual on field press censorship states:

Yet, in combat areas, censorship is essential to the maintenance of security and, reasonably and judiciously applied, does not damage the felicitous nature of the relationship from which so much of our national power derives, but rather serves to strengthen it.⁴

(U) THE US EXPERIENCE WITH FIELD PRESS CENSORSHIP

The United States has not seen fit to invoke formal field press censorship since the Korean War.⁵ Initially, voluntary censorship was attempted in Korea. Under the system a newsman was supposed to submit his material if he thought security could be involved. During the first trying days of the war General Douglas MacArthur wrote of the voluntary censorship system:

Gloomy and doubtful as was the situation at this time, the news reports painted it much worse than it actually was. I felt obliged to issue an explanatory release: "This is the result of an experiment being tried perhaps for the first time in modern combat; that of avoiding any military censorship or undue restriction of the movements of war correspondents. Reports of warfare are, at any time, grisly and repulsive and reflect the emotional strain normal to those unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of battle. Exaggerated stories obtained from individuals wounded or mentally shocked have given a distorted and misrepresentative picture to the public."⁶

Field press censorship plans were prepared for the Cuban Crisis and for Vietnam but were not used. DOD Directive 5230.7 empowers the Unified Commander outside of the continental United States to invoke field press censorship in the event of a declaration of war or other dire emergencies pending the direction of the Secretary of Defense with the approval of the President.

(C) VIETNAM CENSORSHIP--VOLUNTARY COOPERATION (U)

(U) Vietnam was a different story--there was no declaration of war by Congress. Technically, America has not been at war with North Vietnam. Many journalists based their failure to comply with the traditional voluntary censorship of the past on this alleged illegality of the war. However, there are many other peculiarities which dictate against a non-indigenous force invoking involuntary censorship while waging a limited war against an insurgent force on foreign soil. Full censorship presupposes control of all communications and transportation systems in and out of a country or war theater, and to be completely effective, it requires both civil and

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armed forces censorship of all publications, mail, and internal communications. In Vietnam, only the Vietnamese have the authority to invoke this type of censorship, and they have the capability of doing it effectively and acceptably only with the assistance of American personnel and facilities.

(U) In a letter to the author, Lieutenant General W. G. Dolvin stated:

In the WWII situations overseas and even in Korea, there were no commercial communications available to correspondents in the field and commanders did exercise censorship of the mail. Thus, a correspondent had to submit his copy through official channels if he wanted it to move at all. This situation has never prevailed in Vietnam. There has always been a comparative abundance of commercial communications media available. Even though the government of Vietnam controlled the PTT facilities and had carte blanche to exercise censorship if it desired, it never made a serious effort to do so.⁷

(U) General Dolvin had extensive experience with the mass media through the MACV Public Affairs Office while serving as Chief of Staff to General Creighton Abrams.

(C) General Michael S. Davison when speaking of his experiences as a field force commander during the cross-border incursions asks:

Can the commander of the Military Assistance Command impose press censorship on a reporter from LeMonde, for example, or the London Times? It seems that the most he could do would be to deny US facilities and transportation, as was the case in the Lamson operation in Laos.⁸

(U) News censorship of one form or another was discussed by commanders, defense public affairs officials, and newsmen on numerous occasions. However, in early July the Defense Department rejected formal censorship in Vietnam after agreement was reached between

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the American Mission and the Government of Vietnam. The following rules which went into effect on 15 July 1965 are still in effect.

There will be no casualty reports and unit identifications on a daily basis or related to specific actions except in general terms such as "light, moderate, or heavy." Casualty summaries will continue to be reported on a weekly briefing in Saigon and the statistical summary released at the Pentagon. Procedures for notifying next of kin will not be changed nor will the practice of releasing in Washington the name, rank, casualty status, branch or service, and emergency addresses of casualties following notification of next of kin.

Troop movement or deployments will not be announced or confirmed until such time as military evaluation determines such information is clearly in the possession of the Viet Cong. . . .

(U) The field press censorship system that was instituted was called "Voluntary Cooperation." Given the prevailing conditions in Vietnam COMUSMACV decided that censorship would be unenforceable and perceived that greater benefits would accrue to a policy of complete candor. Thus it was that he practiced a policy of full disclosure supposedly within the limits of security restrictions. It was felt that field press censorship could result in a loss of public support for the Vietnam War.

(C) COMPETITIVE AND INSTANTANEOUS REPORTING (U)

(U) There is no doubt that the no-censorship-of-the-news policy helped to speed the reports of the war at home and abroad. News reporting in Vietnam was both competitive and instantaneous. By the end of February, during Tet 1968, there were 119 Vietnamese, 248 Americans, and 260 "third-country nationals" in Saigon as accredited war correspondents; a grand total of 627.

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(U) In numerous instances the military chain of command was placed in embarrassing positions by competitive and over-zealous reporters, working under a voluntary cooperative censorship policy, whose news was instantaneously passed to the US through normal news circuits. It was demonstrated that radio, television, and newspapers have the capability of obtaining information for public consumption more quickly than valid military information on the same events can be brought to the attention of the National Military Command authorities. This was particularly so at the outset of Southeast Asian hostilities. The primary cause of the differential has been the sequential notification of progressively higher command levels; a necessity in the military decisionmaking chain which is often difficult to explain to the civilian populace.

(U) Reaction time has been further complicated by a new concept for conducting war. The highest levels of authority now routinely make decisions in matters which were formerly the responsibility of the local military commander. Examples of this are the determination of localized strategy, targeting, and tactics. As a result, the quantity of information that must be passed from field-level forces to the highest authority has exceeded all previous levels. There has been little if any allowance for increase in response time.

(C) During critical operations it was not uncommon for the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) to have the National Military Command Center query CINCPAC in regard to the authenticity of

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reports carried by the networks which were not yet available through military channels.

(U) News leaks occurred at various points during the war, but the major problem in Vietnam has been the breaking of embargoes on the release of information by correspondents. Sharpened competition among accredited correspondents also produced information that could assist the enemy. After several violations occurred amid repeated warnings by the military command in Saigon,¹⁰ Jack Foisie, a newsman of repute, had his accreditation suspended for a 30-day period for a story about the Marine landing in Quang Ngai Province before official release of the information.

(U) Needless to say the suspension of Foisie's accreditation, and that of several other correspondents who broke news embargoes deemed necessary by COMUSMAC, were loudly acclaimed as a violation of freedom of the press by the Saigon correspondent community.

(C) SENIOR COMMANDERS' OPINIONS OF THE VIETNAM NO-CENSORSHIP POLICY (U)

(U) The following excerpts from letters to the author portray the feelings of former corps, division, field force, and brigade commanders, as well as MACV chiefs of staff regarding the no field press censorship policy in Vietnam.

(C) From General Michael S. Davison, Commander of Second Field Force during the cross-border incursions:

With respect to imposing field press censorship, I am sure you appreciate that this is a highly sensitive and complex subject. It is easy to make a case for field press censorship under conditions

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such as World War II . . . an all out war receiving the highest degree of public support of any conflict in which the United States has been engaged. On the other hand in Vietnam, where we were coming to the aid of a sovereign nation confronted with an insurgency as well as an outright invasion and in which we were in effect guests, it becomes difficult to see how press censorship is going to work.

(U) From Lieutenant General Charles A. Corcoran, former Chief of Staff, MACV and later Commander of First Field Force:

I do feel that the Unified Commander should have the authority to invoke field press censorship. I am convinced that many of the problems that we have had in getting the support of the American people can be traced to the reporting by the news media. Reporters were not reporting the events as they actually occurred, but were in fact reporting according to the editorial policy of their particular publication. A reporter of Newsweek, the Washington Post, or the New York Times who attempted to honestly report the events occurring in South Vietnam would not last very long in the employ of those publications. I also believe that the lack of censorship in many cases has caused the unnecessary loss of life, both ARVN and US.

(U) From Lieutenant General Welborn G. Dolvin, former Chief of Staff, MACV and currently Commanding General, XXIV Corps:

Many military personnel tend to oversimplify the concept of field press censorship. It does not simply involve requiring correspondents to submit their copy for clearance but also includes the need to control all the various means of communications to prevent circumvention of the censorship. A commander would be required to provide official communication support for the press and to censor all mail, not just that of the press.

One very important consideration which military personnel overlook when they opt for field press censorship is that it covers only security and not accuracy. Although the press has not been particularly good to the military in Vietnam, most of their damage has been done in the area of interpretation and the reflection of anti-war sentiment rather than in the form of security violations.

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(U) From Major General Donn R. Pepke, former Commanding General
4th Infantry Division and Brigadier General Gordon J. Duquemin,
former Brigade Commander, 4th Infantry Division:

Field press censorship and the ground rules under which correspondents operated in Vietnam should be considered concurrently. To a degree, the ground rules were a form of selective censorship imposed upon the media. These rules were primarily aimed at the timing of news released rather than the content, although content was included. That these rules worked as well as they did under a situation of rapid turnovers of correspondents and an insatiable appetite of the public for news of Vietnam, is indeed a credit to the professionalism of all concerned. Of course there were violations of the ground rules, however, there were few and far between. I believe field censorship should be invoked only as a last resort, and then only when all other means of control have broken down. Actual censorship could best be accomplished by the commander exercising control over the news dispatch services, i.e., teletype circuits, radio-telephones, etc. In Vietnam, for example, only MACV could have actually exercised any real censorship, and then only if they had absolute control over all communications means. Delegation of censorship authority to commanders who do not control communications would therefore be meaningless. The American public has a right to know, and a need to know what is happening, although not necessarily on a real time basis as you stated in your original thesis. It appears, therefore, that the embargoing of news, as was done in Vietnam, is far more in keeping with our basic precept of freedom of the press than actual censorship.

(U) CONSENSUS OF OPINION

The general consensus of opinion from the above excerpts brings out one point lucidly. Whether for or against censorship, all involved are unanimous in their opinions that involuntary censorship would be unenforceable in Vietnam.

In reality, the US Unified Command was a guest assisting a host country in fighting an undeclared war of insurgency. To effectively enforce involuntary censorship, the US Unified Command would have had to exercise control over all means of communication. The host country held this control and never chose to deny it to the news media.

(U) THE PUBLIC NEED TO KNOW

There can be no argument with the fact that the American public has a "right" to know--the Constitution and its amendments guarantee it.

The essential question which hangs in delicate balance is, "How much and how soon?" How much and how soon before the equal rights of the majority have been compromised by the few? Does notification of the American public that a military operation is to be launched in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos in advance of the event, and the enemy's resultant foreknowledge, really serve the Constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and press? Or is this more typically the newsman's veil for "scooping" an opposing news service?

The delicate scales which weigh the national interests of the majority versus a minority pleading constitutional freedoms can easily be tipped in either direction depending upon the interests of the weigher.

On 31 January 1971, eight days in advance of the actual ARVN drive into Laos, the New York Times printed a front page story¹² outlining the purpose, area, and buildup for the operation despite

a MACV imposed embargo on releases. The New York Times published subsequent articles which elaborated in even greater detail on the operation prior to MACV's lifting the embargo on 4 February 1971.

One cannot help but question if it was really necessary for the American public, and the enemy, to have the plans for the operation some five days prior to its actual initiation. Even more pertinent is the question, "At what point do constitutional freedoms cross the line into the area of 'aiding and abetting' the enemy?"

In the final analysis, the dilemma for the unified commander is the necessity to ensure both the safety and security of the men fighting the battles and the success of the tactical missions when the conduct of the war is continuously open to world scrutiny. He must balance the requirement of the military mission and the security of the man in the field with the public right and necessity to know the facts of the situation.

CHAPTER IV (U)

FOOTNOTES

1. US Department of Defense, Department of Defense Directive 5230.7: Wartime Information Security Planning (WISP) (21 May 1971) (hereafter referred to as DOD directive 5230.7).
2. US Department of the Army, Army Regulation 360-65: Establishment and Conduct of Field Press Censorship in Combat Areas (1 April 1966), p. 2.
3. William Greider, "The Press as Adversary," The Washington Post (Washington) (27 June 1971), p. B-1.
4. US Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, FM 45-25, OPNAVINST 5530.5, AFM 190-5: Field Press Censorship (16 June 1967), p. 4 (hereafter referred to as "FM 45-25").
5. United Nations and Far East Commands, Information Office, Immediate Release: Joint Field Press Censorship Group to be Terminated Tokyo (2 November 1954).
6. Douglas MacArthur, Reminiscences (1964), p. 338.
7. Dolvin letter.
8. Davison letter.
9. Memorandum to Newsmen, handed to newsmen at the Pentagon by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and at Saigon by the MACV Public Affairs Officer. Early July 1965.
10. "News Media Warned on Censorship Rules," The Washington Post (13 August 1965), p. A-3.
11. "US Reporter in Vietnam Is Suspended for a Month." The New York Times (2 February 1966), p. C-7.
12. At Appendix One is article, "Indochina Offensive Readied," New York Times (31 January 1971), p. 1.

CHAPTER V (C)

THE SHAPING OF US PUBLIC OPINION BY A FREE US MASS MEDIA IN VIETNAM (U)

(U) The reaction of the US public to the Communist Tet 1968 Offensive and the joint US and ARVN campaigns into Cambodia and Laos are two prime examples of the impact which public affairs can exercise in shaping US public opinion and subsequently US policy and strategy.

(U) TET 1968

Clausewitz's assertion of the continuity of policy through war and peace is superbly vindicated by the Communist method of "fighting with negotiating," that is, of winning a peace conference by a well-timed victory, as Dien Bien Phu decided the issue at Geneva in 1954. The Tet Offensive of 1968 in Vietnam, written off by the American command with incredible stupidity as a costly failure, [of the North Vietnamese] achieved its political aim of shaking confidence in both the South Vietnamese regime and American military protection.¹

In the waning months of 1967 an optimistic picture of the war in Vietnam was being painted for the American public. The phrases that "we can see the light at the end of the tunnel" and "victory is just around the corner" were emanating from the highest governmental and military officials.

On the night of 30 January 1968 at Nhatrang, a city of 119,000 halfway up the coast of South Vietnam, a Vietnamese corporal guarding a government radio station was the victim of the first rounds that marked the beginning of the 1968 Tet Offensive. But, the

shots that were to be heard around the world were fired at the US Embassy in Saigon during the early hours of 31 January.

A handful of Viet Cong staged a raid on the Embassy but never gained entrance. Militarily it represented little more than a nuisance.

Nevertheless, the Embassy was the place where the Stars and Stripes was officially planted in the soil of Vietnam, and thus it was the symbolic center of the American effort.²

The large concentration of newsmen in Saigon quickly blew the Embassy incident out of all proportion in the minds of the American public. For an hour and twenty minutes the Associated Press reported the Viet Cong as holding the building. Chet Huntley reported similarly to some fourteen million Americans watching his 6:30 PM live telecast on ten million television sets. The Embassy was officially declared clear at 9:15 AM six hours and twenty-eight minutes after the first call for help. However, the impact that Tet would have on millions of Americans and on the future of their leaders had just begun.

Coming at a critical time--just before the first presidential primaries in a presidential election year--it caught the American political system at its moment of greatest irresolution and potential for change.³

The assertions of the President, his senior aids and the American military chiefs were more suspect than ever before. They had sold success before, and Tet had proved the product faulty; the public was not inclined to buy again. Communiques and claims had been devalued, words had lost their ability to persuade. It seemed more than ever true that a picture was worth more than ten thousand words, and a profusion of pictures with sound were beamed into the nation's living rooms each evening.

The Viet Cong were being decisively beaten in the Saigon streets but they were scoring great feats on television and the press.⁴

Although Hanoi did not place heavy emphasis on the Embassy attack in its first reports of Tet, it later boasted of the "assault on Bunker's Bunker." Once again, as at Dien Bien Phu, their cause had been served through the politics of the gun barrel.

On the night of 31 March 1968 at 9:00 PM President Lyndon Johnson sat down in front of the television cameras in the White House Oval Office to address the nation on "live" television. Gallup's latest poll showed that only 32 percent of the public approved the President's handling of the war and this was to drop to 26 percent before the end of the month. His campaign leaders had been grasping for a dramatic straw that could turn him into "the peace candidate" before the critical Wisconsin primary in April. He stated to Clark Clifford during a 20 March phone call: "I've got to get me a peace proposal."

The speech, delivered at the appointed hour, announced the cessation of US bombing of most of North Vietnam. But only a handful of confidants were aware, just minutes prior to air time, that the President would add his own ending. That ending recognized the disunity of the American public on the Vietnam War issue when Lyndon Baines Johnson, one of America's most adept politicians, announced, "Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President. . . ."

(C) CROSS-BORDER INCURSIONS (U)

(U) The Cambodia and Laos cross-border incursions, which occurred in mid-1970 and early 1971, saw another American president fall to low ebbs of political popularity and new highs of conflict with the American public.

(U) In an appearance to seek the support of the American public, not dissimilar to Johnson's post-Tet 68 speech, President Richard Nixon addressed the television cameras in the White House Oval Office on the night of 30 April 1970. At that date the latest Gallup Poll showed that approximately 58 percent of those polled approved of the way the President was handling his job.⁵ All things taken into consideration, Gallup's rule of thumb is that any time a president's overall rating is above 50 percent he is politically in favor. Thus it can be considered that the President held the general approval of the American public. Particularly, in view of his November 1969 Vietnam withdrawal speech.⁶

(U) The occasion for the President's appearance that April night was to brief the American public on the first cross-border operations into Cambodia by ARVN forces and why he felt it necessary that the US support these incursions into Communist sanctuaries. Vietnamization needed the time he felt the attacks would provide. It was during this briefing that he made his classic remark, "I would rather be a one-term President and do what I believe is right."

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(C) All things considered, the best estimates of CINCPAC indicated the cumulative results of the cross-border operations from 29 April to 1 July 1970 included the capture of the following significant items:

Individual weapons	20,072
Crew served weapons	2,534
Rocket/mortar/RR ammunition	143,109 rounds
Small arms ammunition	15,693,254 rounds
Rice	6,879 tons
Medical supplies	109,800 pounds

The individual weapons would have equipped 55 full strength VC infantry battalions and the crew served weapons would have equipped 82 to 90 VC battalions. The enemy could have conducted 18,585 attacks by fire with the captured rocket, mortar, and recoilles ammunition, and could have provided a basic load for approximately 52,000 individual soldiers or approximately 122 VC battalions with the captured small arms ammunition. The captured rice could have fed approximately 25,000 men for one year at a full ration or 38,000 men for one year at a reduced ration. The captured medical supplies could have supported a 320 bed, division-level hospital for 580 to 760 days. At least, a part of the time desired for Vietnamization had been obtained.

(U) Hanoi suffered some of its greatest defeats in both men and equipment but was never defeated in the public affairs arena. The US news media accused the President of attempting to "win" the war in Southeast Asia.

(U)"The threatening tone of his speech that night implied a determination to seek military victory in Southeast Asia."⁷

[?] According to the polls, the President's popularity rose and fell periodically until it dropped to a two-year all-time low of less than 50 percent during the early February invasions of the Laos Panhandle.⁸ The period which followed saw US public support of US involvement in Indochina drop to new lows and subsequently dictate the accelerated withdrawal of US forces from Indochina.

(U) BIASED OR IMPARTIAL NEWS REPORTING FROM VIETNAM?

Earlier chapters emphasized the instantaneous flood of news which is carried daily from Vietnam to the two most potent sources of news for Americans, television, and newspapers. An accelerated American life provides only a short period of the day for the majority to formulate their opinions. Therefore, the ability of a minority, the newsmen, to shape the opinions of a majority, the public, is evident. That majority should have the privilege to scrutinize the newsmen who transmit the public affairs message with their inherent human biases and prejudices. Their position does not carry an immunity to examination as many of them feel it does. Vice-President Agnew has made his opinions evident on this point. He is also well aware of the power they wield.

A small group of men, numbering perhaps no more than a dozen . . . decide what 40 to 50 million Americans will learn of the day's events in the nation and the world. A narrow and distorted picture of America often emerges from the televised news. A single dramatic piece of the mosaic becomes in the minds of millions, the whole picture.⁹

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(U) SELECTIVITY

As mentioned earlier, the power that the correspondent exercises is not so much in what he chooses to publicize but what he chooses to omit. This is the selectivity process.

The thousands of mass murders by the Viet Cong at the City of Hue during Tet 1968 seemed to be of little concern to the press. They chose, "selectively," to make third or fourth page mention of it. Rather, My Lai was their "front pager" and they were eventually to give a Pulitzer Prize for its expose.

Our civic action achievements, while of great significance in meeting the overall objectives of our national goals in Vietnam, never seemed to catch the imagination of the press. The My Lai's and the Charlie Companies became the most marketable material of the press in this extremely competitive business.¹⁰

(C) THE CORRESPONDENT (U)

(U) In early 1970 the accredited correspondents in Vietnam averaged 450. They received the best treatment, including government transportation to their story, of any newsmen in history. They were a different group than those who reported WWII and Korea. "Statistically they are young--51 percent under 29--and over 10 million are college graduates."¹¹

(C) Speaking of his experience during his tour as CG of Second Field Force, General Davison states:

The thing about morale and discipline is that a young reporter with no military service, and this was the case for most reporters in Vietnam, doesn't know what the real determinants of morale and

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discipline are. He asks leading questions concerning morale and discipline and gets the kind of responses he is seeking. In fact I told one CBS correspondent if he asked me the right question I would tell him my morale is poor. The true determinant, of course, of the condition of morale and discipline is mission performance.¹²

(U) Of the correspondents' performance, Brigadier General Gordon Ducquemin says:

On more than one occasion, a disgruntled ex-GI returned to Vietnam as a free-lancer. The objectivity of these journalists was somewhat in doubt at times. The length of the Vietnam conflict created a proving ground for many an aspiring journalist looking for that Pulitzer Prize winning story. As has often been said, it is the unusual that makes the headlines, and these energetic young men and women left no stone unturned in their quest for "the" story.¹³

(U) In the absence of censorship, reporters and their editors ultimately have the power to determine what they choose to print. Many recognize the conflict between national security and news interest. However, the pressure and competition of the mass media is ever present and there is still some correspondents who do not recognize that they have any responsibility to consider our national interests. In writing about Vietnam, one reporter stated,

We reporters were the heirs of a traditional American freedom: The right of a journalist to write what he sees whether the news is good or bad for his country. We did not have to worry about the alternatives of policymaking. The ambassadors and generals, on the other hand, were the heirs of a new dilemma: The discord between the country's traditional instincts and its duties and responsibilities in the Cold War. . . .¹⁴

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(C) THE CORRESPONDENCE (U)

(C) The correspondence from Vietnam which found its way to the pages of the New York Times, The Washington Post, ABC, NBC, and CBS, to mention only a few, represented the win or loss of the public affairs battle. Of that reporting General Davison says:

It is generally conceded that, overall, the reporting from the field we received during the Cambodian operation was some of the best that came out of Vietnam. We received compliments in this regard not only from OSD but also from the White House. The reason for this, I believe, was that it was my policy to receive reporters and to discuss the operations with them frankly and candidly. We took them wherever they wanted to go and let them see whatever they wanted to see.¹⁵

(U) Along the same lines General Dolvin states:

Although it may be difficult to stomach, it seems that the units which had the fewest problems with press reports of their activities were those in which a generally positive approach was taken in dealing with the press. Commanders at all levels who took the time to explain what they were doing and showed a genuine interest in being helpful fared better than those who took a negative or minimally cooperative approach.¹⁶

(C) However, it is most interesting to note that both of the aforementioned generals, along with another, do not fail to immediately note that the correspondent in the field will play the game by his rules under the press of competition.

There are some things, however, that defy even the most open and candid approach to the press. For example, last fall and winter, when so much was written about declining morale and discipline in the US Army, in actuality, the performance of my infantry companies was quite demonstrably improving, not worsening. Indeed, at the time we were withdrawing some units for inactivation and one battalion, with every man knowing its

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date of stand-down, in the last nine days of its existence initiated 15 contacts with the NVA. And we had to take one rifle company out of a fire fight on the last day in order to get it back to Bien Hoa for stand-down. Yet the Newsweek Saigon office had been directed by the New York office to do a story on poor morale and discipline. They did it; and the Chief of the New York Times Bureau in Saigon, who accompanied the Newsweek team to visit some of my brigades, said he could find nothing to write about on the subject.¹⁷

CBS correspondents spent an entire day screening the members of a 1st Cavalry Division battalion to find five who were against going across the border. These five soldiers were then put on camera to state their objectives while the reporter summed up their position as being representative of the entire battalion.¹⁸

Reporters were not reporting the events as they actually occurred, but were in fact reporting according to the editorial policy of their particular publication. A reporter of Newsweek, the Washington Post, or the New York Times who attempted to honestly report the events occurring in South Vietnam would not last very long in the employ of those publications.¹⁹

(C) Major General, USMC (Ret), John R. Blandford was not quite so tolerant of the mass media in a lecture delivered at the US Army War College on 6 December 1971. Mr. Blandford, The Veteran Chief Counsel for The House Armed Services Committee told the class:

CBS, ABC, and NBC just made up their mind that they were going to show Vietnam in its worst light. If necessary they were going to stage problems over in Vietnam and they did. There is no doubt about the fact that they did. If they could find some disgruntled corporal to say the right thing before a television camera they hunted him out and it was headline news. They showed the same C130 at Khe Sahn from so many different angles that the average American thought we lost about 75 C130 aircraft at Khe Sahn. We lost 1. They gave the impression that there were literally thousands of Americans killed at Khe Sahn, we lost 200. But this is what the news media can do.²⁰

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(U) Edith Efron in her latest book, The News Twisters, considers the bias and selectivity of the news media at great length. She charges that an ideological monopoly exists and controls the airwaves. Her research findings, although of limited duration, definitely show a trend towards slanted news. Among the subjects she analyzed were four which had direct or related effect on the news emanating from Vietnam:

1. The number of words spoken for and against the bombing halt on the three networks combined.²¹

2. The number of words spoken for and against the Viet Cong on the three networks combined.²²

3. The number of words spoken for and against US policy on the Vietnam War on the three networks combined.²³

4. The number of words spoken for and against the Left on the three networks combined.²⁴

Examination of the aforementioned appendices provides statistical proof that the networks actively slanted their opinion coverage against the US policy and the US military in Vietnam.

(U) As previously noted the Viet Cong had been identified as the perpetrator of the mass murder of thousands at Hue just a short period before the Efron study in Appendix 4. However, during the seven-week period of her study only once did a political opinion appear on the subject of the Viet Cong. An ABC reporter justified Viet Cong "savagery" as the fault of the United States.

(U) Miss Efron's concern about the figures in Appendix 6, which show the media moving to the far left, are of equal concern

to many. The Blue Ribbon Defense Panel recently prepared a supplement for the President to show their sense of urgency about the current posture of our country,²⁵

The greatest cause for concern is not that a few thousand New Leftist revolutionaries are on the move. Rather, it is that they--and their lawless conduct--are tolerated and often supported by a broad base of otherwise responsible students, faculty, and even college administrators and trustees. Many of the tactical "causes" of the New Left have acquired a broad appeal. . . . We have witnessed all too frequently the disheartening spectacle of avowed revolutionaries being accorded respectability by many fellow students and faculty members as well as by the national publicity so generously provided by the media. Among the most popular campus speakers are these leftists whose goal--in accord with Communist objectives--is to disarm America.

There is increasing evidence that the enemy is winning the battle of words and ideas in Indochina. Not only through his own adeptness, but through the public affairs message which the US mass media has selected to give to the US public.

(U) THE IMPACT OF THE CORRESPONDENT
AND THE CORRESPONDENCE

It should be made clear at this point that no thoughtful person would suggest that the military in Vietnam was above criticism. Whether one feels that the correspondents were far left or right; their correspondence biased, selective, or impartial, their impact on the American public was unequalled in history. There is no better example than the Walter Cronkite story.

The CBS Evening News with Mr. Cronkite was one of the first and most consistently popular half-hour nightly news programs

In the sixties. In fact, President John F. Kennedy inaugurated the first edition on 2 September 1963. The Cronkite show was a coveted forum for politicians and others seeking the eye and ear of the country.

Mr. Cronkite had made trips to Vietnam and supported the policies of the US and President Johnson in our efforts there. Mr. Cronkite shared the Administration's optimism that the end was in sight.

After pollsters determined the great confidence that the rank-and-file members of the AFL-CIO placed in Mr. Cronkite, Chairman John Bailey of the Democratic National Committee told a Democratic Party conference,

What I'm afraid this means is that by a mere inflection of his deep baritone voice or by a lifting of his well-known bushy eyebrows, Cronkite might well change the vote of thousands of people around the country. . . . With the vast power he obviously holds over the nationwide audience, I hope he never becomes too unhappy with my candidate.²⁶

The Tet 1968 attacks came as a shock to Cronkite. He returned to Vietnam for a first hand view and returned to the US disenchanted and disillusioned with Mr. Bailey's candidate and "his" war. During a half-hour CBS news special, entitled "Report from Vietnam by Walter Cronkite" he told an estimated nine million Americans:

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion.²⁷

Presidential Press Secretary George Christian stated that the shock waves of Cronkite's post-Tet stand rocked the government. The shock dealt another blow to the political fortunes of President Johnson, blows from which even the master politician could not recover. The gigantic impact of one correspondent's views, projected through the mass media, had reshaped US public opinion on a monumental issue.

CHAPTER V (U)

FOOTNOTES

1. Correlli Barnett, "How Not to Win a War," Horizon (Summer 1971), p. 50.
2. Don Oberdorfer, Tet (1971), p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 20.
4. Ibid., p. 239.
5. At Appendix 2 is Gallup Poll, Joseph Mastrangelo, The Political Heartbeat of President Nixon (1969-71) (Copyright permission requested by USAWC Library).
6. Ibid.
7. Noam Chomsky, et al., Cambodia (1971), p. 217.
8. Appendix 2, The Political Heartbeat of President Nixon.
9. Spiro T. Agnew, Frankly Speaking (1970), p. 12.
10. Gordon J. Duquemin, Brigadier General, US Army, letter to author, 26 January 1972 (hereafter referred to as "Duquemin letter").
11. Warren K. Agee, et al., The Press and the Public Interest (1968), p. 208.
12. Davison letter.
13. Duquemin letter.
14. David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire (1964), pp. 32-33.
15. Davison letter.
16. Dolvin letter.
17. Davison letter.
18. Dolvin letter.
19. Charles A. Corcoran, LTC, US Army, letter to author, 1 February 1972 (hereafter referred to as "Corcoran letter").

20. John R. Blandford, The Legislative Branch and Its Relations to Defense Decisionmaking, Lecture (6 December 1971), p. 22, cited with special permission of Mr. Blandford.

21. At Appendix 3 is Figure 2, "The number of words spoken for and against US policy on the bombing halt on the three networks combined." From The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971), p. 39 (copyright permission requested by USAWC Library).

22. At Appendix 4 is Figure 3, "The number of words spoken for and against the Viet Cong on the three networks combined," from The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971), p. 39 (copyright permission requested by USAWC Library).

23. At Appendix 5 is Figure 4, "The number of words spoken for and against US policy on the Vietnam War on the three networks combined," from The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971), p. 37 (copyright permission requested by USAWC Library).

24. At Appendix 6 is Figure 5, "The number of words spoken for and against the Left on the three networks combined," from The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971), p. 44 (copyright permission requested by USAWC Library).

25. US Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, The Shifting Balance of Power, 30 September 1970, pp. 30-31.

26. Oberdorfer, p. 247.

27. Ibid., p. 251.

CHAPTER VI (C)

CONCLUSIONS (U)

(U) The United States lost the public affairs battle waged during the Indochina war; Indochina, because it was lost as much in Cambodia and Laos as it was in Vietnam. This fact is self-evident in the Nixon Administration's resolve to withdraw American forces from Vietnam before the next elections. The Administration is well aware that a Southeast Asian war no longer has the support of the American majority. The battle was lost to an enemy who used military, political, and propaganda campaigns to pressure the US Government to get out of Vietnam or settle on terms favorable to the enemy. The suspension of air strikes in North Vietnam in 1968 was a high water mark of the enemy's effective propaganda war. Time alone will tell whether Hanoi wins the battle in Saigon as well as Washington.

(U) This study has emphasized the impact of the US mass media. Under the Unified Commander is charged by the Secretary of Defense with the responsibility for public affairs, as the title of this study so indicates, but in a war fought without censorship the Unified Commander's true dilemma is relaying the public affairs message via the news media. It is they who can shape public opinion at home in support of national policy--the true goal of public affairs. The ability of the Pacific Command (PACOM) to perform its public affairs mission was determined just as much by the day-to-day whims, and eventual left learnings, of the press as it was by the enemy.

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(C) CENSORSHIP (U)

Vietnam has shown that the public seeks information and will satisfy this desire from any available source. It is imperative that an opinion vacuum be avoided by providing the facts to the people within security guidelines. Where people do not have the facts, they develop their own opinion based upon whatever information is available. This applies to the news media as well. Conversely, information efforts must be tempered to avoid overselling and to stay within the public affairs policies of the government. Exaggeration can trap information officers by exposing serious contradictions between what is and what is not.

We took them [correspondents] wherever they wanted to go and let them see whatever they wanted to see. We really only had one "bad" story out of all this. This story had to do with the visit of a group of Congressmen to a battalion fire base at a place called "Shakey's Hill." The local commander stupidly put his troops through a lot of eyewash drill for the benefit of the Congressmen, a perfect example of how we get in difficulty with the press!¹

Restrictions placed by foreign governments on the release of US military information can run contrary to national policy requiring release of maximum information to the American people. If the US ever engages in another undeclared limited war on foreign soil, negotiations must be initiated at the outset to establish mutually agreed policy on the release or restrictions of information. The Unified Commander must be given authority commensurate with his responsibility to provide for the security of his command. His responsibility to insure the safety of his men and the security

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of the battlefield should be the sole determinant in the decision to invoke or withhold censorship.

(C) UNITY OF EFFORT (U)

(C) Fundamentally, CINCPAC has not had the authority to determine and implement a total public affairs policy and program in Vietnam. For that matter, neither has COMUSMACV. Public affairs authorization delegated to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV has resulted in a fragmented public affairs program in Vietnam.

(C) Events have borne out in Vietnam that information efforts are an important, integral part of the total war as they would be in future wars of this nature. These activities are not a support function or a report of an event after the fact. Experience in Vietnam has unmistakably shown that a cohesive, centrally controlled, simultaneous information action program must be an operational arm of the military commander. Only in this way can a credible array of facts that will stand the test of challenge from any source be immediately presented to gain international support for the operational actions.

(C) The formulation of public information policies during the present conflict emanated from the Secretary of Defense and the highest level. The Unified Commander served only in the chain of command as a transmitting agency for public affairs policy directives from the Offices of the Secretarys of Defense and State. CINCPAC lacked the authority to determine and implement a total public affairs policy and program in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

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The electronics revolution, which took the battlefield into the American living room via satellite, increased the power and velocity of fragments of experience, with no increase in the power or velocity of reasoned judgement. Instant analysis was often faulty analysis. This was particularly so in the case of editors and commentators at home, many of whom were in touch with the political situation in the United States more than with the military situation in the war zone.²

At best, the information efforts although well intended, were lost in a maze of individual or "level" effort. This has not contributed in unity to produce a force of public opinion that can work for the national objectives of the United States.

(U) Time and hindsight make it almost impossible to visualize the United States ever again becoming actively engaged in a limited war of national liberation on foreign soil. But who visualized Americans in combat at the 38th parallel less than five years after the end of World War II? The mistakes of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos must not be repeated. "If there was any specific military failure it was the lack of universal understanding of the fact that we were performing in a fish bowl."³

(C) In final summation the most single important informational conclusion to come out of the Vietnam War has been that there can be no separation between the military commander's obligation to perform the operational mission and his responsibility to report on that operation. Therefore, the commander who performs the operational mission should have the authority to report on that performance. In future contingencies the Unified Commander should have the necessary authority to establish a cohesive, centrally

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controlled, simultaneous information action program as an operational arm of the Unified Command.

W. J. MICKEL, JR.
Colonel, Infantry

CHAPTER VI (U)

FOOTNOTES

1. Davison letter.
2. Don Oberdorfer, TET (1971), p. 332.
3. Dolvin letter.

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Laos

Indochina Offensive

Readied

20P 11 31 71 PA
News Blackout

Shrouds Push By Viets, U.S.

A major South Vietnamese land operation with U.S. air support was being mounted yesterday in the region where the Ho Chi Minh trail enters South Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia.

Because military authorities in Saigon had imposed a blackout on news of this operation, it was not clear whether it was actually under way last night.

But officials in Saigon announced publicly that about 400 U.S. B-52 bombers were carrying out saturation bombing of the tri-border area to halt an enemy buildup in southern Laos and the north-west corner of South Vietnam.

Newsmen in Saigon were briefed Friday by high military authorities on the details of the operation, but an embargo was clamped on the information they were given. That embargo was scheduled to be lifted yesterday at 6 p.m., Washington time, but it was later extended for an indefinite period.

There was speculation that the extension was caused by weather conditions hampering the operation somewhere in the tri-border area where South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia come together.

The South Vietnamese operation that had been planned was thought to be the largest cross-border campaign since the incursion into Cambodia last spring.

Speculation about the South Vietnamese drive was sparked beforehand by press conference remarks made in Washington by Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

At Tansonnhut Airport near Saigon, the U.S. Air Force canceled all passenger flights on C-130 transports to make room for priority troop and materiel transport operations.

U.S. B-52 bombers struck near Khesanh, just south of the Demilitarized Zone, for the third successive day yesterday. The U.S. Seventh Fleet put an extra aircraft carrier on station in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Rogers said Friday, "There are large supplies being built up in that area—in the panhandle area of Laos. We have been using air power to attack those supplies and the trucks coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We will continue to do that. Whether we will take other action or not, we will have to wait and see."

"I am certainly not in a position to announce any such action, but we don't foreclose any possibility."

See INDOCHINA, A18, Col. 1

APPENDIX 1 (U)

INDOCHINA OFFENSIVE READIED

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APPENDIX 2 (U)

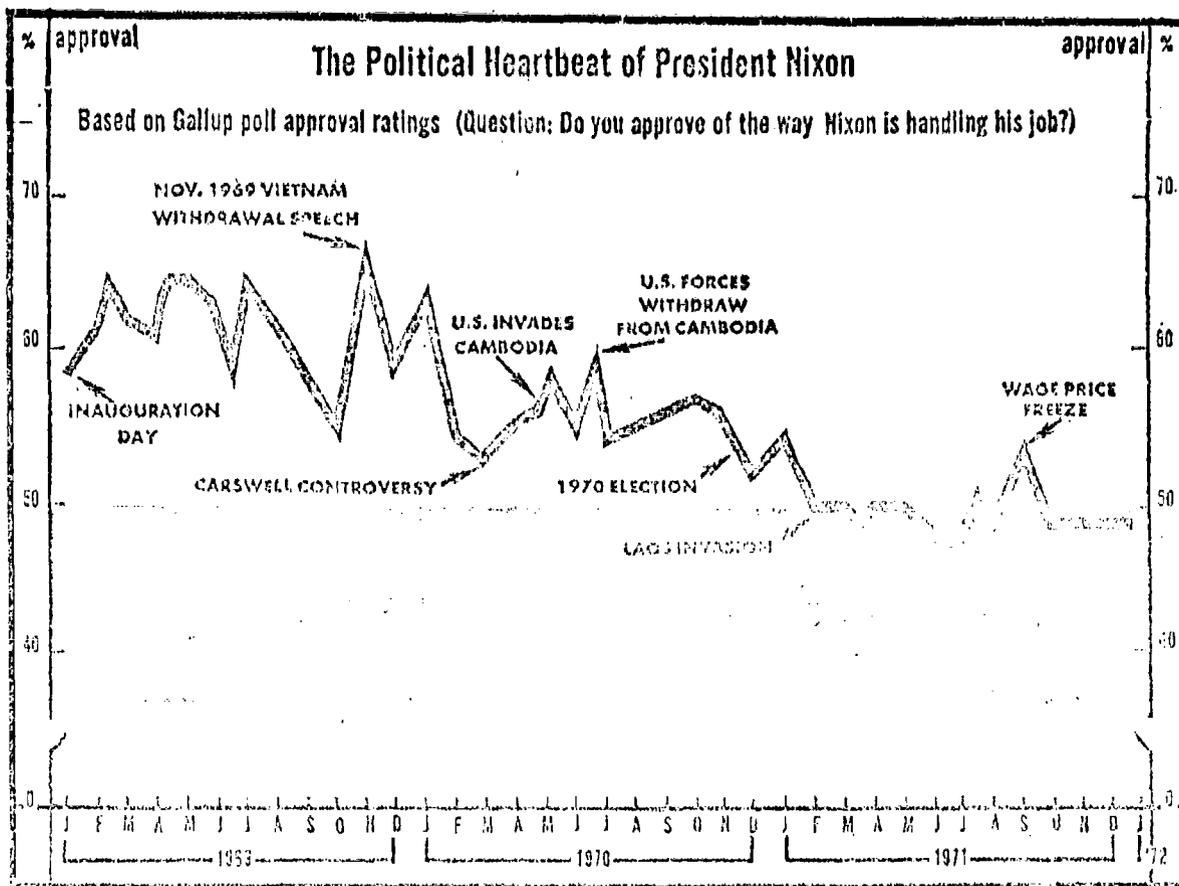
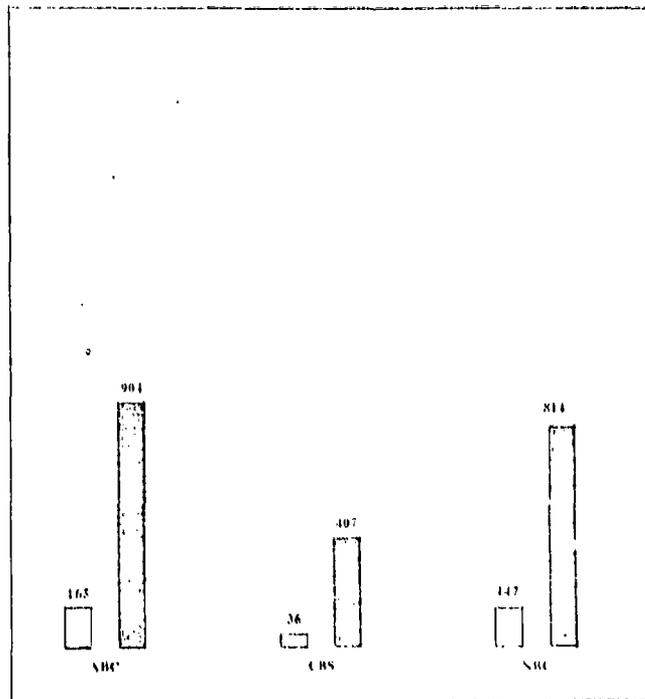
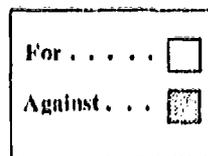


Figure I

Joseph Mastrangelo, "The Political Heartbeat of President Nixon,"
Washington Post (Washington) (1 February 1972), p. A19.
(Copyright permission requested by USAWC Library)

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APPENDIX 3 (U)



Opinion of presidential candidates is not included. See preceding chart. Opinion is not tallied after October 31, 1968, when the bombing was halted.

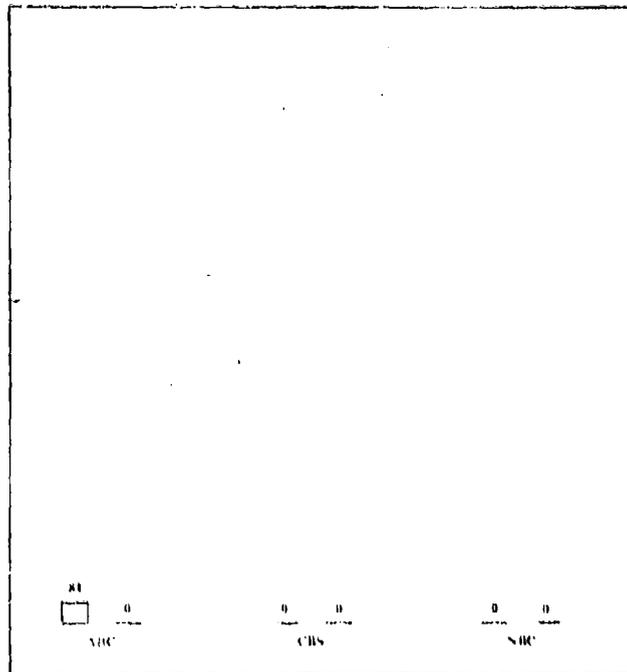
Figure 2

The number of words spoken for and against U.S. Policy on the Bombing Halt on the three networks combined. From The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971), p. 37. (Copyright permission requested by USAWC Library)

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APPENDIX 4 (U)

For	<input type="checkbox"/>
Against . . .	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



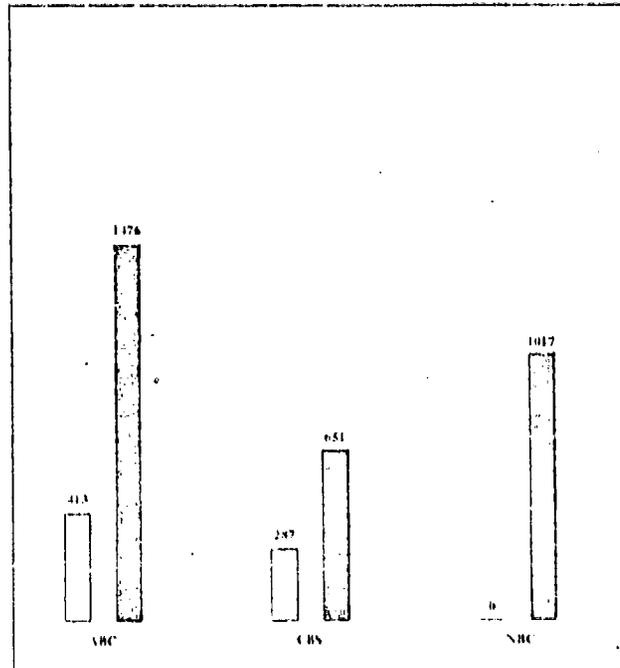
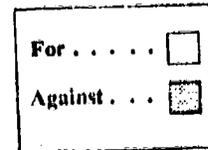
*Battle reports are not covered by this study.

Figure 3

The number of words spoken for and against the Viet Cong on the three networks combined. From The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971) p. 39. (Copyright permission requested by USAWC Library)

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APPENDIX 5 (U)



Opinion of presidential candidates is not included. There was virtually no material from Mr. Nixon and Mr. Wallace, and Mr. Humphrey's statements could not be clearly classified as for or against.

Figure 4

The number of words spoken for and against U.S. Policy on the Vietnam War on the three networks combined. From The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971) p. 37. (Copyright permission requested by USAWC Library)

UNCLASSIFIED

APPENDIX 6 (U)

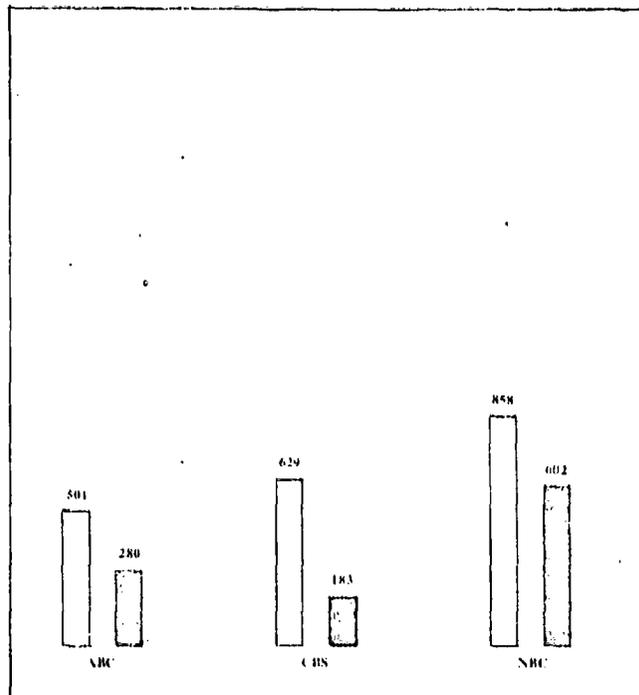
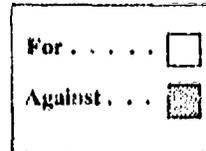


Figure 5

The number of words spoken for and against the Left on the three networks combined. From The News Twisters, Edith Efron (1971) p. 44 (Copyright permission requested by USAWC library.)