

RULES GOVERNING PUBLIC RELEASE
OF MILITARY INFORMATION IN VIETNAM
(Effective 1 November 1966)

BACKGROUND

The basic principle governing the public release of military information in Vietnam is that the maximum amount of information will be made available, consistent with the requirement for security.

In past wars a great deal of information could be, and was, denied to the enemy on the basis that he did not have ready access to it. This is not the case in Vietnam. By their very nature, subversion and guerrilla warfare make it impossible to safeguard many types of information that once were carefully protected. Thus, the arrival of a major US unit is announced immediately, rather than weeks or even months later. Pin-point datelines are permitted. In-country strength figures, by service, are released at regular intervals. Casualty figures are released weekly.

In Vietnam the greatest problem in achieving a full flow of information to newsmen and thence to the public is not that of deciding whether information is releasable, but that of physically gathering, transmitting and checking information from widely scattered locations linked together only by air transportation and an almost saturated communications system.

In the past, certain ground rules have defined the items of information that are not releasable and those that are releasable. The ground rules have been reviewed to insure that they are clearly stated, that they are limited to those required to preserve military security and that the principle of making the maximum amount of information available to the public is being followed.

The situation in South Vietnam is such that correspondents may come into possession of information which has not been released officially under the ground rules set forth herein. Such information is not to be transmitted or released to the public until officially released by Vietnamese, American or other Free World spokesmen in regard to their respective national forces. Official Government of Vietnam (GVN) and US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) accreditation is issued on this condition. Deliberate violation of these conditions or ground rules by a correspondent will be regarded as a basis for suspension or cancellation of accreditation.

Correspondents may find that, at times, their movements may be restricted in certain tactical areas. These restrictions are kept to a minimum but they may be applied by a commanding officer when in his opinion the nature of an operation warrants such action. Correspondents will be advised of such restrictions by the commanding officer of the unit or by the IO representative of the headquarters involved, or by the unit G2/S2 if there is no IO representative present.

GROUND RULES

1. The Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam is the sole releasing authority for all information material, including photography, pertaining to US military activities in Vietnam and gathered or produced by military individuals or organizations. Local commanders are delegated the authority to release hometown news material. As authorized by COMUSMACV, the Chief of Information or his duly appointed representative is the official MACV military spokesman.

2. Information cleared for release will be made available to the press by MACV through one or more of the following means.

- a. Daily press release.
- b. Daily press briefing.
- c. Call outs.
- d. Special press handouts.

3. Releasable Information

a. General

(1) Arrival of major units in country when officially announced by COMUSMACV.

(2) Strength figures of US forces, by service, when announced by COMUSMACV.

(3) Official total casualty figures on a weekly and cumulative basis, as furnished by Department of Defense on the basis of reports from the Services.

(4) Enemy casualty figures for each action or operation, daily and cumulatively.

b. Ground/Naval Operations

(1) Casualties suffered by friendly units in an announced operation in terms of "light," "moderate" or "heavy" as applied to the size of the force in that action or operation.

(2) Size of friendly forces involved in an action or operation using general terms such as "multi-battalion".

(3) Information regarding details of a tactical operation when release has been authorized by COMUSMACV (See paragraph 1., General Notes).

c. Air Operations

(1) Target or targets hit, to include general location and category of target.

(2) Identification as to whether it was VNAF, US or a joint VNAF/US strike.

(3) Whether aircraft were land-based or carrier-based. Names of carriers when their aircraft are involved.

(4) Time of attack in general terms.

(5) General evaluation of success of the mission.

(6) Types of ordnance expended in general terms, such as 250-pound fragmentation bombs, 500-pound general purpose bombs, rockets, .50 caliber ammunition, 20mm cannon fire.

(7) Number of missions over North Vietnam; number of sorties over the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

(8) Types of aircraft involved.

(9) Weather enroute and over the target during a strike.

(10) Pilot sightings of unfriendly aircraft.

(11) Periodically, the number of aircraft downed:

(a) By hostile fire in South Vietnam.

(b) By hostile fire in North Vietnam.

(12) Volume of enemy anti-aircraft fire in general terms.

4. Information not releasable under any circumstances.

a. General

(1) Future plans, operations, or strikes.

(2) Information on or confirmation of Rules of Engagement.

(3) Amounts of ordnance and fuel moved by support units or on hand in combat units.

b. Ground/Naval Operations

(1) Exact number and type or identification of casualties suffered by friendly units.

(2) During an operation, unit designations and troop movements, tactical deployments, name of operation and size of friendly forces involved, until officially released by MACV.

(3) Intelligence unit activities, methods of operation, or specific location.

c. Air Operations

(1) The number of sorties and the amount of ordnance expended on strikes outside the RVN.

(2) Information on aircraft taking off for strikes, enroute to, or returning from target area. Information on strikes while they are in progress.

(3) Identity of units and locations of air bases from which aircraft are launched on combat operations.

(4) Number of aircraft damaged or any other indicator of effectiveness or ineffectiveness of ground anti-aircraft defenses.

(5) Tactical specifics, such as altitudes, course, speeds, or angle of attack. (General items such as "low and fast" may be used.)

(6) Information on or confirmation of planned strikes which do not take place for any reason, including bad weather.

(7) Specific identification of enemy weapons system utilized to down friendly aircraft.

(8) Details concerning downed aircraft while SAR operations are in progress.

GENERAL NOTES

1. The initial release of information pertaining to any tactical operation in the field will be made by the MACV Office of Information (MACOI) when, in the opinion of the Field Force commander concerned, the release of such information will not adversely affect the security of his command. This condition will exist when it can be presumed that the enemy is aware of the general strength and location of the friendly force(s), and may occur either before or after there has been significant contact. The Field Force commander's recommendation for release does not constitute authority for commanders subordinate to MACV to effect release to news media. Initial announcement of an operation will be made only by MACOI.

2. Casualty information, as it relates to the notification of the next of kin, is extremely sensitive. By Executive direction, next of kin of all military fatalities must be notified in person by an officer of the appropriate service. There have been instances in which next of kin have first learned of the death or wounding of a loved one through news media. The problem is particularly difficult for visual media. Casualty photographs can show a recognizable face, name tag, jewelry or other identifying feature or item. The anguish that sudden recognition at home can cause is out of proportion to the news value of the photograph or film. Although the casualty reporting and notification system works on a priority basis, correspondents are urged to keep this problem in mind when covering an action in the field. Names of casualties whose next of kin have been notified can be verified by the MACV Information Office and by the Directorate of News Services in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs).

3. Only two Viet Cong casualty figures are released - "killed in action" and "captured". There is no way to get a "wounded" figure although there are indications that for every Viet Cong killed, one-and-one-half VC are wounded seriously enough to require hospital treatment. The "captured" figure may be broken down into "Viet Cong" and "Viet Cong Suspects". The total is a firm figure. Any "Viet Cong Killed" figure released by MACV will have been verified on the scene by US

personnel to the extent permitted by the military situation. It cannot be an exact figure, but it is probable that duplications and other errors on the high side are more than offset by the number of Viet Cong dead who are carried away or buried nearby, by those who subsequently die of wounds and by those killed by artillery concentrations and air strikes not followed up by ground action. Thus, when the briefer announces a specific number of Viet Cong killed in a particular operation or over a given period, that figure is not as precise as the popular term "body count" would imply. Neither is it a guess or loose estimate. It is the best figure that can be developed and, as noted, probably is conservative in the long run.

4. Members of the Military Assistance Command Information Office are available to discuss any questions which may arise concerning the release of military information.

5. Requests for information concerning non-military activities and Republic of Vietnam military activities should be addressed to the Government of Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, the US Mission or the Public Information representative of the appropriate Free World Force or activity.

6. Whenever possible, changes to this memorandum will be brought to the attention of correspondents before they are put into effect.

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