

Immature reporters mislead public: General

Young and inexperienced war correspondents in Vietnam have failed to provide the public with adequate objective information, American General William Westmoreland, former US Army Chief of Staff and Commander of all US forces in Vietnam, said Friday.

He was speaking to students at the University of New Brunswick on the press in Vietnam.

Many of the young correspondents fashioned themselves after crusaders who were at war with the military with a duty to attack and expose everything from the M-16 rifle to reforms in the Vietnamese government, he said. Government-press relations worsened during the early years of the Vietnam conflict amid an atmosphere of Buddhist uprisings, increasing enemy activity, rising US casualties and the sensitivity of the South Vietnamese government.

He hastened to add that "normally the more senior, mature correspondents did a good job. They researched carefully and did not believe without checking the plethora of rumour and specu-

lative individual opinion" which was available.

"Unfortunately this was not true of the less experienced".

Hanoi's propaganda machine also hindered responsible press coverage, said Westmoreland. "Unlike other conflicts, the war in Vietnam was not purely a matter of military victory or defeat, but became a struggle for public acceptance or rejection," he said, "Hanoi planned a two-pronged attack - one military on the battlefield in South Vietnam and the other psychological against the American public. Modern technology provided the press a means of indirectly involving the American public with the war on an almost hourly basis. The war was literally piped into the living room, bedroom and kitchen of most Americans."

The government was equally responsible for the poor press, he said. The government failed to recognize a growing credibility gap until it was too late, said Westmoreland, and failed to state its case clearly and consistently in the beginning. The government used a piecemeal approach to the

information problem, he added, "with far too many fingers in the pie."

As well, the military failed to provide personnel "with an appreciation for the importance and role of the press, capable of responding to correspondents in their own language. By 1967, however, many of our weaknesses were rectified."

The low point in objective reporting, said Westmoreland, was the Tet offensive in 1968. "After the first three days (of Hanoi's offensive) it became clear that it was a flop but (US) Ambassador Bunker and I and our people were unable to overcome the negativism of the press corps. In fact, the truth about the tremendous defeat suffered by the enemy at Tet has only been chronicled accurately in the last couple of years."

Westmoreland said he wasn't in favour of having the newspapermen prejudiced in the government's favour, "but the facts should be presented objectively to show the big picture clearly without over-playing the sensational."

"Professional journalism is not

well-served when careless news organizations authorize press credentials for non-professionals including curiosity seekers, am-

ateur commentators, vacationing journalists and non-journalist wives, as was the case in Vietnam," he said.

U.S. military 'did job admirably'

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communists until South Vietnam was strong enough to fend for itself."

The U.S. military in Vietnam "did the job admirably," he said, even though their actions were severely limited by certain constraints placed upon them.

"We were limited to the use of weapons, the area we could

fight in, and the time at which we could fight. I'm not complaining about it, though, because I'm aware of the factors that had to be taken into account, both domestically and internationally.

But it made for a very complicated situation. It was like fighting in a goldfish bowl."

STUDENTS NOW ON BOARD OF GOVERNORS

UNB students now have two representatives on the Board of Governors. Mike Richard, a second year law student, is on the Board for two years, while Ken DeFreitas, a fifth year Forestry student, picked up the one-year seat. Craig Wilson from UNBSJ also picked up a one-year seat.



"Your mother and I think he's very nice dear but isn't he a little old?"



"We can't wander through the forest much longer without some smart-alec teaching assistant or student asking us where we're going..."