

Pentagon Says Military Law Impedes No Viet War Reporter

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The Department of Defense has assured Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.) that the wide reach of U.S. military law in Vietnam contains nothing that "conceivably could impede or hamper newsmen" reporting that war.

But the Department asserts emphatically that history and precedent give the military jurisdiction "over camp followers in the field" if there is shooting going on, regardless of whether it has been formally declared a war.

Moss, who is more concerned about possible interference with press coverage than with the wider legal aspects of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, said yesterday

that he would not comment on the Department's letter until his staff has studied it.

As chairman of a House subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information, he asked Defense's General Counsel Paul C. Warnke last week about plans to bring civilians with U.S. forces in Vietnam into court-martial jurisdiction.

This has been shelved temporarily because the State Department and the Pentagon do not see eye to eye on the plan, it is known here, and because it aroused South Vietnamese authorities and the foreign press corps in Saigon.

Government sources here said the Pentagon was mainly concerned with exerting con-

trol over U.S. civilians working on contract in Vietnam. At least one American working in the Camranch Bay area has been charged under court-martial procedure.

Some newsmen in Vietnam felt that extension of military law carried the threat of eventual censorship. The article in the Code that caused the fuss is the one saying that "in time of war, persons serving with or accompanying an armed force in the field" come under its jurisdiction.

Warnke also sent Moss a memorandum written by the Staff Judge Advocate in Saigon, arguing that Congress in Revolutionary days had not meant to limit control of "camp followers" to formally declared wars.