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Agnew Says U.S. Would Acknowledge a Laos Defeat

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The Nixon Administration would admit it publicly if South Vietnamese combat forces were mauled by the enemy in Laos, Vice President Agnew said today.

"I don't see any reason why we shouldn't," he said. But the Vice President contended, in a one-hour televised background briefing with reporters and editors from the Boston area, that the South Vietnamese military thrust into Laos had been an unqualified success.

"Contrary to reports that you noticed the last day or so in the papers, this was not a rout," Mr. Agnew said. He alluded to news accounts that enemy forces had pushed Saigon's troops toward the South Vietnamese border.

"This was an orderly retreat," he said.

Speech Discussed

The panelists directed much of their attention toward the Vice President's speech before the Middlesex Club, a Boston Republican group, last night. In the speech, Mr. Agnew questioned the credibility of Columbia Broadcasting System television documentaries.

Mr. Agnew said today that he had called attention to criti-

cism of the network not to intimidate its reporters but to demonstrate that "the media are not infallible."

Asked what he believed the media's relationship to the Administration should be, Mr. Agnew said reporters should play an "adversary" role and should be "suspicious" of government. But he added that news media should be held accountable for their statements, just as public officials are.

As an example, the Vice President said that one news account recently quoted an American as having described the situation in Laos as the "worst fighting I have ever seen."

Mr. Agnew said "we checked and found out" that the American had had only a week's experience near any combat zone.

He also expanded on his charge last night that the C.B.S. documentary "The Selling of The Pentagon" had been a "vicious" attack on the Department of Defense public information effort.

The program included one segment in which a military officer's words were "run together as if they were a continuous thought" although they were not, Mr. Agnew said.

Another officer's supposed declaration that Laos would fall to the Communists if South Vietnam did was actually a recitation by the officer

of a statement made by Prince Souvanna Phouma of Laos, said the Vice President.

He declined to give other specific objections to the C.B.S. program on the Pentagon. He explained that the Defense Department was attempting to "document these inaccuracies before the American public" and was seeking time from the network to do it.

In Washington, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, Daniel Henkin, objected to a statement in The New York Times this morning that the Defense Department was trying to prevent the network from rebroadcasting the documentary.

Mr. Henkin said it would be "abhorrent" to him if the Pentagon did that.

All the department has done, he said, is to "call to their attention" at the network "some legal shortcomings that they have not fulfilled."

Asked to explain, Mr. Henkin said that the Department of Defense had provided some film to the network on condition that it not be used unless the individuals pictured in it gave their approval. In at least one case that was not done, and the Pentagon has called the matter to the network's attention, Mr. Henkin said.