

Movements of Newsmen Being Curbed by Saigon

NYTimes

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER FEB 1 1973

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 31 — The South Vietnamese armed forces and police have sharply restricted the movement of foreign newsmen since the cease-fire went into effect on Sunday and have threatened some of them at gunpoint.

Informed officers say that while there has been no formal change in policy toward newsmen, the cease-fire has made many unit commanders "jittery" and that they have taken steps on their own.

The officers add that President Nguyen Van Thieu is well aware of the restrictive measures but has done nothing to discourage them.

The South Vietnamese seem most anxious to bar newsmen from witnessing Government violations of the cease-fire and from making contact with Vietcong or North Vietnamese soldiers.

Confusion Is the Rule

At the moment, there is considerable confusion in South Vietnam, with Government and Communist forces seemingly vying until the end for control of the land and its people.

None of the machinery to supervise or control the cease-fire has been organized and the only observers attempting to go out and report what is going on are journalists and some intelligence agents.

Since Sunday, at least a dozen correspondents and photographers, mostly Americans, have been detained for up to three or four hours as they tried to cover developments at Tan Son Nhut air base near Saigon.

Several correspondents were detained in connection with the arrival of Vietcong and North Vietnamese delegations to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, which is to help carry out the cease-fire.

Newsman Is Arrested

One correspondent tried to sail a business card bearing his name and telephone number toward a delegation of Communists. He was arrested briefly and told that his press credentials were being revoked on the ground that he had tried to pass a message to the Communists.

This afternoon this correspondent and two other newsmen were stopped by military police as they drove past the compound in Tans On Hut where the North Vietnamese delegation to the military commission is living.

The three were held for three hours, then released without an explanation. A roll of film and their Government press cards were confiscated and not immediately returned.

A correspondent for an American television network said he had been told he would

be shot if he did not stop filming a scene of Government troops lounging in hammocks at an outpost near Saigon on Sunday.

In the far northern region, Government soldiers shot out two tires of the jeep of a correspondent and a photographer of the New York Times who had gotten within earshot of a South Vietnamese attack after the cease-fire had begun.

A number of photographers have reported that film has been ripped out of their cameras. Other newsmen say that officers in the field have tried to discourage them from moving toward areas of fighting by saying it was too dangerous, but in most cases, they said, they were not physically stopped.

In the Mekong Delta yesterday, two photographers and a radio reporter said they had managed to make contact with the Communists in a village in which control was divided and where both Government and Vietcong flags were flying in separate sections. They said the Vietcong officer in charge had agreed to meet with them, but that Government officers had detained them for about an hour and then escorted them out of the area under armed guard.

Embassy Says It Complains

Officials at the American Embassy say they have made "strong representations" to the Saigon Government, but one official added, "I don't think we're going to get anywhere."

Senior American military officers, who said they were also trying to persuade the Government that its new restrictions not only were unnecessary but also would result in negative publicity, said they had little hope of success. "We've not had a great deal of success in bringing the South Vietnamese around to our way of thinking in the past," one officer said.

All American officers who had been operating in the field have now been pulled back to provincial capitals and many of them have been cut out of the Government's chain of military information.

One officer in the delta told a newsman today that there had been only one cease-fire violation in his area in the previous 24 hours, but that he could not get the South Vietnamese "to tell me where it was or what happened."

Many of those officers who remain well informed on military operations have refused to talk to newsmen since the cease-fire began. One senior officer in Saigon said the reason was that their mission was to "help make the cease-fire a success."