

CBS News Versus The White House

New York

CBS News accused the White House yesterday of an "undercover campaign to discredit" a television story of a combat assault in which a North Vietnamese prisoner was shown being stabbed while lying on the ground.

Commentator Walter Cronkite said the attempt to discredit Columbia Broadcasting System News included an allegation that "the story was faked."

CBS correspondent Don Webster then produced a South Vietnamese sergeant who—interviewed through an interpreter—said he stabbed the fallen North Vietnamese "because the enemy soldier was reaching for a rifle."

The sergeant was identified on the program as Nguyen Van Mot, and he was quoted as saying he killed the prisoner in self-defense, drawing a knife from the prisoner's body after an initial thrust and plunging the weapon in a second time.

"The Pentagon may wish to believe this story never happened," Webster added, "but it did."

Cronkite devoted a 15-minute segment of his half-hour evening news program to the incident.

"For reasons not entirely clear," Cronkite said, "the White House has engaged in an undercover campaign to discredit CBS News by alleging the story was faked."

He said reporters and columnists have been prompted "to publish White House and Pentagon suspicions about the authenticity of the report."

"Clark Mollenhof, special counsel to the President," Cronkite went on, "confirms that he has investigated the CBS Vietnam story but refuses to say who ordered the investigation. He acknowledges he talked to several reporters and columnists."

"Richard Wilson (Washington bureau chief of the Des Moines Register), whose column appears in 60 newspapers, has printed these charges. And tomorrow, in 620 newspapers, columnist Jack Anderson will repeat the substance of a White House memo containing these charges."

Associated Press