

figures is of much greater concern. We have been projecting an image of success over the recent months, and properly so. The newsmen will immediately seize on the point that the enemy force has increased . . . All available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion. All those who have an incorrect view of the war will be reinforced, and the task will become more difficult."

CBS had incorrectly attributed that cable to Gen. Westmoreland. He was in Manila when it was sent, but he quickly endorsed it. He vigorously defended this position in his testimony at the trial, saying: "Yes, we were sensitive to press reaction. We would have been dummoxes if we weren't. I totally agreed with Gen. Abrams' language. I agreed with it then. I agree with it now. If I had to do it again, I would." The general said the media would have distorted any public release of increased troops estimates. They would have misinterpreted the figures about the Self-Defense Forces and this would have misled his troops. He said the troops never thought they were getting a fair shake from the media. He said, "I got this everywhere." He said that at one time he had 500 reporters accredited to his headquarters in Saigon, all competing for stories. He told the court: "It took an inordinate amount of my time to answer stories and editorials published or aired back in the U.S."

The Urge to Distort

The urge to distort information of this type, trying to make things appear worse than they are, was clearly manifest in the CBS program. In this documentary, Mike Wallace said that "instead of being told of an enemy army of more than half a million, the president, the Congress and the American public were told there were only 248,000 Vietcong left; that the enemy was running out of men." When George Carver, the CIA expert, had that statement read to him while he was on the witness stand, he exploded with, "That's a lie." He said he never had information in 1967 that there was an enemy army out there of more than half a million. That was exactly the kind of misinterpretation that Gen. Westmoreland feared that some in the media would place upon the order of battle figures.

This willingness of CBS to distort the record has been made dramatically clear to the jury by showing what some of the people interviewed by CBS actually said and contrasting it with what CBS put on the air. Westmoreland's attorneys have obtained the outtakes from the documentary—those portions of the interviews that were taped but not used on the air. They have been showing these to the jury, evidently to good effect.

The Philadelphia Inquirer ran a long article about the use of the outtakes on October 28, based on interviews that CBS had done with Col. Gains Hawkins and Cmdr. James Meacham. Both appeared in the documentary as strongly supporting the charges against Gen. Westmoreland. The Inquirer said: "Hawkins' outtakes and hour-long outtakes of an interview with an intelligence officer named James Meacham, were powerful stuff. Both men were shown making remarks that seemed to contradict the program's premise.

"Even worse for CBS, it appeared that the network chose to include in its program only those statements that supported the CBS premise. And those comments represented only a tiny, selective fraction of the full interviews. Moreover, the jury saw that Crile (the producer) was apparently determined to pry from the officers incriminating statements about Westmoreland. He asked the same questions again and again, even apologizing once for 'hectoring' Meacham. CBS hardly helped its own case by editing a response by Hawkins to make it appear in the documentary that he was referring to 1967 intelligence figures pushed by Westmoreland's command as 'crap.' The outtakes revealed to the jury, which had earlier viewed the Hawkins' statements eventually used in the documentary, that Hawkins was actually referring to figures supplied years earlier by the South Vietnamese Army."

While Mike Wallace was accusing Westmoreland of misleading the president about enemy strength in Vietnam, one of the key witnesses against the general, Col. Gains Hawkins, was recorded on CBS video-tape denying that was true. Asked if President Johnson had been told about the higher figures proposed for the order of battle, Hawkins said: "President Johnson knew everything. No one fools commanders." He also said no one had ordered him to keep the enemy strength below 300,000. He said: "I deduced it, and I defended it willingly. . . . When it comes right down to it, who the hell can prove what figure is better than another figure?"

James Meacham had been shown on the program charging that Lt. Col. Daniel Graham had wanted to tamper with the computer data base, and he was quoted as writing to his wife, saying: "I've never in my life assembled such a pack of truly gargantuan falsehoods." In the outtakes Meacham is shown telling George Crile that "nobody I had anything to do with faked intelligence." Pressed hard by Crile, he exploded, saying: "You're trying to get me to say that we all falsified intelligence. I'm not gonna say it because I don't have any sense of having done that." He said that in writing to his wife he was "just blowing off steam." He told Crile, "I don't agree with what Sam (Adams) and you are trying to say." But the only portion of Meacham's interview that was used was ten sentences that supported Crile's premise.

What You Can Do

CBS News badly needs an ombudsman or viewers' advocate to guard against the abuses revealed by the Westmoreland case and to handle viewer complaints. AIM has submitted a shareholder resolution asking that one be appointed. Write to Thomas H. Wyman, Chairman, CBS, Inc., 51 West 52nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10019, and urge him to accept AIM's resolution.

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