

April 1951
**Letter, President Syngman Rhee to General
Matthew Ridgway**

Citation:

"Letter, President Syngman Rhee to General Matthew Ridgway", April 1951, Wilson Center Digital Archive, B-011-029, Official Correspondences, President Rhee's Correspondences, Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/118075>

Summary:

Syngman Rhee asks General Ridgway to expel a British reporter, Edward Hewat, for allegedly biased reporting on the "Shin-won-myun Massacre."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan



Dear General Ridgway:

As you know, this Government has advocated and supported the principle of a free press and has consistently refrained from taking any action which could be construed as an effort to censor or control the dissemination of news and it will continue to do so.

However, in time of war, it is most essential that the privileges of free press be exercised with judgment and discretion. There is no place for irresponsible and biased reporting of controversial matters in such a way that aid and comfort is given to the enemy by providing him with propaganda which can be effectively used against us.

Edward Hewat, a correspondent for certain British newspapers, and who is now stationed in Taegu, prepared and released a story on the so-called "Shin-wun-myun Massacre", using as a basis for his report the unsupported ~~and~~ statements of an unidentified "police captain". No mention was made of the available fact that Government and Legislative committees specially appointed to ascertain and report the true facts were, at the time of his story, engaged in preparing their official reports.

Mr. Hewat apparently made no effort to ascertain all of the available facts and reported his findings in a manner calculated to bring discredit upon the legitimate and unquestioned ^{duty} ~~responsibility~~ of the National Police and the ROK Army to protect the civilian population from ^{illegal} ~~guerrilla~~ activity wherever such activity exists.

A comparison of Mr. Hewat's report with that of New York Times correspondent, Mr. George Barrett, copies of each of which are enclosed, indicates that Mr. Hewat was violating the basic tenets of professional ^{JOURNALISM} ~~reporting~~ and was failing to observe the ethics of the profession by not presenting both sides of the matter with impartiality.

Although this Government cannot agree with all of the material reported by Mr. Barrett, we feel that his account indicates a legitimate effort to ascertain the true facts and it points out that the Government is taking the necessary steps to insure a complete investigation. The basic difference between the two stories lies in the fact that Mr. Hewat



(2)

condemns acts, which, after investigation may well prove to be entirely legitimate, without offering any opportunity for defense or even suggesting the possibility of extenuating circumstances. Mr. Barrett, on the other hand, makes it clear that the Government is studying the matter and that no accurate conclusions can be reached until the official report has been prepared and considered.

This Government will take whatever action is deemed necessary after studying the official reports. The presumption of innocence will prevail until the contrary is established, in accordance with democratic procedures. This Government will not be swayed by the personal, unsupported, irresponsible judgment of an apparently biased newspaper reporter. A copy of the joint report of the Ministries of Home Affairs, Justice and National Defense is enclosed. The report of the National Assembly's Special Committee is not yet prepared.

The effect of Mr. Hewat's biased report has been to give aid and comfort to our common enemy. He has given the Communists a propaganda weapon which can and will be exploited to the fullest with

great damage to our mutual cause. He has brought unwarranted discredit upon the National Police and the ROK Army who ~~are frequently and~~ legally

[^] ~~are~~ performing their duty by protecting themselves, the civil population and the ^{UN} fighting forces from ^{THE} effects of illegal guerrilla activity.

In time of war such reporting by Mr. Hewat is tantamount to treason.

Therefore, I, as President of the Republic of Korea, request you, in your capacity as Supreme Commander, to immediately remove Mr.

Edward Hewat from this country, to relieve him of his credentials as a ^{disciplinatory} correspondent and to take whatever other ^{disciplinatory} action you may deem expedient in this matter.

Very sincerely,

3 enclosures:

Copy of Hewat's story in "Down"
Copy of Barrett's story in New York Times
Copy of Joint Ministry Report