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 EMBASSY
 OF THE
 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 Mexico D.F., Mexico

S-POL 23-8
 Mex city - Students

EXCISE

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October 18, 1968

OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Maxwell Chaplin, Esquire
 Office of Mexican Affairs
 Room 3906-A
 Department of State
 Washington, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 MEXICAN AFFAIRS
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Dear Max:

Many thanks for your letter of October 11 regarding political reporting in general and reporting on the student agitation in particular.

First, let me say a few words on the general subject.

It has always seemed to me that good reporting and analysis comes down to two at times conflicting elements: timeliness and accuracy. These elements are often in conflict because the analyst never has as complete information as he would wish and has the feeling that by waiting some important gaps might be filled. Nonetheless, an accurate analysis may be useless if it arrives after a vital decision has been taken. On the other hand a timely analysis that is incorrect in essentials may lead to an erroneous decision and thereby cause great harm. There is then a close relationship between timeliness and whether the estimate or report is needed before deciding on a course of action. If this is the case, the report must be submitted, imperfect though it may be, before the decision is taken. On the other hand, if it is not "actionable," delay in the interest of greater accuracy is only sensible and prudent.

Perhaps, I may illustrate the foregoing by examples from the recent student agitation. With the Olympic Games approaching

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and student violence continuing apace, the Department clearly needed the Embassy's best assessment, kept current, on the possibility that student violence would disrupt the Games and/or endanger American participants or spectators. These assessments were needed, I assume, in order that the Department could determine how it should answer queries from the press or private individuals. Timeliness was essential. I think that if you will look over our assessments, they have been timely, they have been substantially unqualified by "saving clauses" and to date (I still have my fingers crossed,) they have been accurate.

On the other hand, the question of how the October 2 violence started is in a totally different category. No immediate action or decision in Washington (that I am aware of) hinges upon that assessment. Hasty or snap assessments produce such egregious and lamentable errors as Time's reporting of it. If asked how the fracas started or who started it, a Departmental spokesman might, it seems to me, quite honestly and properly have said that the situation was very confusing and that we do not know. This seems to me far more respectable than giving currency and perhaps official sanction to error. How the violence started may have importance, but its importance lies in the longer term and accuracy, not promptness, becomes the controlling element. I believe that our 7514 of October 11 was about as prompt and as complete analysis as was possible with some regard for accuracy and in the light of the welter of conflicting rumors and reports. [] that they had some 15 differing and sometimes flatly contradictory versions of what happened, all from either "generally reliable sources" or "trained observers" on the spot.

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It may be my early training in physical science which makes me view with special concern the pretending to knowledge which one does not have.

Returning to the subject of competing with the press, I still consider it wrong and dangerous to place this requirement on an Embassy (the press is primarily concerned with selling papers; we are concerned with accurately informing our government,) but as I told you when we discussed this, I recognize that such a requirement is a fact of life and we have done our best to meet it.

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We have submitted since the student agitation began 89 telegrams (as of October 14) on the subject according to my count. While it has been simply impossible to comment individually on all press stories and on the plethora of reports submitted by the two other agencies reporting on the subject, we attempted to cover spot developments which seemed to us important and reasonably confirmed. I believe that if you glance through the 89 telegrams, you will find a fairly comprehensive and complete record of a developing complex situation. We were reporting daily and frequently twice daily before being requested to submit "Sitreps."

I have reviewed our analytical comment on the student situation and find that in addition to brief analytical comment contained in spot reporting telegrams, we have sent seven telegrams devoted primarily to analysis and assessment (6328, 6722, 6776, 6878, 7239, 7361, 7514.) I have also reread our basic analytical telegram 5481 written before student violence flared up. While we did not foresee at that time student agitation of the magnitude or tenacity which subsequently took place, in all fundamentals the assessment in 5481 has remained valid throughout the strike.

We had thought that the most urgent requirement placed on the Embassy in terms of time was a continuing assessment of the effect of student violence on holding the Olympic Games and the extent to which Americans might be endangered. We accordingly gave the Department a continuing, consistent and unequivocal assessment which has had the additional merit of being, to date at least, accurate.

I do not know what incident you refer to in the last paragraph of page 2 of your letter. I am aware of four incidents when it was alleged that fatalities occurred: evening of July 29; night of September 21 and early morning September 22; night of September 23 and early morning September 24; October 2. In each case we gave available information on deaths within twenty-four hours (see telegrams 6235 of July 30, 7131 of September 22, 7175 of September 24 and 7362 of October 3, respectively.)

I do not mean to imply that our reporting and analysis could not have been better, and I freely admit that there have been times when we

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have, ourselves, felt that there were serious gaps in our information (there still are!) This not unexpectedly shows up in our reporting. But I do not see how you can read through our reporting and not conclude that the many people who contributed to it here are entitled to take considerable satisfaction in the job done.

Sincerely yours,

W. Stuart

Wallace W. Stuart
Counselor for Political Affairs

P. S. Your October 10 letter has just arrived. I shall set about a reply to it as soon as possible.

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