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ABSTRACT FOR
THE MEDIA AND OPERATION DESERT STORM

Commander Richard B. Marvin, USN

What kind of a job did the news media do in covering Operation Desert Storm? Pete Williams, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), thinks they did just fine, citing public opinion polls that indicate the media's popularity rose after the war was over. But is that enough?

This paper assesses the media's performance in comparison with standards set forth in the Federalist Papers and the First Amendment to the Constitution. To do this, I will first consider what the standards are and briefly look at the historical record of journalists and the military, focusing on recent wars. I will then describe the structure provided for and accepted by the press during Operation Desert Storm, such as media pools, escorts, security ground rules and copy review, and then relate what happened during the war. The final section of the paper will assess how the media did in satisfying the requirements for an independent view of what the government was doing.

**1992
Executive Research Project
S62**

The Media and Operation Desert Storm

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THE MEDIA AND DESERT STORM

"With regard to publicity, the first essential in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first essential in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide-open publicity. It is your job and mine to try to reconcile these sometimes diverse considerations."

General Dwight D. Eisenhower
May, 1944¹

"We were snookered."

Newsmagazine correspondent describing media pools²

The quote from General Eisenhower illustrates the tension between the military and the media which has existed throughout our country's history. The second quote from a journalist who had negotiated media pool arrangements with the Department of Defense (DOD), reflects the popular perception that the balance between the two institutions favored DOD during Operation Desert Storm. This paper will briefly discuss the constitutional basis for the relationship, review how these two institutions have interacted in the past, focus on the latest case, Operation Desert Storm, and assess the media's performance in that conflict.

The relationship defined

As the United States was founded, the revolution concerned not only a new government but an even more

fundamental question, where the power of government resided. Previously, power resided with a king or perhaps with a parliament. Here, the founders has a different concept--all power would flow from and return to the people.

The idea of a free press is a corollary of this basic doctrine. In order for the people to make informed judgments on matters of government, they required some sort of independent means of information. As the Constitution was being adopted, Alexander Hamilton discussed the role of the press in Federalist Paper 84, saying that the press "will stand ready to sound the alarm when necessary, and point out the actors in any pernicious project" and that "the public papers will be expeditious messengers of intelligence to the most remote inhabitants of the Union."³

As the original thirteen states adopted their own constitutions, nine included provisions protecting freedom of the press.⁴ The idea was so important that it was included in the First Amendment to the Constitution which states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..."⁵ The adoption of this amendment was a tremendous advance in civil and political liberty. It established the people as sovereign, in that they had the right to say what they pleased about the government, which was their servant and which governed with their permission.⁶

In the view of democratic theory, a free press is a crucial element, providing a common ground of knowledge and

analysis, a meeting place for national debate. The press provides the link between the people and their institutions.⁷ Thomas Jefferson concluded one could not have a democratic government without a free press. "The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right. And were it left to me to decide whether we should have government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."⁸ Alfred Camus, the French existentialist, wrote "a free press can, of course, be good or bad, but most certainly without freedom it will never be anything but bad."⁹

The tension mentioned at the start of this paper arises from the fact that the aims of those in government do not always coincide with the idea of total disclosure of their actions by a free press. William J. Small, former president of NBC News, observes that people in government, "for good reasons as well as suspicious ones, are compelled to minimize or suppress information, to try to mold it by the amount they release and the timing of that release."¹⁰ Today that is referred to as "spin control."

Media Coverage in Past Wars

Another dynamic in the situation is the immediacy of the reports. In the earliest days, news of an event lagged significantly behind the occurrence. For example, the Battle of New Orleans was fought two weeks after the treaty ending

the War of 1812 was signed. In the Mexican War, Mexico was so remote and the difficulty in gathering the news so great that it took two weeks or longer for reports to reach New Orleans.

The first major clash between the military and the news media came during the Crimean War in 1854, when a correspondent for the London Times, William Howard Russell, accompanied the British Army into combat.¹¹ Russell soon discovered that disease was crippling the army and that blundering by the British commanders was destroying any chance for victory. With the support of his paper, Russell aroused Britain's middle class with descriptions of the horrors of the army's hospital at Sevastopol, the ill-advised charge of the Light Brigade, and the fumbling of the British command. The British establishment accused him of betraying sensitive military information. Russell's revelations were so sensational and so damaging that the government of Lord Aberdeen fell in a parliamentary vote of no confidence.

The unseating of a prime minister by a newspaperman was a lesson governments never forgot. In the years that followed, each time a war occurred the nations involved attempted either to enlist the cooperation of the press or to restrain it.¹²

Technology had advanced by the time of the American Civil War, when a telegraph office or a railroad was usually in reach of a man with a good horse. Attempting to control

the transmission and dissemination of strategically important information, President Abraham Lincoln gave the military control of all telegraph lines and made censorship of the press a function of the War Department. At best the move was marginally successful. War correspondents released information of value to the enemy with such regularity that General Robert E. Lee read northern newspapers carefully throughout the war. He even came to know which reporters were the most accurate, commenting on one occasion that he liked the work of one correspondent for The Philadelphia Inquirer because the man "knew what he reported and reported what he knew."¹³

Moving to more recent times,¹⁴ World War II was marked by cooperation between the correspondents and the military. The military, for its part, got reporters to the field to get a good overall picture of what was happening, and the reporters submitted their work at the division level for censorship. Walter Cronkite recalls that this officer was usually a civilian (often a lawyer) called to wartime duty who was as concerned with the public's right to know as the military's rights to certain secrets.¹⁵ Views of senior officers varied from Eisenhower's acceptance of the media referred to at the start of this paper to Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, who wanted to make only one announcement to the press regarding the war, who won.¹⁶

The Korean War commenced with a U.S. experiment with "voluntary censorship." General Douglas MacArthur declared

censorship "abhorrent" in July, 1950. Instead he passed the problem to the newsmen. Write what you please, he said in effect, but if you break security or make "unwarranted criticisms," you will be held personally responsible.¹⁷ This permissive policy pleased no one. Several of the newspaper bureau chiefs asked MacArthur to impose censorship because they believed that without it, the competitive pressure to disclose more information than rival reporters would be too great. The situation in Korea changed in November when numerically superior forces from Communist China entered Korea and began driving Allied forces south. The Far East Command imposed military censorship on December 20, 1950.¹⁸

Although censorship reduced the number of security violations that had been occurring under the voluntary system, it failed to eliminate them entirely. Members of the press disposed to violating the rules could still report freely when they traveled to Tokyo or the United States. In order to gain advantage over the competition, a few reporters also collaborated with the correspondent of the Paris Communist newspaper Le Soir, Wilfred Burchett, to receive material from behind enemy lines and to publish carefully screened photographs of smiling and well-fed American prisoners-of-war.

Military information officers, for their part, provoked the press by withholding legitimate news. For example, when inmates rioted at a United Nations prisoner-of-war facility, the U.S. Army withheld all information due to the concern

that it might become an issue in armistice negotiations. American officials also did not disclose when enemy prisoners seized the commander of the Kojido prisoner-of-war camp in May, 1952. In both cases, word finally surfaced in the form of damaging newspaper exposes.¹⁹

Vietnam marked a watershed in the relations between the two institutions. While it is easy to remember the antagonism which existed at the end of the war, the press, at least initially, supported U.S. involvement.²⁰ Since it was not a "set piece" war (one with fixed front lines), reporters hitched rides out to the field, observed operations and returned to Saigon where the Army offered daily briefings. The carrot of voluntary guidelines for security was offered with the stick of revocation of accreditation if the guidelines were violated. This system of voluntary guidelines worked well. The recollections by the public affairs chiefs who served in Vietnam indicate there were only nine cases of reporters losing their accreditation, and only two of these violations seriously endangered operational security or troop safety.²¹

Problems arose when reporters in the field or in Saigon found differences between what they observed and what they were being told. It now appears the misleading was due to inaccurate reports from the field and the Johnson administration's desire to put the best possible face on the conflict. This effort included at least some attempts to

manipulate the news and resulted in the creation of the
"Credibility Gap."²²

Tensions then became apparent at the daily press briefing in Saigon, soon known as the "Five O'clock Follies," as journalists, almost all of whom now felt that they were being told considerably less than the truth, took out their frustrations on lower-level officers who were left the run the briefings.²³ On another level, however, the spokesman-baiting exercise was less a matter of keen-eyed journalists challenging official "lies" or claims of "progress" than of venting the journalists' underlying frustrations over their inability to answer independently the question from the home office: "Are we winning or losing the war?"²⁴

In this atmosphere, many newsmen began to mistrust the military to a point of overreacting, allowing their mistrust to affect their coverage. This, along with the fact that some of the press complaints were unfounded and others were misleading, resulted in the beginnings of widespread mistrust of the entire media by the military.²⁵ Another factor in this distrust was the arrival in Vietnam of many young, inexperienced reporters who knew little about the military or the Vietnamese. Their stories were often inaccurate or slanted negatively because of this inexperience. Those who stayed long enough improved, but many were on short assignments and never gained the needed experience. Similarly, there were some young "advocacy"

reporters who felt the American people were incapable of understanding the facts and strove to editorialize negatively in their news stories.

And so it degenerated into mutual hostility, with many people in the military believing that the press lost the war by eroding popular support. This conclusion does not stand up to close analysis. William Hammond, U.S. Army historian, concludes that "what alienated the American public, in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, was not news coverage but casualties. It is undeniable that press reports were often more accurate than the public statements of the administration in portraying the situation in Vietnam."²⁷ In fact, then, the press provided the American public with information. It was the public, not the press, that made the administration withdraw from a war it could not-at least at a price Americans were willing to pay-win.²⁸ Peter Braestrup, in his study of military-media realtions for the Twentieth Century Fund, concludes that "what Vietnam makes so clear is that ultimately the President is the key figure in military-press relations. The President must insist on reasonable access for newsmen and reasonable candor and coherence."²⁹

This Presidential concern for media access was not demonstrated in the next case, the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983. General John Vessey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told President Ronald Reagan that the military could not easily carry out the Grenada mission unless there

were no press and television along to worry U.S. commanders.³⁰
The President agreed and so the media was kept off the island for the first 48 hours of the invasion. When asked later about the reason for this action, the U.S. commander, Vice Admiral Joseph W. Metcalf III, stated "I did not want the press around where I would start second-guessing what I was doing relative to the press."³¹

Eight years later, Vice Admiral Metcalf felt that "history may show that while Grenada was a skirmish in terms of warfare, it may have been the information-warfare 'mother of battles'. It marked the start toward equilibrium in the relationship among the government, the military and the news media."³² Predictably, the media did not adopt Vice Admiral Metcalf's interpretation and was outraged over their treatment. Time magazine editor-in-chief Henry Grunwald observed "the Administration's measures suggest a certain mindset: the notion that events can be shaped by their presentation, that truth should be a controlled substance."³³ John Chancellor, NBC commentator, while the invasion was occurring on October 26, 1983, stated "the American government is doing whatever it wants to do in Grenada without any representative of the American public watching what it's doing...the Reagan administration has produced a bureaucrat's dream: do anything, no one is watching."³⁴

The outcry was so great that General Vessey appointed a commission headed by Major General Winant Sidle, USA, to study the situation. A press ad hoc committee offered to

provide witnesses to testify at the hearings, but recommended that its members not serve on the commission itself. None served.³⁵ The Sidle Commission began meeting in 1983, and presented its recommendations to Defense Secretary Weinberger in August, 1984 (listed in Appendix A). The key one to note here is the second recommendation that when it becomes apparent ...that media pooling provides the only feasible means of furnishing the media with early access to an operation, planning should provide for the largest possible press pool that is practical and minimize the length of time the pool will be necessary before "full coverage" is feasible.³⁶ The Sidle Report went on to explain that "media representatives appearing before the panel were unanimous in being opposed to pools in general. However, they all also agreed that they would cooperate in pooling agreements if they were necessary for them to obtain early access to an operation."³⁷

The recommendations of the Sidle Commission, particularly regarding media pools, were adopted by the Department of Defense and the pools were exercised several times. Unfortunately, during the invasion of Panama in December, 1989, the media pool was notified too late to allow it to be in place at the start of the action. This occurred because of the decision of Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to delay notification due to reasons of "operational security."

Reviewing the record prior to Operation Desert Storm, Braestrup concludes "that since 1941, under many trying circumstances, the military and the media have managed to accomodate each other, often in surprising ways, mostly without undue jeopardy to either military operations or the healthy flow of information...The two cultures can work together when the military sets out consistent ground rules and is able to enforce them impartially and with some intelligence."³⁸ However, there are two broad areas of tension, one constitutional and one dealing with troop morale, public perception and security.

³⁹
With regard to the Constitution, the parameters of the media's legal right of access are uncertain and therefore not inviolable. The First Amendment sometimes runs up against countervailing sections of the Constitution, most notably Article II, which grants the President authority over foreign and military affairs. The exceptionally broad authority of the President over the conduct of foreign affairs has been repeatedly upheld since the landmark 1936 case, United States of America vs. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation. At times, however, such as the 1971 Pentagon Papers case, First Amendment interests have outweighed the President's Article II powers. In a 1974 case, the Supreme Court held "the Constitution does not...require government to accord the press special access to information not shared by members of the public generally. The right to speak and

publish does not carry with it the unrestrained right to gather information."

The other area of tension is the effect of critical reporting on morale and operational security. Military victory is more easily accomplished when the image of the military is a good one.⁴⁰ Otherwise, not only is troop morale sometimes weakened, but the enemy is always encouraged when an unfavorable story is aired or printed. Certainly when men's lives are at stake, when public perceptions (and political leaders' perceptions) of the battlefield are in part shaped by the news media, the notion of accomodating a profession that considers itself autonomous and by implication "neutral" or "critical" even in wartime is unlikely to appeal to generals, their civilian superiors, or the combat troops.⁴¹

This desire for favorable image goes along with concern for security, and at times legitimate concerns for security of operations (e.g. troop locations, size, etc.) become intertwined with concerns regarding image. Social critic Ben H. Bagdikian observes "a sinister wind is blowing through the American democratic process. We began our society on the priciple that government exists legitimately only with the consent of the governed and that consent without significant information is meaningless; the greater the information available to the public, the safer the democracy. But in the last generation, we have reversed the assumption. Thanks to nuclear weapons, the Cold War and the

growing militarization of America, we seem to have accepted the contrary idea that the less the public knows, the greater the 'national security.'⁴²"

Judge Hugo Black echoed this sentiment in his final Supreme Court opinion: "The word 'security' is a broad, vague generality whose contours should not be invoked to abrogate the fundamental law embodied in the First Amendment. The guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of informed representative government provides no real security for our republic."⁴³ These areas of uncertainty regarding the scope of the First Amendment and what is meant by "national security" again arose during Operation Desert Storm.

What happened during Operation Desert Storm?

Media Pools

When Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, there were no U.S. media in the area. The U.S. and international press corps grew from zero to 17 in the first pool sent in late August to 800 in December to approximately 1600⁴⁴ (about the same number accredited to cover all of World War II) at the start of the ground war in late February, 1991. As preparations for the ground war became complete, huge distances separated the troops requiring reporters covering the units to ride with them and not tag along in their own transport. Ground units could not handle large numbers of reporters since very few seats were available. Pools were

perceived by DOD as the only way to provide wide-spread coverage⁴⁵ due to lack of resources to execute the pool policy for all reporters. Reporters in Saudi Arabia agreed it was an unmanageable situation, with too many reporters in country.⁴⁶

At the time, Pete Williams, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) (ASD(PA)), explained the creation of the pools was an extension of the pools proposed in the Sidle Commission report.⁴⁷ The media organizations who had maintained a continuous presence in Saudi Arabia since August, known as the "sacred sixteen", were allowed by DOD in January, 1991, to decide pool composition.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, they voted to keep pool slots for themselves, resulting in bitter fights with newcomers. One observer noted that all told, reporters seemed to spend more energy fighting each other than fighting restrictions.⁴⁹ Finally, DOD came up with rules for assignment.⁵⁰

By early February, more than 1,000 journalists were accredited but only 126 were in pools. That figure is somewhat misleading in that it includes photographers, camera operators and technicians. The New York Times senior correspondent was also offended that slots went to reporters from Mirabella, the monthly women's magazine, and Stars and Stripes, the unofficial military newspaper.⁵¹ Therefore, for most of the news people most of the time, the war was played out at the Dhahran International Hotel, across a six-lane highway from the Dhahran International Airport-a hotel whose

turquoise-domed swimming pool changing rooms became familiar to Americans as the backdrop for countless television network "stand up" reports from Saudi Arabia.⁵²

The exclusive use of pools was disputed at the time in letters from media executives to ASD(PA). Andrew Glass, Washington bureau chief for Cox newspapers, urged that correspondents be allowed to cover forces outside the pool system, noting that such coverage "may be dangerous, difficult and even foolhardy. Certainly the military has no obligation to accomodate those who wish to make the effort."⁵³ Nicholas Horrock of The Chicago Tribune, remembering the recommendation of the Sidle Commission regarding pools for only a short duration, if at all, wrote "This means that the restrictive rules devised to cover the early rush of a sneak attack will be in force for the entire war."⁵⁴ Pete Williams responded after the war that "we agonized over the decision to continue the pools. There was simply no fair alternative, especially considering the highly mobile nature of this war, prosecuted in a vast desert."⁵⁵

So, given the DOD's stated reason, the pools stayed in place for the duration, which meant that a limited number of the media would receive limited access to the war front, their copy would be reviewed and then made available to others, and they would be escorted by military public affairs officers.

Ground rules and copy review

The Department of Defense (DOD) developed a number of ground rules regarding material which could not be reported by pool members. These ground rules were furnished to the media for comment on January 8, 1991, and were approved on January 14 with no major changes in spite of media suggestions⁵⁶ (the ground rules are given in Appendix B). According to ASD(FA), the ground rules "were not intended to prevent journalists from reporting on incidents that might embarrass the military or to make military operations look sanitized. Instead, they were intended simply and solely to prevent publication of details that could jeopardize a military operation or endanger the lives of U.S. troops."⁵⁷

While reminiscent of the system used in Vietnam, this time a copy review process was added. In Vietnam, the press was its own censor in that after a story came out that violated the ground rules, the reporter concerned had his accreditation suspended or cancelled.⁵⁸ During the Gulf War, the stories written by pool members were reviewed by the Public Affairs escort who could suggest changes. If there was a dispute, the story would be forwarded to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and, if not resolved, to the Pentagon where it would be discussed with the reporter's editor in the United States. If, after discussion, the news agency wanted to use the story, they could do so. The system, therefore, was not technically censorship in that the

government did not make the final decision to kill the story.⁵⁹ What it did do was add tremendous amounts of time in getting stories out as well as act as "defacto field censorship without calling it that" according to Fred Hoffman, the second-ranking Pentagon spokesman during the Reagan Administration.⁶⁰

Why did the media play ball?

Given all the above, the media was in a difficult situation. Reporters fumed that the rules undercut "the public's right to know" but the public itself was unsympathetic. Polls showed a large majority favoring even tougher restrictions. Journalists thus faced a dilemma. If they breached the Pentagon rules and really tried to cover the war, they would risk alienating their readers and viewers and presumably their advertisers, to say nothing of risking expulsion from the war zone. But if they did not resist the restrictions, they would essentially be mere conduits for official information, with little ability to check its accuracy. They were thus caught between the proverbial rock and hard place.⁶¹

The decision to go along with the pools and all the other rules was based on the fact that DOD had a monopoly on access to the troops in the field.⁶² It was criticized at the time--Paul Fussell, a social critic who has written extensively on control of information during war time, observed "when they first heard of these guidelines, they

should have raised an incredible, obscene howl. Instead, they grumbled about the First Amendment but really acted as if they were honored to be in Saudi Arabia."⁶³ In the words of New York Times media writer Walter Goodman, "The Pentagon won ground superiority over the press before it achieved air superiority over the Iraqis."⁶⁴

What happened?

The pool system stayed in place throughout the ground war, but there were problems in several areas: lack of total coverage, delay of copy, changes in copy, the performance of the military media escorts, and, when the war ended, the impending collapse of the pool system.

What the pool arrangement meant was that the military acted as assignment editor, determining what got covered. Malcom Browne, New York Times correspondent, testified before Congress that "as pool reporters in Saudi Arabia, we were essentially unpaid employees of DOD. There was a standing joke that the Army would assign pool members to the consolidated mess kit repair battalion whenever it was felt that morale was low at the expense of something like the 101st Airborne."⁶⁵ Public Affairs officers familiar with making pool arrangements also stated the some commanders chose not to take media when asked and that the media was not interested in embarking Navy ships for fear of missing the ground war.⁶⁶

A significant problem was the delay of copy, caused by the security review process and the availability of military communications to support the accompanying press. One of the characteristics of most news stories is that they are time-sensitive. The security review process took time, and, by the time it was completed, the war had moved on, and the perishable dispatches were hopelessly stale.⁶⁷ John Fialka of The Wall Street Journal returned from a 10-day stint covering elements of the Seventh Corps with two analytical stories which examined some of the options that he felt the military would face in the future weeks. These two stories were held up for 60 hours by the Seventh Corps command, long enough to destroy their use by his paper. The actual change that resulted from the 60 hour delay was the insertion of one word, "perhaps".⁶⁸ Reporters were experiencing routine delays of 36 to 48 hours in filing reports.⁶⁹ On the second day of the ground war (26 February), with 142 combat pool reporters accompanying U.S. ground forces in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, hardly any of them filed a dispatch that arrived in the United States in time for the evening news or the next morning's newspaper. None provided a firsthand account of ground combat, so the biggest day of the war ended up being one of the most underreported days.⁷⁰

After the war was over, the Joint Information Bureau (JIB) run by the Central Command in Dhahran reviewed 343 pool reports filed during or immediately after the ground war and found 21% arrived at the JIB in 12 hours, 69%

arrived in less than two days, and 10% arrived in more than three days. In fact, five reports, hampered either by weather or poor transportation, arrived at the JIB more than six days after they were filed.⁷¹ Looking back at the history of the Civil War quoted above with accounts of Bull Run reaching New York in 24 hours and comparing this result of 31% of the field reports being at least two days late, one might question if progress is being made.

There were differences noted among the services in their ability to move copy and their attitude towards the pool reporters. Far and away the best were the U.S. Marine Corps, who were particularly praised for their use of laptop computers in expediting the flow of copy.⁷² The Marines, under the command of Lieutenant General Walter Boomer who was previously the USMC Public Affairs Officer, were generally the most cooperative.⁷³ The Army seemed indifferent and sometimes hostile to the reporters,⁷⁴ more interested in damage control than in getting their story out.⁷⁵

Changes to copy made in the field in the security guideline review process lacked consistency or at times were made for reasons not related to operational security. For example, while in a pool, Malcom Browne found out that stealth aircraft had "smashed Iraq's laboratories and plants involved in developing nuclear weapons. This is news of the first magnitude...we ask the stealth commander for permission to report the happy tidings, but he turns us down on the grounds that new attacks on the nuclear facilities

might be needed, and nothing should be reported until the job is completed. We agree, of course, but the following day Agence France-Presse, the French news agency, scoops us on the story by getting details of the raid from the staff of a U.S. senator, and the day after that, General Schwarzkopf announces the raid himself."⁷⁶

In a different type of change, Frank Bruni of The Detroit Free Press was asked by a wing commander to agree to a change in a story where the word describing returning pilots was switched from "giddy" to "proud".⁷⁷ Discounting the inherent delay caused by the review process, ASD(PA) reported that of the 1351 print pool reports written, only five were appealed as far as Washington. Four were cleared by the Pentagon and the fifth was withdrawn by the reporter's editor-in-chief.

The Pentagon, by insisting on copy review, ignored another aspect of media behavior, that of self-censorship. In an earlier study of reporters who covered DOD, Robert Sims observed "whatever their political persuasion, the Pentagon reporters deny any desire to report information that would result in physical harm to individuals serving the United States. Most indicate they will voluntarily withhold such information if they are convinced it would have that result."⁷⁸

CBS News managing editor and anchor Dan Rather has referred to a "gut feel" regarding national security and⁷⁹ exercised that feeling at least twice during Operation

Desert Storm. In one instance, a CBS cameraman working in the field with the U.S. Seventh Corps ran into an old Army buddy and was innocently taken into a sensitive area where the Seventh Corps ground attack plan was depicted on a map. The friend explained the plan in enough detail that the cameraman could remember the planned locations, deployment, and objectives of each combat division. When the cameraman returned to Dhahran, he reported what he had learned to CBS. When briefed on the material, Rather recognized how harmful the divulgence would be and immediately killed the story.⁸⁰

In a similar case, CBS shot video tape footage of a briefing on a U.S. aircraft carrier which mistakenly had a map with the battle plan in the background.⁸¹ The tape was not used.

Respected Washington columnist David S. Broder, after Desert Storm was over, reflected "the conflict between the press and the military on real matters of security is minimal. The Washington Post and other organizations voluntarily withheld information they possessed that would have tipped off Saddam Hussein to the flanking movement that routed his forces. They voluntarily withheld information about the operation of Special Forces units behind Iraqi lines. The press does not have to prove its patriotism--nor apologize for its judgement."⁸²

Another rough spot was the performance of the military officers acting as media escorts. Previously viewed as facilitators of interviews and the media's advocate, public affairs officers were now considered to be harming the flow

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of information between the troops and the press. While some escorts were excellent at facilitating, many others were perceived as an inhibiting presence with the troops (Army PAOs carried cards given to the soldiers to remind them that they did not have to be interviewed, called by the pool reporters the "Miranda warnings") and one zealous PAO threw himself in front of the camera when a soldier said a forbidden word.⁸⁴

The escorts were mostly reservists. At least half had not attended the basic public affairs course and were not aware of the media's sensitivities and problems.⁸⁵ Also, the escorts worked for CENTCOM who wanted control and who didn't want to be embarrassed, so they were caught in the middle between their bosses' desires and the media's needs.⁸⁶

Lastly, the pool system could not be sustained once the ground war started.⁸⁷ Pools were perceived to be necessary by the CENTCOM JIB for security review. The breakdown was noted but there was no plan to change.⁸⁸ In January, some reporters, called unilaterals, began attempting to operate outside of the pool arrangements. After the capture of CBS correspondent Bob Simon and his crew by the Iraqis, unilaterals fell off. However, as the ground war began, pools began to become less compelling. It was a function of the winning atmosphere-reporters were not afraid of getting shot or captured.⁸⁹ Editors and reporters continued to complain about the slowness with which pool reports were sent back from the front,⁹⁰ but the most important reason was

that the unilaterals began getting the best stories.⁹¹ The most dramatic example of that was Bob McKeown and his CBS crew entering the inner ring of Kuwait City before the American Marines could get there and before most of the Iraqi defenders had left.⁹²

To the CENTCOM JIB, the unilaterals were a surprise because they thought the Saudi officials would shut down the roads to the battlefield.⁹³ The press found they had greater outreach with unilaterals and started using them more often. The brevity of this particular war saved the military from the long-range result it had set up. The breakdown of the system in just a day or so of ground warfare foretold eventual failure. The anger of the press corps was building, reporters were defying the pool-and-escort edict and the poolbreakers were coming up with better stories than the pool members.⁹⁴ "The pool was never intended to be the be-all and end-all of coverage," says Fred Hoffman, a former Pentagon spokesman who helped devise the pool set-up. "It shouldn't have been used beyond the earliest stages of the war."⁹⁵

Of course, the reporters who were on-scene in Saudi Arabia were not guiltless. Many had never covered a war, did not know how to do it, and asked ignorant or silly questions.⁹⁶ Bill Monroe, editor of Washington Journalism Review, noted that "the press-military tension also takes its character from the ignorance and prejudice of the press."⁹⁷ Newsday reporter Patrick J. Slovan, recent Pulitzer

Prize winner for articles on the aftermath of the Gulf War, observed "a lot of editors and publishers got conned into going into the Pentagon pool system. They went into the bag." ⁹⁸

An Assessment

Pete Williams, ASD(PA), began his assessment of the media's performance by offering to debunk two "negative myths;" that the press didn't do a good job of coverage (quoting public opinion polls saying the public was happy) and that reporters didn't have much of a chance to report the war (adopting the logic that at least some of them in pools got to see troops). ⁹⁹ However, the DOD Interim Report on the Persian Gulf War cited three shortcomings regarding the Public Affairs officers: command support was uneven, some PAOs could not judge operational security violations, and they had improperly restricted access by stopping interviews, dictating questions and attempting to get reporters to change their reports. ¹⁰⁰

The first problem was the reliance on media pools by DOD. ASD(PA) cites the tremendous number of media in country as the reason, and 1600 in country smacks of pack journalism. ¹⁰¹ One might anticipate that as advertising revenue drops, the networks might be driven by economics to common coverage. ¹⁰² However, it would be their decision as to how best provide independent coverage.

Cragg Hines, Washington bureau chief of The Houston Chronicle, observed in Congressional testimony: "Covering a war by pools must be something like phone sex, judging by the middle-of-the-night television ads. It sounds safe and easy, and with enough imagination you could get the job done, but you instinctively know there is a better way." ¹⁰³ By keeping the pools and security review as a long-term proposition, DOD shifted the balance that Eisenhower referred to, and restricted and controlled media coverage. ¹⁰⁴ Martha Teichner of CBS summed up the situation: "You've got incompetence from the bottom up and you've got resistance from the top down and it met where we were, the pool. It all came together, and it was disasterous." ¹⁰⁵

Robert Manoff, director of the Center for War, Peace and the News Media, charged that "the campaign in Saudi Arabia was managed like an American political campaign. Imagery was a dominant concern." ¹⁰⁶ The Pentagon did an excellent job of controlling the flow of information. The restrictions gave the military a major say in where journalists could go and what they could report. ¹⁰⁷ Since only a small number of reporters had access to the battlefield, most were dependent on the daily briefings in Riyadh and Washington for news. They were handled with great skill. Learning the lessons of the "Five O'clock Follies," the briefings were filled with facts and figures and the men who conducted them were cooperative, usually candid and, when it came to estimates of enemy damage, very cautious. Pete

Williams states "this was the first government operation I know of that had euphoria control."¹⁰⁸ Williams concludes in a review of the operation "the next operation will undoubtedly be different. The presumption, in any event, must be against pools."¹⁰⁹

Another argument regarding DOD controlling coverage is that by dictating what is covered and, by being covered becomes known, DOD shapes the framework of subsequent discussion and later budget decisions by the public and the Congress. This returns to the original discussion of popular sovereignty and the idea that the people can best protect and exercise their sovereignty if they are informed and in possession of the knowledge with which to carry on public debate and make decisions.¹¹⁰ It seems in this case public information gave way to public relations.

In 1971 during the Pentagon papers case, Tom Wicker of The New York Times wrote "the great lesson of the Pentagon record is the ability to operate in secrecy breeds contempt for that very public in whose name and interest officials claim to act...When men are relieved of the burden of public scrutiny, uncomfortable as it may be, no other form of accountability takes its place."¹¹¹ Obviously there is a need for some secrecy in military affairs. Considerations of security and tactical flexibility require it, though usually for only brief periods of time.¹¹² The use of guidelines for "security" expand this period of time as well as become manipulative. The conclusion must be that because of the

policies accepted by the news media, they did not achieve the standard for independent verification set by the First Amendment.

As noted above, ASD(PA) is vague about what will happen next time. There certainly will be new problems to face, particularly the change from reporting what happened to reporting what is happening. Major General Winant Sidle, head of the 1984 Sidle Commission, summarized "the appropriate media role in relation to the government has been summarized aptly as being neither a lap dog or an attack dog but, rather, as a watch dog. Mutual antagonism and distrust are not in the best interests of the media, the military or the American people." ¹¹³

The tension between the military and the media described by General Eisenhower still exists, but he also gave the solution-to work together. The Sidle Commission wrote in concluding its report: "The optimum solution to ensure proper coverage of military operations is to have the military-represented by competent, professional public affairs personnel and commanders who understand media problems-working with the media-represented by competent professional reporters and editors who understand military problems-in a nonantagonistic atmosphere. The panel urges both institutions to adopt this philosophy and make it work." ¹¹⁴

APPENDIX A

The Sidle Commission offered eight recommendations:

(1) Public Affairs planning should be made concurrently with the operational planning.

(2) If a media pool is the only way to provide access, it should be as large as possible and maintained only as long as necessary.

(3) The Secretary of Defense should decide whether to prepare a ready list of reporters.

(4) Media access should depend on media voluntary compliance with security guidelines.

(5) Public affairs planning should include enough personnel and equipment to assist correspondents.

(6) Planners should strive to accomodate journalists at the earliest possible time without interfering with combat operations.

(7) Planners should attempt to include intra-and inter-theater transportation for the media.

(8) Military public affairs representatives and news organization leaders should meet to discuss their differences.

APPENDIX B

Ground Rules-January 14, 1991

The following information should not be reported because its publication or broadcast could jeopardize operations and endanger lives:

(1) For U.S. or coalition units, specific numerical information on troop strength, aircraft, weapons systems, on-hand equipment, or supplies (e.g., artillery, tanks, radars, missiles, trucks, water), including amounts of ammunition or fuel moved by or on hand in support and combat units. Unit size may be described in general terms such as "company-size," "multibattalion," "naval task force," and "carrier battle group." Number or amount of equipment and supplies may be described in general terms such as "large," "small," or "many."

(2) Any information that reveals details of future plans, operations, or strikes, including postponed or cancelled operations.

(3) Information, photography, and imagery that would reveal the specific location of military forces or show the level of security at military installations or encampments. Nations may be described as follows: all Navy embark stories can identify the ship upon which embarked as a dateline and will state the report is coming from the "Persian Gulf," "Red Sea," or "North Arabian Sea." Stories written in Saudi Arabia may be datelined "Eastern Saudi Arabia," "Near the Kuwait border," etc. For specific countries outside Saudi Arabia, stories will state that the report is coming from the Persian Gulf region unless that country has acknowledged its participation.

(4) Rules of engagement details.

(5) Information on intelligence collection activities, including targets, methods, and results.

(6) During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movements, tactical deployments, and dispositions that would jeopardize operational security or lives. This would include unit designations, names of operations, and size of friendly forces involved, until released by CENTCOM.

(7) Identification of mission aircraft points of origin, other than as land- or carrier-based.

(8) Information on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection, or security measures.

(9) Specific identifying information on missing or downed aircraft or ships while search and rescue operations are planned or underway.

(10) Special operations forces' methods, unique equipment or tactics.

(11) Specific operating methods and tactics, (e.g., air angles of attack or speeds, or naval tactics and evasive maneuvers). General terms such as "low" or "fast" may be used.

(12) Information on operational and support vulnerabilities that could be used against U.S. forces, such as details of major battle damage or major personnel losses of specific U.S. or coalition units, until that information no longer provides tactical advantage to the enemy and is, therefore, released by CENTCOM. Damage and casualties may be described as "light," "moderate," or "heavy."

NOTES

1 From the forward of "Regulations for War Correspondents Accompanying Allied Expeditionary Force in the Field." Copy found in U.S. Cong. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs Hearing on Pentagon Rules on Media Access to the Persian Gulf War, 102nd Congress, 1st Sess., S Hrg 102-178, p. 887.

2 Douglas Waller, private interview, March 5, 1992.

3 Alexander Hamilton, The Federalist Papers ed. by Clinton Rossiter (New York: A Mentor Book: New American Library, 1961), p. 517.

4 The four states which did not include freedom of the press were New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Connecticut. See Peter Stoler, The War Against the Press (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1986), p. 27.

5 U.S. Const. Amend I.

6 Stoler, p. 21.

7 Ibid., p. 15.

8 Ibid., p. 7.

9 William J. Small, Political Power and the Press (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1972), p. 20.

10 Ibid., p. 10.

11 This section is based on Joseph J. Mathews, Reporting the Wars (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), pp. 31-51 and William M. Hammond, Public Affairs: The Military and the Media (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 3-7.

12 Hammond, p. 3.

13 Mathews, p. 86.

14 The Spanish American War of 1898 was slightly different in that portions of the press actively campaigned for the war with Spain. In response to a reporter in Cuba who said there was nothing to report, publisher William Randolph Hearst replied "I'll provide the war, you provide the reporting." After the U.S. entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson created a Committee on Public Information headed by George Creel. Creel wanted voluntary restraint by the press but Congress created censorship within two months. See Stoler, p. 96, and Small, p. 72.

15 Walter Cronkite, "What is There to Hide?" Newsweek, Feb. 25, 1991, p. 43. The same idea is expressed more fully in Cronkite's testimony on Feb. 21, 1991, to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. See S Hrg 102-178, p. 21-23.

16 Actually, Admiral King met periodically with a group of writers on a not-for-attribution basis during the war, particularly after press complaints regarding the late release of information concerning the Battles of Coral Sea and Midway. See Thomas J. Buell, Master of Sea Power (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), pp. 259-262.

17 Peter Braestrup, Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1985), p. 50.

18 Ibid., p. 53.

19 Hammond, p. 7.

20 Stoler, p. 58.

21 Winant Sidle, Major General, USA(Ret), "The Gulf War Reheats Military-Media Controversy," Military Review, September, 1991, p. 55.

22 Ibid., p. 54.

23 Stoler, p. 62.

24 Braestrup, p. 64.

25 Sidle, p. 54.

26 Ibid.

27 Quoted in Robert G. Kaiser, "Trust Me," The Washington Post, Jan. 27, 1991, p. C7.

28 Stoler, p. 69.

29 Braestrup, p. 74.

30 Ibid., p.90.

31 Ibid., p. 93.

32 Joseph W. Metcalf III, Vice Admiral, USN(Ret), "The Mother of the Mother," U.S.Naval Institute Proceedings, August, 1991, p. 56.

33 Stoler, p. 179.

- 34 Braestrup, p. 113.
- 35 Ibid., p. 123.
- 36 CJCS Media-Military Relations Panel Report (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1984), p. 4
- 37 Ibid., p. 8.
- 38 Braestrup, p. 24.
- 39 This section is drawn from Braestrup, pp. 129-130.
- 40 Sidle, p. 53.
- 41 Braestrup, p. 22.
- 42 Quoted in Stoler, p. 165.
- 43 Quoted in Small, p. 41.
- 44 Pete Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," Parameters, Autumn, 1991, p. 6. Mr. Williams declined to be interviewed for this paper.
- 45 Commander Greg Hartung, USN, private interview, Dec. 11, 1991.
- 46 John Fialka, private interview, Dec. 23, 1991. Fialka, a Wall Street Journal reporter, is just completing a study of this topic, The Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf, to be published by the Media Studies Project/Woodrow Wilson Center.
- 47 Good Morning America, ABC, WJLA, Jan. 11, 1991.
- 48 The "Sacred Sixteen" included USA Today, Gannett, Knight-Ridder, The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Boston Globe, Newsday, The Washington Times, The Dallas Morning News, Stars and Stripes, and Cox Newspapers. See Frank A. Aukofer, "The Press Collaborators," Nieman Reports, Summer, 1991, p. 24.
- 49 William Boot, "The Fool," Columbia Journalism Review, May/June, 1991, p. 25.
- 50 Fialka interview.
- 51 R.W. Apple, Jr., "Correspondents Protest Pool System," The New York Times, Feb. 12, 1991, p. A14.
- 52 Malcom W. Browne, "The Military vs. the Press," The New York Times Magazine, Mar. 3, 1991, p. 28.

- 53 S Hrg 102-178, p. 593.
- 54 Ibid., p. 597.
- 55 Williams, p. 6.
- 56 S Hrg 102-178, p. 636.
- 57 Williams, p. 5.
- 58 Sidle, p. 58.
- 59 Ibid., p. 59.
- 60 "Talk of the Town," The New Yorker, Feb. 4, 1991, p. 21.
- 61 William Boot, "The Press Stands Alone," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April, 1991, p. 23.
- 62 Fialka interview.
- 63 Boot, "The Press Stands Alone," p. 23.
- 64 Quoted in Richard Valeriani, "Talking Back to the Tube," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April, 1991, p. 24.
- 65 S Hrg 102-178, p. 32.
- 66 Captain Michael Doubleday, USN, and Commander Greg Hartung, USN, private interviews, Dec. 11, 1991.
- 67 Browne, p. 45.
- 68 S Hrg 102-178, p. 33. Also verified with Fialka during private interview Dec. 23, 1991.
- 69 S Hrg 102-178, p. 660.
- 70 Guy Gugliotta, "Signs of Breakdown in the Pool System," The Washington Post, Feb. 27, 1991, p. A27.
- 71 United States Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1991), p. 19-3.
- 72 Fialka interview. Also mentioned by Col. Ralph Mitchell, USA(Ret), private interview, Dec. 12, 1991, and Williams, p. 8.
- 73 Mitchell interview.
- 74 Mitchell and Fialka interviews.

- 75 After the fact, the services expressed concern about how their treatment by the media had affected the public perception of the service's contribution to the success of Desert Storm. This theme is explored in the case of the U.S. Navy throughout U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings August, 1991, issue. Also see John Burlage, "When Navy Avoided the Press, It also Hid Its Successes," Navy Times, Sep. 23, 1991, p. 31, and Rowan Scarborough, "Tight Lips Sank Ship's Role in Gulf," The Washington Times, Oct. 6, 1991, p. 7.
- 76 Browne, p. 45.
- 77 Ibid., p. 44.
- 78 Robert B. Sims, The Pentagon Reporters (Washington, D.C.: National University Press, 1983), p. 145.
- 79 Remarks made during a lecture at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces on Sep. 24, 1991. Mr. Rather declined to be interviewed or answer written questions for this paper.
- 80 Mitchell interview.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 David S. Broder, "The War Story," The Washington Post, Mar. 20, 1991, p. A25.
- 83 Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict, p. 19-3.
- 84 Williams, p. 8.
- 85 Hartung interview.
- 86 Doubleday interview.
- 87 Gugliotta, p. A27.
- 88 Doubleday interview.
- 89 Hartung interview.
- 90 Richard Zoglin, "It was a Public Relations Rout Too," Time, Mar. 11, 1991, p. 57.
- 91 Bill Monroe, "How to Cover War: Forget the Pool," Washington Journalism Review, May, 1991, p. 6.
- 92 Mitchell interview.
- 93 Doubleday interview.

- 94 Monroe, p. 6.
- 95 Zoglin, p. 57.
- 96 Theodore Draper, "The True History of the Gulf War," The New York Review of Books, Jan. 30, 1992, p. 43.
- 97 Bill Monroe, "How the Generals Outdid the Journalists," Washington Journalism Review, April, 1991, p. 6.
- 98 Howard Kurtz, "Newsday, N.Y. Times and Sacramento Bee Win 2 Pulitzers Each," The Washington Post, April 8, 1992, p. A4.
- 99 Williams, p. 2.
- 100 Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict, p. 19-4.
- 101 Broder, p. 25.
- 102 RADM Brent Baker, USN, "Last One in the Pool...", U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, August, 1991, p. 71.
- 103 S Hrg 102-178, p. 37.
- 104 Ibid., p. 728.
- 105 Draper, p. 44.
- 106 Zoglin, p. 57.
- 107 Ibid., p. 56.
- 108 Williams, p. 3.
- 109 Ibid., p. 9.
- 110 Stoler, p. 105.
- 111 Small, p. 255.
- 112 Ibid., p. 259.
- 113 S Hrg 102-178, p. 54.
- 114 Sidle, p.63.

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