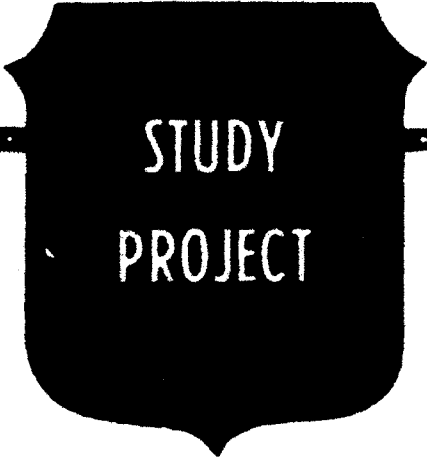


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MILITARY/MEDIA RELATIONSHIP  
IN FUTURE CONFLICT

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BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL RANDALL L. PINGLEY  
United States Army

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## ABSTRACT

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There appears to always have been an adversarial relationship between the military and the media. Most people believe that relationship grew out of the Vietnam conflict, but it actually began during the Civil War. Press correspondents were referred to as 'paid spies' by the military on both sides during the Civil War. Vietnam served only to widen the chasm between the military and the media.

This paper briefly traces the history of military/media relations from Vietnam through our involvement in Somalia. Each conflict during the past two and one-half decades is discussed in an attempt to discover the root causes for the friction between the military and the media. The common thread throughout is the underlying problem that the military and the media do not trust each other nor do they have confidence in each other. In conclusion, it makes suggestions how the military and the media can learn to trust each other and gain confidence in each other.

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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MILITARY/MEDIA RELATIONSHIP IN FUTURE CONFLICT

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Randall L. Pingley  
United States Army

Lieutenant Colonel William H. Harkey  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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## MILITARY/MEDIA RELATIONSHIP IN FUTURE CONFLICT

"The mission of Army public affairs is to strengthen the Army's deterrence and warfighting powers by timely, accurate and truthful communication about our Army to soldiers, their families, and to U.S. and foreign publics. Effective public affairs efforts produce motivated soldiers and support from the American public, while deterring potential enemies."<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

As an introduction, it is necessary to provide an understanding of what public affairs is all about. The next few pages will explain the three subordinate missions of public affairs and the principles of public affairs and provide an understanding of how they are used to accomplish the overall public affairs mission.

Principles of public affairs taught at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) will be examined and discussed. Additionally, this paper will examine the public information mission of Army public affairs and, in particular, examine how the Army handles media relations during crisis. For comparison, this paper will also discuss how the Marine Corps handled public information during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

All public affairs personnel from the various services, and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians learn their basic skills at DINFOS located at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. This single defense-wide school provides all public affairs personnel in DOD

with the same foundation and provides for a more consistent handling of public affairs issues than if each service had its own school. The three broad public affairs missions taught at DINFOS are command information, public information, and community relations.

Command information is that "information provided to soldiers, their families, civilian employees and other internal audiences."<sup>2</sup> Command information is the program by which a commander communicates to the members of his command. It is a fundamental function of command. It is fully the responsibility of the commander, but the public affairs staff is charged with its management and implementation.

Public information is that "information provided to American and foreign publics through the civilian news media."<sup>3</sup> Public information has its focus on external audiences. The basic tenet of public information is to tell the entire story as accurately and quickly as possible to as many people as possible. Media relations plays an integral role in public information, and providing required support to the media is the most demanding challenge for the public affairs staff.

Community relations is "direct contact with civilians and community leaders in areas of military operations."<sup>4</sup> Community relations is more of a support and coordination role. Staff responsibility for community relations can vary and is different in Continental United States (CONUS) commands from overseas commands. In overseas commands, it is normally a shared function

with the G-5 staff element that has responsibility for civil affairs, host nation support, civil-military operations and maneuver damage; however, during combat operations, it is a civil affairs mission that the public affairs staff supports. In any case, the overseas command public affairs staff is very much involved in the community relations program. In the realm of community relations, both CONUS and overseas commands' public affairs staff analyze public opinion, arrange for speakers to address the local community, counter adverse public relations with the community and coordinate many other events where the command relates to the local community.

All services and unified commands have actively functioning public affairs programs. However, they do not articulate the subordinate missions of public affairs in the same ways. Some have just two subordinate missions and type them as to audience, either internal or external. The services also implement the internal and external programs differently and allocate resources to support these missions in various manners. Nevertheless, all have the primary mission of managing the information flow about the organization and coordinating media relations for the commander.

While the services differ on how they accomplish the three subordinate public affairs missions, they all adhere to the same public affairs principles. It is the policy of the Department of Defense "to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, Congress, and members representing the press,

radio, and television may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy."<sup>5</sup> In the realm of public information, the basic tenets laid out in the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act will be followed to the fullest extent. Requested information will be provided by DOD sources as rapidly as possible and as completely as possible without breaching any valid security classification. Furthermore, requested information will not be withheld by DOD sources solely to protect the government from embarrassment or criticism. Additionally, there will be no purposeful classification of requested information to avoid providing it to the requestor. Requested information will only be withheld from the requestor when its disclosure would adversely affect national security or place members of the Armed Forces at undue risk. The following quote illustrates the point:

"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 those sometimes diverse considerations."

**General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1944**

Department of Defense directives provide a very centralized system for public information release for items of national interest. The public information release authority is a direct line from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs to the Unified Commander or the Service Chief. This dichotomy

between "full and fast disclosure" and the DOD centralized release system is like a two-edged sword. On one side it says to tell everything honestly and accurately and tell it in a timely manner. However, on the other side it lays out a centralized system that must approve what is to be released prior to its release.

Now, there are some public affairs principles that serve as a guide in the interpretation of public affairs policy and they should be discussed. However, I will only discuss those principles that relate directly to public information and media relations. Those principles<sup>6</sup> are:

1. Public affairs is a function of command.
2. Public information is a force multiplier.
3. The public affairs officer is the command spokesman.
4. Public affairs requires command emphasis.
5. Public affairs belongs on the battlefield.
6. Public information and command information can become the same in war.

Clearly, public affairs is a function of command and must have the full support of the commander to be successful. The commander sets the tone for all the public affairs programs. In order to clearly display that tone, the commander must be accessible and must ensure that his staff keeps the public affairs staff in the information loop. Too many times the public affairs staff is left out of the command's operations planning

and, therefore, must play catch up when information is requested from outside sources.

The commander must be involved and must back the Public Affairs Officer (PAO). And he must listen to him. A command can have the best PAO in the world, but he will be totally ineffective if the support of the commander is not clearly present. This support goes a long way when the PAO acts as the commander's trusted agent, the command's official spokesperson.

The public affairs officer is responsible for responding to external communications queries and is trained to do so. In order for the PAO to fulfill that responsibility, he must be kept totally informed by the commander and his staff. There are apparently many Army commands that still try to keep their public affairs staff in the dark, particularly in the plans and operations arena. In those cases, those commands will almost always be doomed to failure in their public information and media relations missions.

When used properly, public information can be a viable force multiplier and certainly belongs on the battlefield. Public information keeps the hometown folks across America, and our allies around the world, informed about our armed forces, and serves to enlighten the public and provide them an understanding of the ongoing military operation.

The following quote from the report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force that studied the military and media after the 1983 invasion of Grenada illustrates this point:

"Our free press, when it accompanies the nation's soldiers into battle, performs a unique role. It serves as eye witness; it forges a bond between the citizen and the soldier and, at its best, it strives to avoid manipulation either by officials or by critics of the government through accurate independent reporting. It also provides one of the checks and balances that sustains the confidence of the American people in their political system and armed forces."<sup>7</sup>

The Marine Corps certainly did an outstanding job of proving this theory during Desert Shield and Desert Storm and it appeared to the public that they won the ground war single handedly. Apparently, the Army has not learned that lesson yet. Public information releases were made all over the theater of operations in Southwest Asia, but the Marines garnered most of the publicity, skewing the coverage of the ground war, in which they performed a much smaller role than the Army.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the public information releases were instrumental in attaining and keeping American public and allied support throughout the Gulf War.

Prior to concluding my discussion on public affairs policy, missions, and principles, I would like to quote the First Amendment from our Constitution which is our basis for free speech and a free press.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the First Amendment and the Freedom of Information Act provide DOD and the media with much latitude in their interpretation of those documents concerning public information in a free society.

#### MILITARY + MEDIA = FRICTION

"The media can't afflict the comfortable and champion the oppressed by trusting government officials. In fact, when both are doing their jobs properly, there should be tension, skepticism and friction between government and the media. As I tell my staff, we should always be just on the verge of having a food fight with each other."

General Colin L. Powell  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
March 15, 1991

There appears to always have been an adversarial relationship between the military and the media. Most people believe that relationship grew out of the Vietnam conflict, but it actually began much earlier. During the Civil War, press correspondents were referred to as 'paid spies.' Vietnam served to widen the chasm between the military and the media.

Most military professionals blame the media for the military's loss of the American public's support and, ultimately, the United States withdrawal from Vietnam. Vietnam was the first conflict ever fought without some sort of official censorship and the military, particularly the Army, paid dearly and has not forgotten the lesson.

Vietnam was the most reported war in history. The media wanted our plans, force levels, deployments and details of our future operations. Competition among the several hundred reporters that covered the war was keen for sensational stories. This caused some reporters to intentionally put words into the mouths of young soldiers and to occasionally purposefully misinterpret statements by officials. Many young reporters soon recognized that the more criticism and the more negativism they reported, the greater the possibility of recognition and, ultimately, fame and fortune. Many of the young reporters in Vietnam were inexperienced, uninformed and frequently biased against the U.S. military establishment. Furthermore, they were, all too often, allowed to go unchallenged by both their peers and their superiors. The libertarian point of view amongst the media had firmly taken root and widened the cultural gap between the media and the U.S. military. According to Peter Braestrup, it has grown even wider. He writes, "with the end of the draft in 1972 and the influx of women into journalism, the culture gap between journalists and the U.S. military had widened greatly since Vietnam."<sup>10</sup>

Television presented special problems never before witnessed. It brought war into the American living room. Its news was compressed and visually dramatic. Its coverage was literally a 'mile wide and an inch deep.' American families were able to see the bloodshed, hear the guns firing, see huts burning and helicopters crashing every evening during prime time news. They saw and heard Walter Cronkite close his CBS news broadcast each evening with the daily tabulated body count for both sides as if it were a high scoring NBA game of the week. War was reported for the first time like crime on a police beat, or a no-holds-barred political campaign. Tremendous friction and even hatred evolved between the media and the U.S. military. Neither trusted the other.

It was apparent that the media had not read Sun Tzu, who wrote over twenty-five centuries earlier: "Break the will of the enemy to fight and you accomplish the true objective of war, cover with ridicule the enemy's tradition, exploit and aggravate the inherent frictions within the enemy country. Agitate the young against the old. Prevail if possible without armed conflict. 'Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.'"<sup>11</sup> That is perhaps the most profound lesson learned from that era by the media and the military.

## GRENADA AND THE SIDLE PANEL REPORT

"Here's something you should know about that war that's going on in the Gulf: much of the news that you read or hear or see is being censored....There is no excuse for this kind of censorship which exceeds even the most stringent censorship of World War II. The press was shut out of Grenada, cooped up in Panama, and put on the late plane [carrying the Pentagon press pool] into Saudi Arabia."<sup>12</sup>

Michael Gartner  
President of NBC News  
August 30, 1990

I want to focus on Mr. Gartner's comment about Grenada and the press being shut out of Operation Urgent Fury. The intent of the U.S. military planners was not to shut the press out of Grenada. The plan was to introduce the media into Grenada at 5 o'clock on Tuesday, the afternoon of the invasion. But the media were not told of this plan until after the invasion had commenced for fear of losing the element of surprise. The plan fell apart when the enemy did not capitulate as expected. The Cubans were not expected to fight, but they did. The plan did not unfold as expected; instead, it came unravelled.

By 5 o'clock on that Tuesday afternoon the fog of war was very thick. The U.S. military reasoned that there was no way to protect the media, so the Task Force Commander, Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, decided to delay their arrival on the island. Quite naturally and as expected, there was a tremendous uproar from the media. History may show that while Urgent Fury was a

skirmish in terms of warfare, it may prove to be the 'mother of battles' of information warfare.

At the time of the Grenada invasion, relations between the media and the U.S. military had eroded to an appalling state. Again, the root of the problem was Vietnam. As I stated earlier, the military brooded over the loss in Vietnam and many blamed the media. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, a division commander during Urgent Fury, participated in Vietnam, Grenada, and Desert Storm, and this is how he felt about the media: "Well, I dealt with the press on a different level in Vietnam than I did in Grenada and in the desert war. I will confess to you that I'm one of those people who came away very disappointed in the press coverage of Vietnam. I saw what I called cooked stories. There were bold-faced lies. So I came away very disappointed and, I will confess, somewhat prejudiced. Having said that, by the time Grenada came around I had matured far beyond that. I had learned from my Vietnam experience."<sup>13</sup>

Had he and the other military authority figures who served in Vietnam really learned anything? I doubt it. The normal adversarial relationship between the media and the military had given way to ugly confrontation during Urgent Fury.

U.S. military spokespersons usually felt that the media were out to get them. They felt that the media assumed that they were always hiding something or lying. This period was the heyday of the anonymous 'informed source.' Paranoia roamed the corridors of the Pentagon. The media and the Pentagon played games with

each other. DOD even resorted to releasing bad news on Friday afternoon, too late for the prime time news. They hoped--and their strategy usually worked--that by Monday the event would not be newsworthy. This was the environment in which the Grenada operation, and the subsequent reporting of it, took place.

The defining aspect of Urgent Fury was that the media did not have immediate access to the scene of combat. It is still the issue that transcends all others. The policy of 'no media' until late into the first day of the invasion was probably a logical extension of the tight security that covered the early planning and the diversion of the amphibious force and carrier battle group into the Caribbean. Additionally, there was a lack of guidance from DOD and JCS. Operational security was not a factor in the media guidance since they were introduced into the theater at D+2 and nearly all hostile action had ceased. Nevertheless, when the media were finally introduced into the theater on D+2, the following rules were established by Vice Admiral Metcalf:

- \* Safety of military personnel, students and journalists were the primary considerations.
- \* Troops in a combat area should not be burdened with the responsibility of the safety of the media.
- \* The media should not be exposed to hostile fire.
- \* Media, if in the area of troops in combat, would be escorted by a PAO.

\* Accommodations for the media must be available whether ashore or aboard one of the ships.

Was the public well served in the reporting of the Grenada invasion? Probably not, particularly if you judge by the standard that the media sets for itself for informing the public. The war was over by the time they got there. Something had to be initiated by DOD to ensure that the next war would not be missed by the media.

The aftermath of Grenada saw an uproar by the media which led the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to commission a panel headed up by Major General (Retired) Winant Sidle, a former Chief of Army Public Affairs. The panel's task was to make recommendations to the CJCS on, "How do we conduct military operations in a manner that safeguards the lives of our military and protects the security of the operation while keeping the American public informed through the media?"<sup>14</sup>

The Sidle panel report identified many public affairs areas of concern and made concrete recommendations on media relations, support of the media during military operations and public affairs participation in the contingency planning process. The panel determined that it was time for new ideas, new technology and new ways of supporting the public affairs mission. Furthermore, the panel felt strongly that as much as any other operational area, a new informational paradigm must evolve. The lesson from Grenada for public affairs was clear. The media

will be present in future conflicts. They will find a way to cover the conflict, especially if it is determined to be of national interest and prime time news coverage is sought by the networks. Therefore, with that understanding, the Sidle panel made the following eight recommendations:<sup>15</sup>

- \* That public affairs planning for military operations be conducted concurrently with operational planning.

- \* When it becomes apparent during military operational planning that news 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.

- \* That, in connection with the use of pools, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend to the Secretary of Defense that he study the matter of whether to use a pre-established and constantly updated accreditation or notification list of correspondents in case of a military operation for which a pool is required or the establishment of a news agency list for use in the same circumstances.

- \* That a basic tenet governing media access to military operations should be voluntary compliance by the media with security guidelines or ground rules established and issued by the military.

- \* Public affairs planning for military operations should include sufficient equipment and qualified military personnel whose function is to assist correspondents in covering the operation adequately.

\* Planners should carefully consider media communications requirements to assure the earliest feasible availability. However, these communications must not interfere with combat support operations.

\* Planning factors should include provision for intra- and inter-theater transportation support of the media.

\* Programs should be established in an effort to improve military and media understanding and cooperation. This would include top military public affairs representatives meeting with news organization leadership on a regular basis to discuss mutual problems. Also, to seek improved media understanding of the military through more visits by commanders and line officers to news organizations and to enlarge programs already underway to improve military understanding of the media through instruction in service schools.

Through these recommendations the Sidle panel report raised the awareness of the need to have the public affairs involved early in the contingency planning cycle to insure that adequate provisions are made to accommodate the media. The media pool concept was accepted by both the U.S. military and the media and it was widely accepted that programs were needed to foster a better understanding of each other and to promote better cooperation. However, a sore point for the media was, and still is, lack of dedicated transportation and communications assets to support them on the battlefield.

General Schwarzkopf had this to say about the Sidle panel report: "But the lesson we learned, I think, from Grenada is that we had to come up with a better way of dealing with the

press than what happened over there. It was after Grenada that the panel met with prominent members of the media to devise the system that we in fact used in Desert Storm, the pool system. It was based upon what happened in Grenada that we came up with the system they used in the Gulf War, and that's why I had to chuckle that at the end of the Gulf War another commission met to decide how we're going to handle the next situation because nobody was happy with the way it was handled in the Gulf War."<sup>16</sup>

Grenada and the Sidle panel report served to focus our attention on U.S. military and media relations. The constant presence of the national media keeps the Pentagon focused on their relationship with the media and forces them to plan on their role in the next conflict. The people of the United States were deprived of the story of American pride, ingenuity, well trained and led soldiers that were successful in the Grenada rescue operation. The media vowed not to allow that to happen in the future.

## THE GULF WAR AND THE MEDIA POOL

"The hundreds of newspeople in the hotels of Dhahran and Riyadh were roughly in the same situation as their journalistic forebears in London during the spring of 1944 who awaited the climatic D-Day landings by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's Allied forces. Those World War II reporters attended briefings on heavy Allied bombing raids against targets in France and Germany, visited, under escort, U.S. units to do human interest features, submitted their dispatches to censorship, and chafed at the restrictions and lack of good stories and action."<sup>17</sup>

This is the viewpoint of John Fialka, the author of Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War. It is shared by many of the estimated 1600 media representatives<sup>18</sup> that covered the war. But it is not the result of the media pool concept designed by the Sidle Panel. It is a result of the way that the pool was handled or mishandled by the U.S. military as the pool membership swelled prior to the start of the air campaign and by the time the ground war commenced. Fialka further points out that "the real test of the arrangements agreed to by the military and the press--censorship, pools, access, and military handling of communications and logistics---for the Gulf War came during the ground campaign, not during the prelude."<sup>19</sup> This was, in large part, due to the fact that there was no coherent U.S. military policy on how to handle combat media coverage. The chasm between American journalists and the military that was created during the Vietnam conflict remained largely unbridged.

Another factor that widened that chasm even more in the Gulf War was the tremendous distaste that members of the media pool had for the preferential treatment given certain members of the media by senior military leaders. They felt that there were too many media 'high rollers' that arrived in theater immediately prior to the ground war that got front row seats from senior military leaders without having to go through the media pool system. They were able to circumvent the system based upon their reputation with certain senior military leaders.

Many members of the media pool compared their treatment in the Gulf War to the way they were treated when the United States invaded Panama in December 1989. The media felt that they were cooped up in Panama by the military and not allowed to cover the conflict there. In the Gulf War, most felt exactly the same way.

Host nation sensitivities nearly prevented journalists from covering the Gulf War. There is no freedom of press in Saudi Arabia. It is a very closed society with little tourism and the Saudis did not want non-Islams running around photographing their country and people. Before the Gulf War, it was very difficult for foreign journalists to get visas and it was impossible for female journalists. Negotiations with the Saudi government caused them to lift their ban on foreign journalists, however, all journalistic efforts had to be screened and approved by the Saudi Ministry of Information.

There was no limit placed on the number of foreign journalists after the Saudis relented. There were upwards of

1600 media representatives in theater at the peak. However, only about 10%<sup>20</sup> were able to go into the field. When they did go to the field, they had to be escorted by public affairs staff or hastily trained media escort personnel. This tight security often created tension between the media and the military.

Unfortunately, memories of the Vietnam conflict shaped attitudes in the Gulf War on the way the media was to be handled by the military, especially how the Army would handle them.

The Commander-in-Chief for the Gulf War, General Schwarzkopf, was extremely sensitive to media coverage. His sensitivities were a hangover from Vietnam which were shared by many senior Army officers. Many of those senior Army officers felt that the media could not be trusted. Furthermore, they felt that biased journalism had, by itself, turned the American public against United States involvement in Vietnam and, if given half a chance, the media would portray the military in Southwest Asia in a negative light, too. Those distrusting senior Army officers were especially fearful of ratings-hungry television people.

However, President Bush vowed not to have another Vietnam. He called up the reserves, secured the assent of U.S. Congress and the support of the United Nations, clearly defined the objective, fixed a decisive strategy, and clearly was prepared to use maximum force necessary. Additionally, unlike Vietnam, he was going to allow the military, through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, to run the war.

President Bush further vowed that the outcome of the war was to be determined militarily and not politically. The key ingredient to that philosophy was the total support of the American public, and Bush understood that he would need the support of the media in order to maintain and sustain the support of the American people. The President understood that the media was the link between grass roots America and the American service men and women serving in the Gulf.

The media pool was the method that President Bush intended to use to get the word to the average person on the street. The media pool concept laid out by the Sidle Panel had been first tested in Panama. Both the media and the military agree that Panama was a poor test for the concept but, be that as it may, it was a test. And as a result of that meager test in Panama, the media pool concept did not change for the Gulf War.

The pool enables reporters to cover the earliest possible U.S. military action in a remote area where there is no other American news media presence, while still protecting the element of surprise--an essential part of operational security. The idea behind the concept, as it was hammered out in the Pentagon and in meetings with Washington bureau chiefs, was that reporters would be assigned to different units where they would be accompanied by an assigned military escort charged with assuring their personal safety and making sure their copy got back to the rear.

The military, especially the Army, quickly discovered that they were neither staffed nor equipped to handle the huge surge

of media in theater. The distances were vast by Vietnam standards. The strain on communications and logistics across the desert was considerable. Quickly the media in the Gulf called for a return to the military-press arrangements of the Vietnam conflict. Primarily, they wanted relatively free access to units in the field. In Vietnam, if reporters agreed to follow certain ground rules, they were allowed to hitchhike, often unescorted, to U.S. units in the field. Also, in contrast to the regime in World War II and Korea, there was no censorship of their dispatches in Vietnam.

Most members of the media felt that censorship was not the problem in the Gulf War. Officially sanctioned censorship rarely occurred. Of the 1300 reports filed by reporters working in pools, only one was officially censored by the Pentagon.<sup>21</sup> They were much more concerned about access and communications, and they felt that what got into their reports was heavily influenced by access. Additionally, they felt strongly that publication of their reports was seriously influenced by delay.

Nearly all media that covered the Army in the Gulf felt that they were neither provided sufficient access to Army units nor adequate communications to convey their dispatches to their home offices in a timely manner. The Pentagon insisted that the media be accompanied by military escorts, but it had not provided enough seasoned public affairs escorts and vehicles to do the job. Worst of all, the Army set up a jury-rigged system to get the media's copy, film, audio, and videotapes back to the rear.

In this digitized, lightning war, technology needed to get the news back to 'the world' stopped at the edge of the battlefield for the most part. Media accounts of major battles sometimes took three to four days to reach New York because of the Army's courier system, aptly called the 'pony express' by the media. As a result, the media feel that the American public did not get a clear, timely picture of the crucial Army effort.

Even though most members of the media will agree that there was no blatant censorship similar to that of World War II, there were numerous instances of subtle censorship. Examples cited by the media include military courier delays in sending copy to the rear, denied access to certain units or a geographic area, and copy lost by the military. Another common complaint was that everything that they were allowed to cover was sanitized by the military. They felt that the military was in strict control. For example, Pete Williams, the articulate spokesman and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, could arrange daily televised briefings in the Pentagon and he could listen to media complaints, but he could only negotiate with Central Command (CENTCOM) in Riyadh for most responses.

The Gulf War was shown, in most cases, as a non-violent war. The media was steered away from most of the violence because the bodies of the dead chopped up by artillery or pulverized by the air campaign do not play well, politically. There were rarely any scenes of death on either side. Donald Mell, a photo editor for the Associated Press who covered the war felt this way: "It

was what we didn't get that bothers me. There were no dead Iraqi soldiers. We had these massive tank battles, but I did not see a picture of an American tank being fired during the whole thing."<sup>22</sup> The surgical air strikes were played repeatedly and the collateral damage was downplayed through live, polished briefings by a multitude of well versed spokespersons at the Pentagon and in Riyadh. The following quote from Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War depicts the media's feelings in this area: "Much of what we wrote and videotaped out there remains unread and unseen to this day because the '100-Hour War' was presented to most viewers and readers in a tidy, antiseptic package. It was a finely orchestrated burst of high-tech violence where smart bombs landed precisely on the cross hairs; where generals made Babe Ruth style predictions that came true in real time; where the 'news' and its accompanying imagery were canned, wrapped, and delivered before the shooting was over."<sup>23</sup>

Next time will be different. Improved technology will make the members of the media less dependent on military communications and, therefore, censorship will be much harder to impose. Next time the media will possess such high tech items as laptop computers, satellite telephones, short wave radios, fax machines, infrared cameras, and much more electronic paraphernalia designed for nearly instantaneous communications with their home office. In fact, we witnessed some of that high tech in the Gulf War. For the first time in U.S. military history, there were Western television journalists in the enemy

capital and vivid, if selective, film coverage of the damage wrought by coalition firepower was seen in the American living room. However, in the future, access will still be vital for the media, and logistics will be strained on the battlefield. And both will still be controlled by the military.

However, the media argues that the sins of the media do not excuse the sins of General Schwarzkopf's CENTCOM Headquarters. They argue that the military failed to supply the necessary means and command guidance that all field commanders, especially Army commanders, make adequate provision for the media assigned to cover U.S. units when the ground war began. They use the examples of the British and the two U.S. Marine divisions.

British viewers and readers often knew more about their troops and sooner. The British media, which had much less in the way of resources to put into the coverage of the Gulf War, invested reporters wisely. While much of the American media's electronic equipment was left behind in Dhahran at the request of the military, the British army helped their media set up and use satellite phones and satellite broadcasting equipment on the battlefield. It appeared to be a good, principled relationship without compromising the basic functions of either media or Army operations. With the exception of portions of the U.S. Marine's sector of the battlefield, that could not be said about the American effort.

Both the Pentagon and the news organizations must ponder alternatives to the high cost, low benefit media pools used in

the Gulf War. Neither side was satisfied, though the military was certainly more satisfied than the media. There is talk of appropriate remedial training for media personnel and the military alike. But prior to that training, both sides should do some rethinking and come to the training sessions with an open mind. Open and honest discussions are critical if there is to be any progress in narrowing that chasm that exists between the media and the military.

#### THE GULF WAR AFTERMATH

"I don't know why it turned out the way it did on the Army's side. As far as we were concerned, what we did seemed to be fairly natural and the right thing to do. It's undergirded to a degree by the belief that the American people have a right to know, and we the Marines are trying to do the best we can to let people take a look at us."<sup>24</sup>

Lt. General Walter E. Boomer  
Commander, Marine Expeditionary  
Force in the Gulf War

After the dust settled from the Gulf War and both sides had time to consider what went wrong and what went right, both sides sat down and discussed the issues. They discussed mutual expectations, senior military commanders' reluctance to cooperate with the media, the exclusion of state-of-the-art media technology from the battlefield, the decision not to logistically support the media pool products returning to the rear with dedicated air assets, and the reporters and photographers

operating independently (the so-called unilaterals) who were violating media pool rules by going unescorted within 100 miles of the battle area.

These discussions continued for nearly eight months. However, they brought to light ways to improve combat coverage in the future. Finally, in May 1992, the sessions led to a consensus on nine principles that should guide future reporting in the battle area.

The following nine principles are those that should govern future arrangements for news coverage of the U.S. military in combat, and were agreed to by consensus by Pentagon officials and the news bureau chiefs.<sup>25</sup>

1. Open and independent reporting will be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations.
2. Pools are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. military operations. Pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of early access to a military operation. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity--within 24 to 36 hours when possible. The arrival of early access pools will not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists already in the area.
3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for specific events, such as those at extremely remote locations or where space is limited.

4. Journalists in a combat zone will be credentialed by the U.S. military and will be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect U.S. forces and their operations. Violation of the ground rules can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion from the combat zone of the journalist involved. News organizations will make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with U.S. military operations.

5. Journalists will be provided access to all major military units. Special Operations restrictions may limit access in some areas.

6. Military public affairs officers should act as liaisons but not interfere with the reporting process.

7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders should be instructed to permit journalists to ride on military vehicles and aircraft whenever feasible. The military will be responsible for the transportation of pools.

8. Consistent with its capabilities, the military will supply PAOs with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and will make these facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage. In cases when government facilities are unavailable, journalists will, as always, file by any other means available. The military will not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.

9. These principles will apply as well to the operations of the standing DOD National Media Pool system.

Louis D. Boccardi, president and chief executive officer of the Associated Press, said of the guidelines: "It is the consensus of our group that the guidelines offer the promise of

the kind of coverage the citizens of a democracy are entitled to have, while they also recognize the need for security ground rules in combat zones."<sup>26</sup>

However, the Pentagon and the news media bureau chiefs could not agree on a tenth principle. The media wanted a principle which would have barred the military from conducting security reviews on their news material. Needless to say, consensus could not be gained on that issue. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Pete Williams, made the following statement, "The military believes it must retain the option to review news material, to avoid the inadvertent inclusion in news reports of information that would endanger troop safety or the success of a military mission. Any review system would be imposed only when operational security was a consideration."<sup>27</sup> Of course, the media view security review as a first cousin, if not brother, to censorship.

## SOMALIA AND THE MEDIA

To the hundreds of journalists who espouse what is known as the drive-up theory (reporters in four-wheel-drive vehicles covering the war while exercising self-censorship) of covering future conflicts, the Marines have an opinion.

"That's bullshit," says Lt. General Boomer, the Gulf War's most astute handler of media, "you cannot have people wandering around on the battlefield on their own. It's not fair to the soldiers. You can say, well, we'll take care of our own, but you can't. The Marines will wind up having to provide protection and in combat we don't have time to do that."<sup>28</sup>

Lt. General Boomer expresses the opinion of all the services. The services all agree that they must control the media covering the combat story, and the best method for them to exert that control is through access. That worked well in the Gulf War, but what would happen if the media got there ahead of the U.S. military?

The U.S. Marines were the first service to get the answer to that question. During the early hours of 9 December 1992 on the eastern shore of Somalia, the United States embarked on a military mission of humanitarian assistance to the thousands of starving Somalians, and to additionally create a secure environment in order to pave the way for a transfer of authority to United Nations peacekeeping troops.

The mission was kicked off by a U.S. Marine landing assault force. Coming ashore with blackened faces and their personal

equipment tied down so that they could quietly wade through the surf, their mission was to secure a beachhead in the vicinity of the Mogadishu airport for the follow on U.S. Marine Corps amphibious forces.

As the highly trained Marines slowly made their way up the beach, they were completely surprised and taken aback by television crews positioned on the beach to provide live coverage. The landing could have been on a hostile beach, if the local war lord had so desired.

The years of hard, strenuous training had not prepared the Marines for what was happening to them. Suddenly they were blinded by the bright lights of live television. The reporters bombarded the marines with myriad idiotic questions, none of which needed to be asked during the hours of darkness of a military operation. Certainly the media did not have to place the members of that landing assault force at risk, and clearly they should not have done so.

The media had been in Somalia long before the arrival of the U.S. Marines. They had been covering the worldwide relief efforts of the world's various relief organizations. They had been there covering the long history of drought and famine and they had been there in the most recent weeks covering the starvation of hundreds of Somalians caused by the plundering of countrywide food centers by local war lord hoodlums.

The U.S. military discovered that, other than the landing assault force being put at risk on the morning of 9 December, the

media could do a fair and impartial job of covering a military operation without military escorts and security reviews. However, the military quickly point out that this is not a combat zone. It is a humanitarian effort and security is not as critical. Therefore, the military is not concerned with controlling the media in this operation.

Some will argue that Somalia is an American foreign policy first: a military operation launched by the evening news. Those harrowing images of skeletal children touched something profound in us, creating an almost instantaneous consensus for action.

The irony is that within a week of the start of our humanitarian effort, the story was no longer leading off the newscasts, nor was it front page news in the newspapers. Indeed, some days it barely merited 30 seconds of air time and was on the last page of the newspaper. Great television, runs the truism, means great images and the ones coming out of Somalia seem to never change.

Lately, this has been for the good, in a sense. Let us hope this extraordinary operation, affirming all that is best in our national character, continues to bore us into a collective stupor. Great television and front page headlines would mean fighting and casualties.

## CONCLUSION

The role of Public Affairs will not change in future conflict. All conflicts are public-opinion processes in which combat is but one factor, and not always the most important. Military units win battles, but wars are psychological struggles between entire peoples. The outcome of war depends on a lot more than just what happens on the battlefield. Without public backing, wars fail. Public support is needed to field strong armed forces and to turn military success into political victory. That depends less on fighting than it does on how the world reacts to its causes and conduct, as well as outcome. The military needs to understand that media coverage is vital for influencing world opinion. Furthermore, the military needs to understand that the most effective way to get public awareness is direct communication by military representatives telling their story. On the other hand, the media must understand that they have no absolute 'right' of access to the battlefield.

The underlying problem is that the military and the media do not trust each other nor do they have confidence in each other. The military understands fighting and the media understands communications. Both groups know that the political impact of combat depends on the communication of the fighting. The media need to see the action and the military needs for them to see it, because conflict is meaningless until it is credibly communicated to the world.

The commanders need to allow their PAOs to work with the media in order to facilitate the public affairs axiom 'maximum disclosure with minimum delay.' As innovative technologies in newsgathering continue to emerge, this will become easier. However, senior military commanders and staff officers are going to have to stay engaged in public affairs planning, because the presence of the media on any battlefield, in this age of instantaneous global telecommunications, is a given.

The military must shed its inherent distrust of the media and replace its archaic system of military couriers by allowing the media to use cellular phones or satellite links on the battlefield. This evolving technology offers the military another argument to tighten controls on the press, but careful consideration should be given by the commander on the ground before imposing any controls. On the other hand, the media must be willing to disregard its inherent competitiveness and make fair decisions on pool slots and coverage. In order to make future pool systems work, the media will have to agree on an upper limit to the number of reporters covering combat. For the military, pools are the best option when it comes to controlling the media. However, the media prefer unilateral methods of combat coverage. They want to get their papers and get in country. There will never be peace in the media over this issue.

Trust and confidence between the media and the military is crucial. A senior official of a prominent United States newspaper said, in a non-attribution discussion, that more than

anything else the media want to be trusted by the military. In order to gain that trust, the media need to consistently provide truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent coverage on military matters. Additionally, in order to gain the confidence of senior military leaders, the journalists need to have experience in covering military matters prior to the beginning of conflict.

The media need to be educated about the military, but there is no formal program to accomplish this. It is left up to each commander. The PAOs need to be proactive in this area and invite as many media representatives as possible to their command for a visit, briefing, and tour. Likewise, the military needs to be educated about the media. Every military school needs to incorporate media relations into their curriculum. Hopefully, this will help to remove Vietnam-era biases that continue to exist between the media and the military.

The Vietnam-era biases must be overcome in order for the media and the military to fully trust each other. As the senior military leaders who served in Vietnam fade away and the Desert Shield/Storm veterans replace them, the media-military relations should improve.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, Public Affairs Operations, Field Manual 46-1 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 23 July 1992), 1-1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1-10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Braestrup, Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1985), 13.

<sup>8</sup> John J. Fialka, Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War (Baltimore: The Woodrow Wilson Center, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 26.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, Office of the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, The Constitution of the United States (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Braestrup, Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media (New York: Priority Press Publication, 1985), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War (New York: Delacorte Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Gartner, Wall Street Journal, 30 August 1990, Opinion-Editorial Page.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Schwarzkopf, "It Doesn't Take a Hero," An interview by C-SPAN, 22 November 1992, Transcript, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Winant Sidle, Report of the CJCS Media-Military Relations Panel (Sidle Panel), Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 6 June 1984, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Schwarzkopf, "It Doesn't Take a Hero," An interview by C-SPAN, 22 November 1992, Transcript, 10.

17 John J. Fialka, Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War (Baltimore: The Woodrow Wilson Center, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), x.

18 Ibid., 55.

19 Ibid., ix.

20 Ibid., 55.

21 Ibid., 57.

22 Ibid., 5.

23 Ibid., 1.

24 Ibid., 31.

25 Department of Defense, "Pentagon Adopts Combat Coverage Principles," News Release by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, 21 May 1992), 2.

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