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**ARMY PUBLIC AFFAIRS: SUGGESTED CHANGES TO WIN
THE MEDIA WAR**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The relationship between the military and the media is often volatile. Fundamental differences exist between the organizations because the media enjoys great freedom to report news, whereas the Army is a structured organization that often views the media as too liberal.

The Army imposed censorship in most conflicts since the Civil War to control the media. In Grenada and Panama, the Army excluded the media in early combat operations. These actions, coupled with senior commanders failing to make their units accessible during the Persian Gulf War, further strained media relations. While these actions damaged relationships, the personnel management of Army public affairs officers sometimes fails to provide qualified public affairs officers to deal with the media.

If the Army is to influence public opinion to support its requirements into the 21st Century, improvements are necessary in some public affairs programs. Senior Army leaders must not only encourage, but demand, candor and openness with the media. Moreover, every soldier should undergo public affairs training so he or she can serve as a spokesperson for the Army. Finally, the Army must improve its personnel management of public affairs officers to ensure it develops quality officers who are trained, experienced, and capable of professionally advising senior commanders about all aspects of the media.

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"We saw and experienced things that never made the briefings. We saw an Army public affairs system fashioned as a dead-end career for officers and staffed with a sprinkling of incompetents put there by media-wary generals, some of whom still blame the media for losing the Vietnam War." Wall Street Journal reporter on his observations of public affairs during the Persian Gulf War. ¹

A significant threat facing the United States (U.S.) Army today may not be an external force, rather the service's own difficulties in informing the public about its Army. America's Army faces continued scrutiny for force reductions, wrestles with how to resource two major regional conflicts simultaneously after a reduction of almost 300,000 soldiers from 1991 to 1996, and faces a high operations tempo caused by civilian leaders who are willing to commit U.S. forces almost anywhere in the world, even when U.S. vital interests are not threatened. Although these Army issues will likely be resolved internally to the Department of Defense or by the Congress, U.S. public opinion should be a key factor in shaping the Army of the 21st Century. An informed public is more likely to ensure that America's Army is properly trained and resourced to meet threats to U.S. interests in the next century.

Unfortunately, the Army² has never excelled at telling its own story or significantly influencing public opinion. This situation exists, in part, because of the Army's concern for operational security during war. The Army also fails to tell its story during peacetime because of a fear of adverse, inaccurate, or biased reporting. Army officers frequently perceive the danger of dealing with the media³ is not worth the risk; therefore they view the safest action is to avoid the media. Complications in military and media relations further exist because the media wants to report controversies, situations the Army wants to avoid. The Army does attempt to fulfill its obligation to keep the public informed by releasing (mostly) favorable information. However, the media often views these releases

as the Army promoting its own self-interests and not newsworthy. Clearly, military and media relations are less than ideal, contributing to the Army not always getting its story to the American public.

Some military historians suggest the Army developed a more sensitive attitude toward the media after the Vietnam War, where reporting is credited with changing public opinion away from the war. However, the military's handling of the media in post Vietnam operations hardly shows any sensitivity. During the Grenada invasion, the military received criticism for excluding the media from the early phases of combat operations. Only six years later, the military significantly restricted reporters during the invasion of Panama, causing outrage among the media. These exclusions demonstrated that attitudes in the military toward the media changed little from the Vietnam War through the decade of the 1980s.

As recently as the Persian Gulf War, the Army was again criticized for its inaccessibility to reporters. Meanwhile, the U.S. Marine Corps fully incorporated the media in its Gulf War operations, treating them as a force multiplier to ensure public opinion was firmly behind the Marines.⁴ The Marines were effective in dealing with the media and their example begs the question, why can't the Army have success with the media? The answer is complex. It can be found in the attitudes of soldiers and leaders, in the attitude of the media, in the lack of public affairs training for all soldiers, in the development of Army public affairs officers, and finally, the media's lack of military experience.

Although military and media relationships have often been adversarial, it is imperative that the Army continues to be conciliatory in its approach to the media. Improvements in Army public affairs will result in enhanced media relations and favorable public opinion for the Army. This paper examines the relationship between the Army and the media from a historical perspective to identify causal factors that have strained Army relations with the media. It also

discusses the professional development of Army public affairs officers and how the management of those officers may ultimately affect media relations. Moreover, it addresses challenges the Army faces in coming years due to technological advances that may restrict the Army's ability to manage the media in future conflicts. Finally, this paper takes the findings of this research to postulate suggestions, that if implemented, could improve Army public affairs and assist to enhance military and media relations in the 21st Century.

The First Amendment, Mass Communication Law, and the Military

"Paramount among the responsibilities of a free press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shots and shell." Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black.⁵

Any assessment of military and media relations must first consider the constitutional and legal basis under which the media operates. The broad freedom the media enjoys to collect and gather information is found in the First Amendment to the Constitution. The First Amendment is succinct. It states "Congress shall make no law...abridging....the freedom of the press."⁶ In interpreting the First Amendment, the Supreme Court has consistently attempted to balance the public's right to know against the individual's right to privacy. The government is excluded from individual privacy considerations and even compelled to release certain information under the Freedom of Information Act. An example of the Supreme Court's broad interpretation of the First Amendment can be seen in a 1944 decision. In the *Associated Press v. United States*, 326 U.S. 1, 20 (1944), the Court observed, "[The First] Amendment rests on the

assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society."⁷

In the 1960s, several significant Supreme Court decisions were made that further enhanced the media's right to keep the public informed. In a landmark case, the Supreme Court ruled in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1964) that before the media may be sued for libel when reporting about a public official or public figure, the media must have acted with malice or reckless disregard for the truth.⁸ Court decisions such as *Times v. Sullivan* resulted in a liberal press that collectively managed to lose the respect of much of the American public. This loss of credibility with the American public can largely be attributed to the media's cavalier attitude towards its obligation to keep the public informed and that it alone is responsible for policing government organizations and large businesses.

While the court-backed opinions may have armed the media with broad rights to report freely, the courts appear to have intentionally exercised restraint in hearing cases that involve the military and media during war and conflict. In *Flynt v. Weinberger*, Larry Flynt brought suit because the Department of Defense banned reporters during the first two days of the Grenada invasion. However, a federal district court judge dismissed the case as "moot because there was no longer a controversy and the plaintiff lacked a legally cognizable interest in the outcome."⁹ A similar suit was brought by a group of publications lead by the *Nation* magazine because of the denial of access to certain areas during the Persian Gulf War. The court again refused to rule on the case, citing the issue as moot.¹⁰

The two aforementioned cases demonstrate that civilian courts are reluctant to intervene in military and media disputes. Because the courts have

not established any legal precedence that would serve to resolve disputes, the military and media relationship has evolved from associations in previous wars. The next section of this paper provides a brief overview of relationships between the military and the media prior to the Vietnam War. This historical review provides a basis to gain an understanding of the military and media's antagonistic relationship.

Military and Media Relations Prior to the Vietnam War

"Good, we shall now have our news from hell before breakfast." Major General William T. Sherman, after learning that three correspondents had been killed in the Civil War.¹¹

Military and media controversies are older than the United States. During the Revolutionary War, the press' ability to publish news was limited. Reporters did not cover the war and news consisted of stories that would be considered editorials by today's journalism standards. Letters written during the war were passed to newspapers that printed them as news stories. Obviously, the accuracy of such stories was questionable. Despite this method of bringing news to the people, controversies still existed. It was not uncommon for newspapers that expressed unpopular opinions to be harassed, raided, or even destroyed. Dispatches in New York newspapers, which he felt undermined the colonies efforts against England, reportedly exasperated George Washington.¹²

The War of 1812 saw little change from the Revolutionary War. However, the Mexican War represented a substantial shift in the way the press reported war, but few, if any, military and media controversies were recorded. Reporters accompanied soldiers to the battlefield and reported firsthand accounts of

military operations. There were few controversies because reporters were generally supportive of ongoing military activities.¹³

Outside the United States, London Times correspondent William Howard Russell accompanied the British Army into combat in Crimea in 1854. Russell reported that disease was rampant among soldiers and British leadership was inept. His reporting attracted the interest of the British middle class and ultimately lead to the downfall of Britain's prime minister, Lord Aberdeen. The unseating of a prime minister by a newspaperman was a lesson governments never forgot.¹⁴

Much of the antagonist relationship between the military and the media can be traced to the Civil War. Technology also had a considerable impact on the relationship. The telegraph and railroad provided a means for new stories to be filed rapidly for the first time. Ultimately, the press' disregard for operational security, coupled with enhanced technology, resulted in censorship to control the press. This action was justified as some newspapers published sensitive information, including the order of battle for impending battles. Despite initial efforts by Major General George B. McClellan to cooperate with the press, President Abraham Lincoln gave control of the telegraph lines to the military. Reporting became such a concern that the War Department passed an Article of War allowing journalists to be court-martialed if they reported sensitive information. During the Civil War, leaders sought to avoid disclosure of information and avoid criticism; desires that would remain prevalent in future wars and continue to fuel controversies.

During World War I, Congress passed significant legislation that could be used to control the press. The Espionage Act (1917) and the Sedition Act (1918) provided mechanisms to control the media. The Sedition Act permitted censorship, which was widely imposed during the war. However, American

commanders allowed the press great freedom to accompany units. Although there was a degree of cooperation between the military and media, news was censored to prevent bad news or to soften its affect.¹⁵

World War II resulted in a continued strain on military and media relationships. "Reporters attending briefings about heavy Allied bombing raids....visited, under escort, U.S. units, submitted their dispatches to censorship, and chafed at the restrictions and lack of good stories and action pictures."¹⁶ Nonetheless, the military and media developed a reasonably good relationship, partly because General Dwight D. Eisenhower believed the press had to be accommodated to maintain public support for the military. Overall, despite the immediate imposition of censorship after the outbreak of World War II, the war represented the high-water mark of military and media relations.¹⁷

The Korean War marked the first 20th century U.S. war where censorship was not initially imposed. However, after news stories were published that captured the essence of the United States' lack of preparedness, censorship was imposed. Censorship was not imposed as much for security concerns as it was because reporters wrote stories that portrayed the Army in a bad light. Such stories included journalists being critical of poor equipment and reporting about low morale. Although censorship caused some strain on military and media relations, journalists could circumvent censorship by going to other countries, such as Japan, to file their stories.

The review of military and media relationships demonstrates the Army's efforts to control journalists reporting from the battlefield. This was done through censorship of news stories or withholding or delaying the release of information. While managing and influencing the media may have been viewed as a need by many military leaders, it would strain media relationships and evolve as a much larger problem as a more liberal press arrived in the 1960s.

The Vietnam War and the Liberal Press

*"A low profile, achieved through restraints on the press at the scene of the conflict and designed to sustain the American public's support for the war, seemed a safer course of action."
William M. Hammond, military historian.¹⁸*

The Vietnam War was the first American conflict since the Civil War where censorship was not imposed. The nature of the conflict permitted journalists with access to most military operations. This situation should have improved relations between the military and media. However, the United States lost the war and many military leaders and scholars blamed the media. What went wrong and why did the Vietnam War serve to polarize military and media relations? While the government's failure to develop a coherent strategy was the likely cause of losing the war, the media's reporting had a great influence. For example, one of the most common recollections that many U.S. citizens may have of the Vietnam War is television scenes around the mid-1960s of body bags filled with American service members or firefights brought directly into the living rooms of American families. As the Vietnam War became a lost cause, many viewed the media as being responsible for galvanizing public opinion against the war, resulting in the U.S. military defeat and withdrawal of forces from Vietnam.

Undoubtedly, the media was partly responsible. The military and media got off to a precarious start soon after American advisors arrived in Vietnam. When the United States committed to support South Vietnam against communist aggression in 1961, the government sought to portray the country in the best manner possible to the American public. South Vietnam had a largely ineffective government and an army incapable of winning the war. The United States

dispatched military advisors who were supposed to train and assist the South Vietnamese Army, but not participate in combat operations. Because the South Vietnamese Army was so ineffective, military personnel were compelled to fight. This led to the denial and disguising of U.S. military personnel in combat operations, despite journalists often witnessing their involvement first hand. Known as the five o'clock follies, the conflicting official accounts versus reporters first hand observations became one of the first military - media controversies of the war.

Significant media controversies began in early 1962, when information officers (since re-named public affairs officers) were "caught between their government's concern for South Vietnamese sovereignty and the desire of American newsmen covering the war to learn as much as possible."¹⁹ Compounding the problem, on February 21, 1962, the U.S. Information Agency and the State and Defense Departments adopted a policy to restrict negative news reporting. The policy stated that "newsmen were to be made to understand that frivolous, thoughtless criticism of the South Vietnamese government made cooperation with the Diem regime difficult to achieve."²⁰ The policy also prevented journalists from covering military operations that could result in unfavorable news stories. Moreover, it resulted in the practice of excessive security classifications to a "degree that denied newsmen access to whole segments of the war."²¹

In early 1962, several reporters, including Francois Sully, a *Newsweek* writer, and Homer Bigart, a *New York Times* reporter wrote stories critical of the Diem regime. A controversy ensued in March 1962, when Diem ordered both newsmen deported. The State Department was forced to intervene and ultimately convinced Diem to countermand his order; however, both men were forced to leave when their visas expired.

Controversies continued as news stories became more critical of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In response to those controversies, the State and Defense Departments placed great emphasis on public affairs programs, including the assignment of qualified officers to public affairs positions. These officers' mission was to facilitate press coverage of the war consistent with security considerations. The Vietnam War consisted of widespread small unit actions conducted in daytime that afforded the media with bountiful opportunities to cover the military in action. As stated, there was no censorship and reporters only had to abide by a set of published ground rules and were ordinarily escorted by public affairs personnel. In fact, military commanders and personnel became so accustomed to reporters that they scarcely took notice of them.²²

Media management during Vietnam evolved into the press being a public affairs problem with most commanders becoming concerned about the media only when an adverse story was published. Public affairs planning was often not included in any operational plans. Few officers thought about public affairs and the overall impact that reporting was having on the conduct of the war. Reporters covered small unit operations and were frequently accurate in covering individual stories, while failing to tie them in to the big picture. Despite some positive coverage, major stories such as the Mai Lai massacre and the Tet Offensive greatly eroded public opinion from support for the war. The military may have learned lessons from the Vietnam War, but the antagonistic relationship between the military and the media carried over to the post-Vietnam era. The exclusion of the media in combat operations in Grenada would demonstrate continued problems between the military and the media as the attitudes that prevailed during the Vietnam War continued into the 1980s.

Grenada and the Media Exclusion

"Your job is to keep him (the Division Commanding General) away from the media." Division Chief of Staff to his Public Affairs Officer .²³

In the early 1980s, as the Army was trying to recover from the Vietnam War and the ensuing budget reductions of the late 1970s, few officers were concerned about public affairs. A prevalent attitude was to avoid the media. The invasion of Grenada, however, would place the military and the media at odds, forcing a resolution as to how the media would cover conflicts in the post Vietnam era.

In October 1983, President Ronald Reagan approved an invasion of the tiny Caribbean Island of Grenada. The government of Grenada had been unstable for several years and was showing signs of a shift to a Marxist government supported by Cuba and the Soviet Union. When intelligence data showed construction of an airfield to accommodate large aircraft, President Reagan acted to "do all that needed to be done in Grenada."²⁴ Under the rubric of rescuing American students in Grenada, President Reagan saw the perfect opportunity to act swiftly.

In planning for Grenada, security was a concern principally to facilitate surprise. Consequently, the White House allowed military commanders to exclude journalists during the early phases of the operations. Shortly before the impending operation, details became known to the media, resulting in approximately 600 reporters traveling to Barbados where they sought to cover the operation. The extensive media interest caught the military completely off guard. This may be attributed to the fact that "by the time of Grenada, there was an entire generation of military officers who did not think public affairs."²⁵

Complicating the situation, many reporters had experience from Vietnam and expected to basically operate as freely as they had during that war. Due to the excessive number of reporters, the military decided it was too difficult to accommodate so many reporters in battle and excluded the media for the first two days of the operation.

The decision to exclude the media, although initially attributed to security, ultimately became an imperative because the military had no plan to provide the media with all the logistics necessary for its operations. Whether attributed to security or planning, when the military excluded the media from the operation, it reaped both the ire of, and further damaged the military's credibility with, the media. Once the Grenada operation concluded, the Department of Defense proposed a national media pool as the solution to prevent the future exclusion of the media in combat operations.

The Department of Defense National Media Pool

"Many in the military had the impression that the media pool would smooth future relations with the press, obviating any need for military commanders to become more involved in the public affairs process than they had before." Frank Aukofer, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and William P. Lawrence, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired).²⁶

After the Grenada invasion, news organizations complained loudly about being excluded from accompanying the military during the first two days of operations. As a result of the media's complaints, a special commission was formed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Vessey. The commission was headed by retired Army Major General Winant Sidle and

became known as the Sidle Commission. Based on recommendations of the commission, the Department of Defense established the national media pool to ensure the media was not excluded from future operations.

The concept behind the pool was basic. Approximately 600 reporters had attempted to cover the Grenada invasion, which was physically impossible for the military to support from a logistics standpoint. To demonstrate the growth of the media and the magnitude of the modern day problem, during World War II, fewer than 30 reporters covered D-Day. In order to make the media more manageable and responsive to their needs, a pool was formed that consisted of the wire services, the television networks, news magazines, radio networks, and 26 major newspapers - totaling approximately 125 journalists. The concept was to have a core of journalists who would be permitted to cover the early phases of an operation. In return, the journalists were required to adhere to security restrictions and to agree to share news among other organizations.

The national media pool was designed to allow the media to cover the early stages of operations. After initial stages, if the situation permitted, the operation would be opened for full coverage by the media. Generally, the concept was met with acceptance by the media. The activation of the pool was even practiced, with some reporters allowed to cover military exercises. However, when President George Bush decided to invade Panama, the national media pool was not activated immediately because of the Secretary of Defense's great concern for operational security. The military's control and restrictions placed on the media would again result in the military receiving substantial criticism from the media.

Panama and Another Exclusion of the Media

After complaints from reporters who were shut out of covering JUST CAUSE ... the Defense Department's public affairs staff admitted it had botched its handling of the press pool. Bob Woodward, The Washington Post.²⁷

Official accounts vary about the handling of the media during the invasion of Panama. One account has the media pool being activated and upon arrival in Panama, being restricted to an airport hangar for safety reasons. A second account has the media pool not being officially activated because most news organizations already had reporters in country long before the invasion. Regardless of the account that is accurate, the handling of the media during the Panama invasion can be attributed to Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, who had "excessive concerns for secrecy."²⁸ Although he took no direct action to activate the national media pool, the media was already sensing an invasion. On the evening before the invasion, NBC Reporter Ed Rabel reported the increase in preparations in Panama and CBS anchorman Dan Rather noted the increased activity at Fort Bragg. The Pentagon's response was to decline comment, except to say the XVIII Airborne Corps was conducting an "airborne readiness exercise."²⁹

At 1:40 a.m., Wednesday, December 20, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater announced the invasion. The Pentagon conducted a news conference at 7:30 a.m., after President Bush's address to the nation. The media had not been invited in the early stages of the invasion and the national media pool was not activated until the later stages of the operations.

The Panama invasion revealed more flaws and further strained military and media relations. After Grenada, many commanders thought the media pool

system would essentially take care of the media. A crucial lesson from Panama was that the media had to be considered in the planning phases of an operation.

After the Panama invasion, two actions were taken that were designed to change attitudes within the military and to convince commanders that public affairs planning was necessary. First, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Pete Williams, asked Associated Press Pentagon correspondent Fred Hoffman to analyze the media coverage of Panama and to assess what went wrong. Hoffman found that Cheney's excessive concern for secrecy was responsible for the delay in activating the national media pool; however, he also concluded that there was no attempt by the military to manipulate the media. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, took the second action. Powell emphasized the importance of planning and support to the media covering military operations. He sent a message to commanders-in-chief (CINCs) informing them to include the media in operational planning and to take into consideration the support that would be required for civilian journalists.³⁰

The lessons learned from Panama resulted in incorporating public affairs into military planning, but it did not change some attitudes that existed among senior leaders, engrained from their media experience in Vietnam. Once Iraq invaded Kuwait, those attitudes would become obvious when Army commanders refused to make their units accessible to the media.

The Persian Gulf War and the Media

There were lingering attitude problems within elements of the military which prevented the Gulf War coverage from being as good as it should have been. Frank Aukofer, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and William P. Lawrence, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired).³¹

Opinions vary on the scope and effectiveness of media coverage during the Persian Gulf War. Moreover, some controversy exists about who had overall responsibility for public affairs during the war. Soon after the war ended, a group of Washington bureau chiefs concluded that "the combination of security reviews and the use of the pool system as a form of censorship made the Gulf War the most under covered major conflict in modern American history." In a letter to Secretary Cheney, they said: "our sense is that virtually all major news organizations agree that the flow of information to the public was blocked, impeded, or diminished by the policies and practices of the Department of Defense."³² At the same time these complaints were made, most Americans thought the war was the best reported war ever because of technology. "Eighty percent of the American public, many members of Congress, and the military - as well as people with military backgrounds - found themselves fundamentally agreeing with a post war statement by Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams that the press gave the American people the best war they had ever covered."³³

The above controversy and others exist because of different perspectives. For example, Central Command CINC General Norman Schwarzkopf recalls Assistant Secretary of Defense Pete Williams being in charge of public affairs, whereas many saw Schwarzkopf as running the public affairs effort in theater, and mostly attempting to keep the media under control. General J.H. Binford Peay, who commanded the 101st Air Assault Division under Schwarzkopf noted: "I must admit that all of us were coming out of the Vietnam period, had been through the press relations of that period ... this was an atmosphere of concern. How do you control all that, so that your outfit appears ... to be a professional outfit? And ... so that you didn't run into the ire of Norman Schwarzkopf, who was very, very concerned about how he controlled the media through that period, for a lot of reasons that I'm sure we don't understand."³⁴

Just as the Army had operated from experiences born out of the Vietnam War, the media also had preconceptions about covering the war. Journalists who had experience from the Vietnam War were accustomed to being able to link up with a unit and report freely. In the Persian Gulf War, the entire nature of war had changed. Coalition forces were spread across a 300-mile front and possessed great technology and preferred to fight at night. This scenario prevented journalists from roaming freely as they had done in Vietnam. The media, and more importantly, the hierarchy of the media, such as editors and publishers, failed to initially comprehend how the nature of warfare had changed. Most reporters in theater soon came to understand security restrictions, travel problems, and the difficulty the military had in responding to a literal mob of reporters. However, many of their editors did not, and they would be the ones complaining at war's end.

Whether coverage was good or bad, the military and media problems of previous years continued to persist during the Gulf War. As mentioned, the inaccessibility of Army units was a major complaint. More importantly, the attitude among some senior leaders of keeping the media away demonstrated why relationships with the media were strained. Unfortunately, those prevailing attitudes served as an example to junior officers, perhaps creating another generation of officers who distrust the media.

While much of the blame for Army units being inaccessible to the media can be placed on senior leaders, in their defense, they do have public affairs officers who are responsible for advising them about media relations. Public affairs officers are essentially the conduit between the commander, his staff and subordinate units, and the media. Often, their job is a futile one; even if the commander recognizes the importance of the media, the immediate concern remains combat operations and mission accomplishment. Senior commanders'

public affairs officers have a difficult challenge and should be unquestionably experienced and qualified for their position. However, a review of the Army's method of developing public affairs officers shows why commanders may not always receive an ideally experienced public affairs officer to advise and assist them in managing the news media.

Public Affairs Officer Management

"As the Army's representative to national and international publics, public affairs must be robustly manned with the highest quality personnel in the Army." Major General Charles W. McClain, Chief of Army Public Affairs.³⁵

The Army's public affairs practitioners are professional and dedicated to serving their leaders and accomplishing the mission. For the most part, they do a credible job in serving the government while handling controversial issues and responding to a demanding media. Nonetheless, the personnel management of officers does not always assign ideally experienced officers in public affairs positions. This section of this paper provides an overview of public affairs officer personnel management and its ultimate impact on military and media relations.

Commissioned officers, enlisted soldiers, and civilian employees administer the Army's public affairs programs. Army officers are commissioned into a basic branch, such as infantry, armor, or military police. Public affairs is not a branch, rather one of the Army's "functional areas."³⁶ Officers are assessed into a functional area in their fifth year of commissioned service. The Total Army Personnel Command conducts the functional area designation and considers the officer's educational background, relative standing among peers, and the officer's preference. Generally, public affairs receives an equitable

distribution of officers in terms of educational experience and quality. However, after the designation process, officer management results in many officers not being assigned in public affairs nor developed for future public affairs assignments. This may be attributed, in part, to the Army's force structure, where there are limited authorizations for captain public affairs positions. Because of limited positions, captains are frequently assigned to branch immaterial³⁷ positions, such as a ROTC instructor, on the faculty at the U.S. Military Academy, or as an advisor to Reserve Component units. After completing one of these assignments, highly successful officers are at a juncture in their career where they are selected for promotion to major and for attendance at command and staff college. Their assignment after command and staff college is frequently to a position in their basic branch, not public affairs. Under this system, there is a high probability for an officer to have been designated a public affairs officer and reached his or her fifteenth year of service without serving in public affairs.

This situation exists because success in the officer corps depends greatly on assignments in troop positions. Public affairs officers who fail to gain assignments in troop positions are generally limited in success, sometimes even if they amass an outstanding record in public affairs. The Army has attempted to rectify this situation by allowing some officers to single track³⁸ in their functional area. Supposedly, this not only allows officers to be competitive without serving in troop assignments; it also fills Army personnel requirements. Special allowances for single track officers was made by giving guidance to promotion boards. However, the single track option is marginal at best in developing all the senior public affairs officers the Army requires.

Most officers choose to pursue the traditional path to success; assignment with troops and serving little, if any time, in their functional area. The assignment

of officers with troops and to branch immaterial positions deprives officers of the experience essential for public affairs positions of great responsibility, such as a warfighting CINC public affairs officer. While the personnel system created this situation over the last 20 years, most senior military leaders have gained a greater understanding of media relations. Unfortunately, while general officers may have a greater appreciation for media relations, their public affairs officers may not possess an ideal degree of public affairs experience necessary to translate this appreciation into successful military and media relations.

Reviewing the media and military relationship during the Persian Gulf War demonstrates some of the impact that personnel management may have had. Repeatedly during the war, corps and most division commanders refused to accept more than a token number of reporters to accompany their units during operations. They offered many reasons: operational security, logistical problems, and reporters getting in the way. The relationship that existed during the Persian Gulf War is not atypical of many Army units in peacetime. The inaccessibility of the military to the media must, in part, be attributed to the public affairs officer. However, public affairs officers are frequently disadvantaged by the personnel system and force structure. For example, at an Army corps, the public affairs officer is a lieutenant colonel and often the lowest ranking staff officer. As an example of the impact of experience and rank, when VII Corps Commander Lieutenant General Fred Franks told his public affairs officer to concentrate on command information and not the media during the Gulf War, that is exactly what happened. A more senior officer may have been more influential in modifying the general's decision. Interestingly, General Franks admitted after the war that his decision regarding the media was wrong.³⁹ At an Army division, the public affairs officer is a captain or major who sometimes may be in his first assignment as a public affairs officer. Nonetheless, these officers

are expected to interact with a much senior staff and influence a two or three star general to do something that he may be reluctant to do in dealing with the media.

While the Army's personnel system is remarkably efficient at developing officers for leadership positions, it currently does not possess the capacity to groom sufficient public affairs officers for positions of increasing responsibility. Unfortunately, this situation impacts on military and media relations because officers not properly developed for key public affairs positions lack the experience necessary to deal with a higher ranking staff and a complex media. The personnel development process ultimately impacts on media relations and undoubtedly future technology will only add to these challenges.

Future Technology and Increasing Challenges

"I was angered when the press started trying to direct the war as well as cover it ... In a country pledged to free expression ... we were going to have to find a way to live with [it]."
General Colin Powell, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴⁰

Technological advancements in communications may soon, if not already, pose one of the greatest challenges to the military in managing the media. The Army warfighting doctrine acknowledges this fact, as well as the impact that instant communications can have on public opinion.⁴¹ Today, a journalist may videotape a news event, but he or she must then travel to an area where the tape can be uploaded and transmitted to a broadcast site, where it is downloaded, edited, and broadcast. Television stations currently have a limited capability to broadcast live news, however, the broadcast journalist must be in a certain limited radius of either the up-link or broadcast site. As communications technology advances, instant coverage using compact equipment will soon

become the standard to broadcast from virtually anywhere in the world. The impact of these developments for the military is real time coverage of newsworthy events, providing the commander and his public affairs officer virtually no opportunity to plan for media coverage or to respond. Once such technology becomes commonplace, the only alternative for managing the media may be some type of satellite communications intercept by the military, which likely would not stand the scrutiny of the courts unless vital national interests are at stake.

Concurrent with communication advances that affect the media, consumers can expect an arsenal of technologically advanced wizardry with which to receive information. Concepts such as video on demand and Internet connections via cable will soon be available on smaller, more powerful, and affordable appliances. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of technology is the pace in which information systems are growing. Americans can buy a car and the basic design may remain unchanged for several years. However, the next generation computer is often only months away. Such high paced growth in communications makes it imperative that the Army plan for dealing with the media in real time in the near future.

Of all the information systems that could greatly affect the military and media relationship, two stand out - the Internet and the broadcast medium. The Internet is growing at a pace unparalleled by any other system in the United States. Developed originally by the Department of Defense to link a system of computers together, the Internet exploded on the American scene in the mid-1990s. It has grown at such speed that it even confounds computer experts' predictions. Yet, some suggest that the current growth is simply the tip of the iceberg. Currently, the print medium uses the Internet to publish home pages where many newspapers are beginning to upload a copy of their current day's

publication. This practice was recently altered substantially when a Dallas newspaper published a hard breaking story about the Oklahoma bombing on the Internet the day before it was published in the newspaper. Some computer experts also see the media soon beginning to use the Internet for interactive news and for news on demand. The broadcast medium offers similar implications for the military. The media's capability to bring unedited real time news into American homes and on their computers has tremendous implications for the military and challenges for public affairs officers.

The future technological advances of the media make it imperative that the military implement improvements in public affairs. The Army must offer some of its best officers to manage public affairs, soldiers must be trained to act as their own public affairs representatives, and senior officers must take the lead in changing military attitudes about the media.

The Civilian News Media Experience Factor

"When the press asked inane questions ... it led the American people to ask if the media were a bunch of incompetent buffoons." Marine Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, on reporter incompetence in the Persian Gulf War.⁴²

While this paper has focused principally on the military's media challenges, the media's role in the relationship warrants scrutiny. As mentioned, much of the media's attitudes are based on court decisions that support the public's right to know. In addition to court decisions, the media also has been heavily influenced by events such as Watergate and other government scandals where officials have been less than honest in dealing with the media. These

scandals have created an atmosphere of basic mistrust of all government organizations, including the Army.

While the media may have a mistrust of the military, it is also likely that most members of the media do not have any military experience. This situation has evolved since the all-volunteer force began. During previous wars, many journalists had served in some capacity in the military. However, military experience among journalists is rare today. Large organizations such as the Army are complex, where different attitudes and perspectives prevail among various ranks. Moreover, different leadership styles are necessary at levels ranging from basic training to strategic leadership at the highest levels of national government. Without the benefit of having experienced at least one level of such a complex organization, the media is disadvantaged in reporting about an organization of which it has little appreciation or understanding.

Commanders and public affairs officers must understand and account for this lack of understanding. Only by assisting journalists in understanding the complex military organization can they effectively ensure that journalists are informed and will tell both sides of military news stories.

Recent Public Affairs Efforts

"I was absolutely delighted with the response from the press. The press agreed to ... almost everything we asked for. We ... had to beat down some of our own guys here, who wanted to make some outrageous demands." General John Shalikashvili, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff on media relations in Haiti.⁴³

After the Persian Gulf War, the military sought to rectify some problems and complaints it had received from the media. In March 1992, representatives

from major American news media and the Pentagon agreed on nine principles to govern arrangements for news coverage on the battlefield. The nine principles are summarized below:

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 of covering U.S. military operations. But pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of access. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity.

3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for specific events, such as those at extremely remote locations.

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. Violations can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion. News organizations will make efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations.

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

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

7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders will permit journalists to ride in 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 the transmission of pool material and will make these facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage.

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

A tenth principle pertaining to the security review of news material was proposed; however could not be agreed upon by the military and the media.

These principles are clearly designed to rectify situations that arose from Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf War. Lessons learned from Panama and the Persian Gulf War controversies may already have resulted in improved relations, or created a better understanding regarding procedures to be used. During preparations for operations in Haiti, military and media leaders met to work out procedures for media coverage with mostly satisfactory results. There were few, if any, complaints from the news media regarding their treatment by the military in Somalia or Haiti.⁴⁴ Operations in Bosnia appear to be enjoying similar success.

Although efforts to date are laudable, they remain to be tested in conflict. Operations in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia amount to operations other than war and do not serve to strain relationships to a degree that will be present when operational security becomes a principal concern in the next conflict. The next major conflict only can serve to gauge if actual improvements have been realized.

Recommendations

"Until ... the PAO is important on the general's staff ... you're not going to get the best and the brightest into public affairs."
Army Colonel William Mulvey, Director of
CENTCOM's joint information bureau
during the Persian Gulf War.⁴⁵

The foregoing discussion identifies situations under which relations between the military and the media have been strained. Based on the existence of less than amicable relations, changes should be made in public affairs to

attempt to improve future relations. The following are suggested changes that could improve relations between the military and the media:

- All soldiers should receive public affairs training beginning at entry-level and continuing at every level through senior service college. Special emphasis on public affairs training should be made at mid-level positions to include incorporating training into the common core of programs of instruction for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and into officer advanced and command and staff courses.

- The public affairs personnel management process should be reviewed and better ways identified to develop experienced public affairs officers. Although not every officer designated a public affairs officer can or should be assigned in public affairs, a method is necessary to develop more experienced public affairs officers. Priority should be given to assign only officers with the highest potential into public affairs. In order to ensure public affairs has a base of quality officers, officers who have not had a functional area assignment by the time they are promoted to major should be subject to accession into public affairs and subsequent use in a public affairs assignment. Once officers are assigned into public affairs, their career should be carefully monitored to receive a balance of public affairs and troop assignments to enhance promotion opportunities and to develop them for future positions of great responsibility within the public affairs field.

- The public affairs force structure should be studied with a view of increasing authorizations for captains and majors. These developmental positions are essential to build experienced public affairs positions required at higher levels.

- The authorized grade level for public affairs should be restructured to bring public affairs officers in balance with other staff level positions within a

headquarters. Specifically, division public affairs officer should be a lieutenant colonel, a corps public affairs officer a colonel, and warfighting CINC public affairs officers should be of flag rank.

- Media relations should be enhanced and an understanding between the military and media organizations promoted by the Army. The Army should devise a mandatory training exercise to promote this goal. A media exercise, conducted quarterly, would be instrumental in enlightening all players about the media. Commanders should be encouraged to invite journalists and their supervisors to participate in non-newsworthy events to create in them a better understanding of the military culture.

- The senior Army leadership must continue to promote openness, candor, and cooperation with the media. Only by continuing to emphasize these qualities can the Vietnam War mentality towards the media eventually be erased.

Conclusions

"To exclude the PAO from operational planning because the commander doesn't like the media is like excluding the medical officer because [the commander] doesn't like to deal with casualties." Lieutenant General Walter E. Boomer, former Chief of Marine Corps public affairs.⁴⁶

The military and the media relationship is complex and will likely always be adversarial. Substantial cultural differences and varying interests will always cause situations that result in mistrust and strained relationships. Nonetheless, a review of the history of media relations show numerous events that could have been managed more professionally, thus avoiding the many controversies and

progressively deteriorating relations.

A review of the Army's method of conducting public affairs business highlights areas that could be improved with the support of the Army leadership. Specifically, the improvement of public affairs officer personnel management and increased training for all soldiers would enhance the implementation of the Army's public affairs programs and could result in improved relations with the media.

Although the Army has generally been effective in dealing with the media during the last two decades, improvements are necessary to continue public support for America's Army in the 21st Century.

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End Notes

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2. ¹ John J. Fialka, Hotel Warriors, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, Baltimore),
- ² This paper focuses principally on Army public affairs; however, where observations are considered applicable to all services, the term military is used.
- ³ The media was commonly referred to as "the press" until the advent of the broadcast mediums (radio and television). With the arrival of these mediums, the correct term is now "media." For the purpose of this paper, press and media were used interchangeably.
- ⁴ Frank J. Stech, Winning the CNN Wars, Parameters, V. XXIV, N.3, Autumn 1994, 37-56.
- ⁵ Bernard E. Trainor, Military Perspectives on Humanitarian Intervention and Military-Media Relations, University of California, Berkley. 1995. 28.
- ⁶ Multiple Authors, The Constitution of the United States of America, Bicentennial Edition 1787-1987, (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1987) 13.
- ⁷ Howard Simons and Joseph A. Califano, Jr., ed., The Media and the Law (Praeger, 1974), 4.
- ⁸ Simons and Califano, 4-18.
- ⁹ Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, America's Team The Odd Couple. A Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military (Vanderbilt University, 1995) 47-48.
- ¹⁰ Aukofer and Lawrence, 48.
- ¹¹ Trainor, 32.
- ¹² Aukofer and Lawrence, 34.
- ¹³ Trainor, 30.
- ¹⁴ William V. Kennedy, The Military and the Media (Praeger, 1993, Westport, Connecticut), 16
- ¹⁵ Aukofer and Lawrence, 37-38.
- ¹⁶ Fialka, x.
- ¹⁷ Aukofer and Lawrence, 38.
- ¹⁸ William M. Hammond, U.S. Army in Vietnam Public Affairs The Military and the Media 1962-1968 (Washington, The Center for Military History, Washington, D.C.), 13.
- ¹⁹ Hammond, 11-12.

²⁰ Hammond, 15.

²¹ Hammond, 15.

²² Aukofer and Lawrence, 43.

²³ Thomas E. Blagg, Colonel, U.S. Army, Chief of Staff, 4th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, Colorado. Interview (in-brief) with author, circa April 1981. Fort Carson, Colorado.

²⁴ Jonathan M. House, The United States Army in Joint Operations, 1950-1983, Unpublished Study from the Center of Military History, Washington, D.C., 1992.

²⁵ Aukofer and Lawrence, 44.

²⁶ Aukofer and Lawrence, 44.

²⁷ Bob Woodward, The Commanders, Simon & Schuster (New York, 1991), 194.

²⁸ Aukofer and Lawrence, 18.

²⁹ Woodward, 180.

³⁰ Aukofer and Lawrence, 18, 44-45.

³¹ Aukofer and Lawrence, 45.

³² Aukofer and Lawrence, 10.

³³ Aukofer and Lawrence, 10..

³⁴ Aukofer and Lawrence, 12

³⁵ Charles W. McClain, Major General, U.S. Army, Vision 2000, Public Affairs Into The 21st Century, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C. 1994.

³⁶ Examples of other functional areas are: foreign area officer, personnel management, operations, resource management, operations research and systems analysis, psychological operations/civil affairs, and computer systems.

³⁷ A branch immaterial position is a position that requires an officer of no specific branch.

³⁸ Officers who are not competitive for troop assignments may elect to give up their branch affiliation and serve consecutively in their functional area sometimes gaining special consideration for promotion.

³⁹ Aukofer and Lawrence, 132.

⁴⁰ Colin L. Powell, My American Journey, Random House, (New York. 1995), 430-435.

⁴¹ Department of the Army, Operations, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1993), 1-3.

⁴² Trainor, 41.

⁴³ Aukofer and Lawrence, 66.

⁴⁴ Aukofer and Lawrence, 66.

⁴⁵ Aukofer and Lawrence, 135.

⁴⁶ Aukofer and Lawrence, 80.

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