

AU/ACSC/44-1181/2005-06

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

THE AMERICAN MILITARY AND THE MEDIA:
HISTORICAL LESSONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

by

Brian D. Burns, Major, USAF

A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

Advisor: Dr. Kevin Holzimmer

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

April 2006

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE APR 2006	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The American Military and the Media: Historical Lessons and Future Considerations		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air University Press (AUL/LP),131 W Shumacher Avenue,Maxwell AFB,AL,36112-6615		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government or the Department of Defense. In accordance with Air Force Instruction 51-303, it is not copyrighted, but is the property of the United States government.

Table of Contents

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	3
INTRODUCTION	4
BRIEF HISTORY.....	7
VIETNAM.....	8
FROM GRENADA TO DESERT STORM.....	9
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.....	14
MEDIA BIAS.....	18
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.....	23
CONCLUSION.....	28
NOTES.....	30

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 50 years, various technological advances have fueled the public's need for rapid satisfaction. Whether it is the cure for the common cold or the arrival of an important package, the common theme is "faster is always better". This fact is most evident in the demand for current and accurate information across an array of diverse areas: music, sports, stock quotes—we want information as fast as possible. This need for information has created a multitude of news outlets across the media spectrum (TV, newspapers, magazines, etc.) that compete to be the first to bring the coverage to the audience. Sometimes this coverage can come at great risk to those providing it, such as reporters standing in the middle of a hurricane to bring you the "first images of the devastation as they occur". All of the elements that the public looks for in an exciting news story are present here: speed of information, a large change from normal news, and the potential for catastrophic and horrific images. It is this last element that carries the most weight when determining what makes a news story interesting. Adulterous politicians, money laundering business executives, and suicide bombers will always be the lead stories over the local school group helping out with Habitat for Humanity. Whether or not you agree, this is the reality facing the coverage that we see, and nowhere is the potential for these types of stories greatest than in armed conflict.

Media coverage of military operations has been around for centuries, and has evolved as much as the technologies and tactics with which war is fought today. It is also in the early origins of the military-media relationship that one can see the seeds of certain characteristics that seem to run common throughout history, as in this example from the Revolutionary War: "The attitude of the military's civilian leadership toward the press

was not much different than one might find today. George Washington reportedly was exasperated by dispatches in New York newspapers, which he felt undermined the war effort against England.”¹ To put it simply, the media member feels that military spokesmen are not as forthcoming with information as they ought to be, holding back key information under the guise of security. Conversely, the soldier views the media with suspicion, wary that they will compromise the safety of personnel in on-going operations and are simply waiting for a catastrophic event to provide the “exciting” news story that will sell newspapers. While this broad generalization will be expanded upon in further detail later in this paper, the underlying theme remains. The U.S. military has an extensive history with the media that will continue to evolve as time goes on, but there is one certainty: this interaction is a factor in the success or failure of any military campaign. The images and stories that emerge from the battlefield provide a picture of perceived reality to the homebound public, and as such it behooves the military to be both positive and honest in its attempts to relay this message; positive in its intents, and honest in its results

The cycle of events has not changed drastically over time. The media provides the coverage to the people, which is absorbed and can produce public opinion (or reinforces current opinion, depending on the context of the report), which in turn drives overall support for or against the current operation. There is no direct link from the military to the public: the media is the conduit for information dissemination, and as such they possess an enormous responsibility that cannot be underestimated. In a recent example of this responsibility in practice, more pictures were released by an Australian news agency showing more graphic pictures of the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse, with

subsequent rebroadcast on the Al-Jazeera network. As noted in a local newspaper, “Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said the Defense Department believed the release of additional images of prisoner abuse ‘could only further inflame and possibly incite unnecessary violence in the world.’”² Why would this news agency report on such a story given the track record of violence that such photos and stories have produced in the past? Could the military have done anything to mitigate or dissuade the agency from running the story, or would it have simply been reported by someone else down the line? This is just one example of the complexities facing both sides of this relationship, and how difficult it can be to strike the balance between full disclosure and responsible reporting.

This research paper will discuss the U.S. military-media relationship, beginning with a brief history of the media at war up to the Vietnam Conflict. With the war in South-east Asia came a different set of rules for those covering the war which redefined the way the American public viewed war and the military. Through the lessons learned from that conflict along with advances in satellite technology came the “modern era” of news coverage as seen during operation Desert Storm (recall the CNN coverage from Baghdad during the opening hours of the war). This real-time reporting forced the military to reevaluate its relationship with the media to the point that news coverage must be considered *before hostilities begin*, not as an afterthought upon completion of the plan. Did the military learn its lesson by placing embedded reporters with the troops during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)? What could have been done better by both sides of this forced brotherhood? In addition to the relationship, this paper will discuss the motivations that the media possesses to report in the manner that they do, and evaluate

the notion of a liberal or conservative bias pervasive throughout our major news sources. Finally, this essay will offer suggestions and recommendations for future operations based on some fundamental truths and characteristics of both sides of this relationship, with primary focus on the programs and procedures the US military can control to foster a cooperative versus adversarial relationship with the media. The military cannot ignore the importance of information and that of public opinion in a democracy such as ours, for it can have decisive consequences in the outcomes of future conflicts.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Since the inception of the American military in the Revolutionary War the American people have had an inherent curiosity in the activities of the defense force its tax dollars fund to protect this nation. It is human nature to want to know the progress of a nation at war, especially when the war is fought for the nation's survival, from the Revolution through the Civil War. As these wars progressed, the military saw the maturation of the media in its coverage from passive reports to active reports from the front lines; from military battle summaries to reports from reporters in the field with Army units (some were soldiers as well).³ Perhaps the earliest example of the power of the press came in the Spanish American war, with the influence of such media icons as William Randolph Hearst brought the details of battle to the home front of every citizen who chose to pay attention.⁴ The advent of World War I combined with the growing proliferation of news sources led to the concept of censorship of the press to protect the efforts and operational security of the military machine. This curtailing of the First Amendment rights of the press continued its theme through World War II, and for the most part was tolerated by the media due to the understood need for information security

in a time of war. As author Frederick S. Voss noted, “in short, the consensus both in and out of government, civilian as well as military, was that a temporary circumscribing of one of the Constitution’s most cherished guaranteed freedoms was a small price to pay for national survival in this moment of peril.”⁵

World War II also saw the introduction of a reporting technique that would find use in many conflicts to follow, although with mixed results: the “embedding” of correspondents with units in the field on a large scale. In their book, *America’s Team: The Odd Couple: A Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military*, Frank Aukofer and William Lawrence note that these journalists “wore uniforms and traveled with military units, and editors accepted battlefield and home-front censorship as the price of national security.”⁶ In addition to the professional reporters inserted into military units, there were also those who were trained writers before the war who enlisted and went through the standard military training. Aukofer and Lawrence further observe that “after participating in or observing several military actions, the correspondents would have their stories, photographs, or motion pictures processed, censored, released, and distributed by the Navy Department.”⁷ This type of reporting—embedded reporters with strict guidelines on reporting methods and subject to military censors—would continue through the end of the Korean War. Journalists and the newly employed television reporters would have to wait until the Vietnam era to see a large increase in their journalistic freedoms concerning coverage of the military.

VIETNAM

The origins of the Vietnam War began with a gradual buildup of forces to meet the growing Communist threat of North Vietnam. As the number of American soldiers

committed to the conflict increased, the public interest and resultant media coverage soared. Americans were curious what this war was about and why the U.S. was sacrificing its soldiers for a tiny country in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War also produced a first for reporters—little or no censorship. “The Vietnam war was a watershed event in the history of military-media relations. Indeed, its aftermath set the conditions for today’s debates. Vietnam was the first major war in modern history to be fought without some form of censorship.”⁸ This is not to say the military allowed members of the press free reign to report on any news they saw fit. Several restrictions still applied to protect operational security. For example, the press could not report on future plans, rules of engagement, friendly troop casualty figures, sortie counts, or the active search for a missing or downed pilot.⁹

Although there were constraints on the release of certain aspects of the fighting, in general more details flowed from the battlefield than ever before. These reports did not necessarily reflect the type of patriotic nationalist fervor as seen during World War II or even Korea, for various reasons. The length of the war, the type of enemy the U.S. was engaging and the lack of measurable results all contributed to the public’s perception that this was not a war worth fighting. Because of the increased freedoms granted to the press, many of those in the military felt that the lack of support for the war at home must be the result of unfair or biased news reporting. Drawing from a survey conducted from 1994 to 1995, Aukofer and Lawrence stated “the low point came when some members of the military blamed press coverage for the loss of the war. Although interviews indicate that that opinion apparently is no longer held by top civilian and military leaders of the nation’s defense establishment, it is still widespread among military officers.”¹⁰ This

distrust would continue to be an issue for the military, and it was not just the armed forces who felt betrayed by the press, but members of public office as well.

The growing frustration in the Nixon Administration with the war effort and its media coverage reached a boiling point with a speech delivered by Vice President Spiro Agnew in November of 1969. The speech, as noted in William M. Hammond's book *The Media and the Military: 1968-1973*, reflected how high level civilians and military officers were feeling at the time.

The speech was emphatic. The vice president complained that since a majority of Americans drew their knowledge of the world from television news programs, a small group of producers, commentators, and the anchormen—perhaps fewer than a dozen—controlled the flow of information to the public... He added that “a raised eyebrow, an inflection of the voice, a caustic remark dropped in the middle of a broadcast can raise serious doubts in a million minds about the veracity of a public official or the wisdom of a government policy.” A distorted image of reality often emerged as a result.¹¹

The vice president's remarks reflect on the power that one individual or one seemingly innocent remark can wield, but also represented a culmination of the sentiments that had been building in Washington since the beginning of the Vietnam conflict. His comments also reflect the disagreement with the reporting itself, perhaps because it reflected on certain failures of the Nixon administration (Nixon would be a friend to more conservative newspapers during the course of his presidency due to the more favorable reporting for his Republican views).¹² No matter the reason, the rift between the military

and the media began to increase, and would not see any dramatic improvement until the onset of the first Gulf War almost two decades later.

FROM GRENADA TO DESERT STORM

The military-media relationship closed out the 1980s with distrust and angst on both sides of this forced marriage. The legacies of Vietnam were painfully evident in the handling of the media during the Grenada invasion of 1983. For the first two days of that operation, “the U.S. government decided to bar the news media from the island. On the third day, only one 25-person press pool, out of approximately 600 reporters at Barbados, was allowed on the island. The media strongly protested this blackout.”¹³ The fallout from this operation created several initiatives, namely the creation of the DOD National Media Pool (DNMP), which in theory created a standing pool of reporters that agreed to certain guidelines concerning releasable material. While the intention of this initiative was good, it fell short of changing the end results. “Ironically, however, (the creation of the DNMP) proved to be counterproductive to improved public affairs planning by military commanders. Many in the military had the impression that the DNMP 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 been before.”¹⁴ When the operations in Panama in 1989 proved similarly frustrating from a media access perspective, the military was forced to rethink its procedures to placate the growing discourse from the press.

The fallout from the Panamanian invasion resulted in directed guidance from top military personnel for future operations when dealing with the media. Major Barry Venable noted in his paper “The Army and The Media” that “General Colin Powell, then

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent a message to the major military commanders in which he reminded them of the importance of planning and support for news media coverage of military operations.”¹⁵ Issued in May of 1990, this directive was well received by members of the press as an indication that the military intended to reform its mindset toward the media throughout all ranks. “This directive helped greatly to change attitudes within the military and to convince commanders that public affairs planning was an important part of overall operational planning, not just the responsibility of public affairs officers.”¹⁶ While both sides agreed that this directive was a step in the right direction, the execution of Powell’s directive would see both successes and failures through Desert Shield and Desert Storm, largely dependent upon which side of the relationship you were on.

In August 1990, Iraqi Forces invaded Kuwait, setting the stage for what would become one of the most impressive technological displays of combat firepower the world had ever seen. This invasion triggered a worldwide condemnation and the deployment of 500,000 soldiers, marines, and airmen to the Gulf to prepare to liberate Kuwait and defeat the Iraqi military on all fronts.¹⁷ With this massive deployment came the news crews, determined to be there when the fighting started and to report from the front lines. The guidance put forth by General Powell was, in theory, to help facilitate this reporting and give commanders guidelines for incorporating the press into the planning: “In the six-month period prior to the commencement of hostilities, the Pentagon, military, and press had worked together to develop plans that would make the Persian Gulf coverage the most comprehensive war time news coverage in history.”¹⁸ What the military commanders did not anticipate was the sheer volume of reporters trying to get a piece of

the action, and this led to frustration from several members of the press. “The media have complained that they were not given ‘access’ to the battlefield. Perhaps. But – what does a military commander do when the number of foreign journalists in someone’s country (Saudi Arabia) goes from about zero to 1000 almost overnight? That’s twice the number that we had in Vietnam at any one time.”¹⁹ While the intent to facilitate the demands of the international press was there, the truth was that not all who wanted to be on the front lines could get there.

The massive numbers of the press mitigated the improved relationship sought by Colin Powell and championed by both sides as an acknowledgement of the media’s importance. This resulted in disgust through the press corps and a general feeling that nothing had changed from past conflicts. As authors Peter Young and Peter Jesser note in their book *The Media and the Military: From the Crimea to Desert Strike*, this also led to cynicism and a sense that the military still viewed the press as both a liability and a strategic tool in its war fighting arsenal. “Above all, the United States military, along with the other participating forces, went into the conflict with the benefit of a well developed media policy designed to contain and minimise press scrutiny to the military’s own advantage. The media had no response and meekly went along with the pre-prepared military policies of restriction.”²⁰ It would appear that military’s intentions of placating the media was perceived by the press as yet another failure in the military-media relationship, and perhaps rightly so. In the media’s collective eye, the military continued to hold its cards very close. In addition to the observation made by Young and Jessers, there were other concerns about the lack of access to the front lines and the amount of censorship applied to the reporting. “Although the military practiced overt

editorial censorship to some degree, the media claimed the military exercised covert censorship by controlling access to units, a practice far more damaging.”²¹ This latter claim, denying reporters’ access to the soldiers in the field, led directly to the practice of embedding in the conflicts that followed: none more prolific than the second Gulf War.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Following Desert Storm both the military and the press felt there was much more to be done to improve the information flow between the two sides, and it needed to be fixed before the next major conflict. “These attitudes led the news organizations and the Pentagon to work together to produce the DOD Principles for News Media Coverage of DOD operations.”²² These principles, formally released in 1992 and still in use today, were adopted by representatives of major American news media and the Pentagon for use in any combat involving American troops. The agreement contains 9 principles, including ground rules for military security, allowing access to all major military units, and stipulates that news organizations will “make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with U.S. operations.”²³ Of all of the principles, none define the fundamental premise of the relationship more than the first one: “1. Open and independent reporting will be the principle means of coverage of U.S. military operations.”²⁴ The principles are in some ways a victory for the media in the sense they provide certain guarantees for their wartime coverage, but the military side gained as well. They realized that while there are always security risks involved with open reporting, most times those risks are worth the reward.

These operational risks are never more sensitive than when a reporter is placed at the front lines with an operational unit, combined with the capability and technology to

report on the current situation at a moment's notice. This situation describes "two very important concepts of which Army leaders need to be aware: security at the source and embedding. Security at the source means military personnel being interviewed must ensure that they do not reveal classified information. Embedding means treating members of the news media as members of units and allowing them to accompany the units on missions."²⁵ The concept of security at the source points out an important aspect of the military-media relation: it is the *soldier* that controls the majority of information available to the media, and as such it is the *soldier's responsibility* when operational security is at risk. It is the reporter's duty to ask probative questions concerning the current operation and how it fits in the large scheme, and it falls on the soldier (from the platoon sergeant to the Pentagon spokesperson) to determine the right mix of information that provides the reporter with enough information to tell his story without risking American lives. The embedding program in OIF provided numerous opportunities to see this practice in action.

While there is debate in some circles concerning the success of the embed program, overall the reviews are favorable on both sides of the fence. Defense and international affairs writer James Lacey had this to say after embedding with the 101st Airborne: "First, a few words on the embed process. What a wonderful idea. Anytime you can get a journalist living in the sand and mud with real soldiers it a major plus. It is impossible for anyone to be associated with U.S. soldiers in combat and not walk away impressed."²⁶ On the military side, the Commander of U.S. Central Command, General Tommy Franks also felt highly about the program. "I'm a fan of media embeds, and it's for a very simple reason: I believe that the greatest truth that's available to the world

about what's going on is found in the pictures that come from the front lines where the war is being fought."²⁷ The images broadcast back to the U.S. utilized the latest technologies as well, such as small satellite cameras that broadcast grainy pictures from the front lines, and gave the public an idea of what the conditions were for the average soldier. While these reports were interesting and seemingly uncensored, there were still those who felt the embed program had its drawbacks.

One such fear of the embed program was that the reporter would become too "close" or connected to the soldiers he was assigned to report on, which would lead to favorable reporting for the military and a less objective product. "Clarence Page of the Washington Times gave this warning: 'Journalists who travel with troops need not only to stay out of the way but also to avoid being so seduced by their camaraderie with troops, even while under fire, that they lose sight of what their audience back home needs to know. 'Embedded' should never mean 'in bed with'.'"²⁸ There were also other concerns, as Howard Tumbler and Jerry Palmer noted in their book, "Media at War: The Iraq Crises", which is a compilation of several observances, such as the one by Clarence Page noted above. Another viewpoint provided sheds light to the fact that certain journalists were skeptical as to the real reasons the military was embedding reporters. As Jeff Gralnick, a Vietnam experienced journalist noted: "Remember also, you are not being embedded because that sweet old Pentagon wants to be nice. You are being embedded so you can be controlled and in a way isolated."²⁹ Despite certain cynical viewpoints such as these, the majority of individual experiences from the embed program were generally favorable.

Several stories and experiences from embedded reporters have surfaced since the fighting commenced in March of 2003. Speaking at the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB in November 2005, one reporter noted that his time with the soldiers proved beneficial for both sides of the reporting. At first, the soldiers were apprehensive and did not want the reporters traveling with them, fearing that “they are just going to write all of the dirt on us.” But as the dialogue increased and the shooting started, the soldiers became impressed with the reporters’ courage and honest assessment of the events they observed. It was this honest and truthful relationship on both sides that allowed the reporter and soldiers to find a workable middle ground, with the result of dynamic news stories from the front lines.³⁰ But while this type of reporting was exciting and made for interesting articles, many began to ask “what does this tell me about how the war is going?”

Jeff Gralnick felt that the embed reporting was captivating due to content, but observed that “It’s a lot of breathy reporting with gas masks on, gas masks off...they’re saying, the grunts are great and we are moving across the desert at 55 miles per hour. It is very exciting but it doesn’t add up to much.”³¹ The criticism here is that major news outlets left these embedded reports to stand alone and, along with the Pentagon, did not do a good job of informing the public how these images fit into the entire war effort. Perhaps the main issue that is not debatable is that the reports from the front lines gave a different perspective from the criticism and speculation of the reporters sitting at a news desk in the U.S. As a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center showed, “eight in ten of those questioned said that the six hundred embedded reporters traveling with the U.S. and British troops were ‘fair and objective.’ Faced with the real reporting of actual

events from the front and the pseudo-analysis of retired generals and journalists back home, Americans wisely recognized the value of live, firsthand information over prejudiced third-hand commentary.”³²

Overall the reports from the front lines and the increased access to the military machine proved beneficial and amicable to both sides, especially to the Pentagon. “The official line from Pentagon officials was that embedding was a success, showing American forces performing well and giving the American public a good sense of battlefield rigors. But there were complaints as well from the administration, centering on how reports from embedded journalists influenced the overall coverage.”³³ It is this influence that the media can wield to cause profound and widespread opinions of the war. The light the media casts its reports and images in is equally if not more important than the facts of the story itself.

MEDIA BIAS?

In order to understand the military-media relation, it benefits us to take a close look at the media process and the demands and influences that drive and feed its motivation. It is no mystery that the majority of news reporting is about selling, and selling is a business for only as long as it is profitable. There was a time that networks did not view news as entertainment, and it was an assumed liability that the news hour did not turn a profit for the networks because reporting the facts was boring and mundane. However, after some changes and finding more “interesting” stories and scandals to report on, the “news” became much more than simply regurgitating the exact events that occurred. In his book “Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News”, Bernard Goldberg describes a scene at CBS corporate headquarters in the

1970s when Dick Salant, CBS News president says “I have good news and bad news; the good news is that CBS News last quarter [thanks to *60 Minutes*] made money for the first time ever. The bad news is that CBS News made money for the first time ever.” As Goldberg states, “They all knew. If news could actually make money, the suits who ran the network would expect just that. Sure they would want quality, in theory. But they wanted ratings and money, in fact.”³⁴ The takeaway is from that day forward news programs were expected to make a profit and this would lead to creations of other news programs and even full time news networks dedicated to making money. This fact underlies the majority of current media produced, and cannot be understated or discounted, so that one can fully comprehend the large influence profit-making and corporate America plays in all media, with varying degrees of influence. The fact is that the context and excitement of investigative journalism may not be the only motivation for reporters on the military beat.

One of the aspects of current media practices is real-time reporting of current events, sometimes with live coverage of the unfolding story, such as a refinery accident or a high speed car chase on the highway. The speed of the reporting has become a standard in this modern society that demands instantaneous information and is willing to sacrifice certain luxuries (such as 100% accuracy) to satisfy this need. Unfortunately, as the public receives the information from what it perceives to be a reliable source, it does not realize that it may not be receiving the entire truth. For example, concerning the use of digital cameras and satellite hookups in OIF, a reporter cited that “The technology is turning reporters and camera operators into producers and editors making often painful judgements about what to include.”³⁵ As the reporter takes on greater responsibility as to

what gets passed as truth, his or her integrity becomes increasingly important to the truth of the story, and many reporters are not as worried about the truth as they are about speed and excitement of the story. James Lacey, a reporter cited earlier in the paper and a highly experienced member of the press, appears quite nonchalant concerning his lack of remorse when it comes to reporting a story and the reporter's recourse if the facts are not accurate:

“Anyone who thinks a journalist is ethically bound to go back and fix wrong information or impressions is fooling himself. Even current military stories are competing for space against J-Lo's latest wedding. Editors are not giving up space to re-hash the past-historical record be damned. Besides, too many corrections will begin to make it look like I could not get the right story in the first place, and what compelling reason is there to make myself look incompetent?”³⁶

This lack of ethical behavior and personal accountability personally shocked this author, and highlights an important aspect for military members dealing with the media. The demands from the media for information are high and can seem unrelenting, but it is much more important to ensure the accuracy of the information, given the fact that reporters of Lacey's character may not retract their initial statements if proven incorrect. While unfair to stereotype the press as unethical and one hopes that reporters such as Lacey are a dying breed, the fact is those who report the news should never be considered as unbiased conduits simply reporting the events that they observe.

The *New York Times* is one such news source that many critics point to as a liberally biased information supplier that claims impartiality. In his book “Off With

There Heads”, Dick Morris states that “the newspaper has become like a political consulting firm for the Democratic Party. Under Raines (managing editor), it is squandering the unparalleled credibility it has amassed over the past century in order to articulate and advance its own political and ideological agenda.”³⁷ This bias can be prevalent in other news sources as well, and can also cross over from one form of media to the next, especially when the speed of the story is most important. If a television reporter can take a large chunk of information from a biased newspaper and just add a little to the broadcast news so the story gets out faster, that can result in the biased reports spreading. Bernard Goldberg summed it up this way: “The problem is that so many TV journalists simply don’t know what to think about certain issues until the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* tell them what to think. Those big, important newspapers set the agenda that network news people follow.”³⁸ This cycle can be perpetual, and demonstrates how one or two individuals’ personal views can have large effects on the content of a newspaper or news program, which the majority of the public naively views as complete truth. The media receives its share amount of criticism for being left-leaning, but there are those who can point out several examples of right bias as well.

In his novel *The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How it Corrupts Democracy*, David Brock cites several examples of the right-leaning slant of several media outlets today. Brock is a former right-wing insider who for several years worked for conservative news sources, and points to such outlets as FOX News and the *New York Post* as producers of the a large block of right-biased reporting. In its early days that have carried over to the present, “FOX appeared to deny the possibility of ‘objectivity,’ which was necessary for news. Instead, it called itself ‘balanced,’ a term

more aptly applied to commentary than to news. FOX was far from balanced—its opinion tilted to the right.”³⁹ Brock contends that a large scale right-wing plan has been in operation since the Nixon era, and has permeated into all media outlets, with the help of large financial backings and full spectrum dominance. The impact of such conservative pervasion in seemingly neutral journalism can be devastating. “The implications of this right-wing media incursion extend well beyond particular political outcomes to the heart of our democracy. Democracy depends on an informed citizenry. The conscious effort by the right wing to misinform the American citizenry—to collapse the distinction between journalism and propaganda—is thus an assault on democracy itself.”⁴⁰ As with liberal views and examples, there is an equal amount of conservative rhetoric and reporting that is documented. Deciding who to believe for the complete truth can be difficult, and even Brock says “I realize that much of the bias is in the eyes of the beholder, and those who see what they see—on either side of the ideological divide—may never be convinced otherwise.”⁴¹ In other words, your views may drive you to watch Fox News or read the *New York Times*, depending on your personal leanings to the right or left, and the views that you find will reinforce your convictions.

Whether you regard the media as biased or not, there is one constant concerning the story that gets reported: the more death, destruction, or failure it contains, the more interesting it becomes. Members of the press know that these types of stories sell newspapers and make captivating pictures on TV, which produces higher ratings (remember about the profit making?). A good example is from the opening days of OIF.

Brent Baker, of the conservative Media Research Center, says, “I think the news media loves to see failure...In the months leading up to the war, liberal opponents

said it would be awful, and that the Iraqi's wouldn't love us, and there would be blood in the streets. So when the actual war started, they actually believed their own fear mongering. When anything went even a little bit wrong, they said, 'Aha. We were right.' But that kind of negative reporting couldn't last long because reality outran it.⁴²

While seen as liberal bias, the fact remains that at times the war was not going as planned and the media reported on certain failures as well as unforeseen Iraqi resistance because it was a departure from the military plan and pre-war estimates. This military needs to consider the public's appetite for destruction and drama and prepare to mitigate the circumstances surrounding failures through honesty and message crafting. Preparing for this and other media contingencies, such as war plan preparations that include several "what if" scenarios, will better prepare the military for the conflicts ahead.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The military's policy toward the media displays a growing realization that like every other relationship or "marriage", it takes time and constant work to make both sides happy. As the military moves forward, there are some initiatives and programs that it should institute to stay ahead of the game and build upon the successes of the past, such as the Principles of News Coverage of Combat and embedding. Prior to discussing these, there are certain assumptions and truths that if the military accepts and prepares for, the future suggestions may actually pay off.

The first of these truths is, as mentioned before, that the media will report on death and failure before life and successes. As renowned author Max Boot notes, "The American military knows that it cannot ignore the power of pictures. In the media age it

is impossible for U.S. soldiers to employ some of the brutal methods that were common, for instance, in the Philippine War.”⁴³ This will have implications about how the military is perceived by the public in relation to the enemy. Second, the military should accept the fact that the media may have other motivations than simply reporting the truth, and may introduce certain leanings intertwined with the story, but the target of that type of reporting is what requires further analysis. For example, many press reports may show news images from the war in a negative light, but is that directed at the soldier doing the fighting or the politician who sent him into the conflict? The military must do all its power to keep the public’s opinions high of its actions, to avoid such incidents as Abu Ghraib again, which only hurt the overall military objectives for any conflict. Third, the press will be ever present, seeking numerous details, and seemingly faster than a speeding bullet in their reporting. In other words, any news story worthy of attention will get out to the press somehow, these days most likely through the internet or email, which means almost instantaneous dissemination. The Public Affairs career field must anticipate this fact and develop procedures that prevent the wrong message or distorted facts from going to print, thereby becoming “facts” in the public’s eye. Once these assumptions are accepted and planned for the next step is the types of programs the military can introduce now to help the relationship of the future.

The military conducts several training programs designed to prepare reporters for the rigors of war, especially those in the embed program. Beginning in November of 2002, the Pentagon conducted week long training in Quantico for several news organizations, training which consisted of hostile environments and chemical warfare.⁴⁴ This education is essential for the media, especially in the high-tech world they must

report from. As Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence noted: “Yet, there is not much question that the complexities of modern warfare demand either some background knowledge or a reporter who is a very quick study. Top military leaders understand that they often must deal with journalists who know very little about the subject, and must learn as they go.”⁴⁵ Although training is valuable, it is also optional and in this author’s opinion too short. If a reporter is willing to come to training such as the week long Quantico course, he or she should be willing to go an extra week or be part of a military training exercise. This would allow greater background knowledge which may catch an assumption presented as fact later down the road.

Another program that the military could adopt would require a much closer relationship with large news organizations (such as CNN, the BBC, Fox News) than we currently have in place. Often times the first contact any of these organizations has with the military is *after the fighting begins*. James Lacey has this suggestion: “One step in the right direction would be to assign a captain/lieutenant to each of the major media organizations. I like to use the ‘reverse embed,’ but that could be interpreted as having that officer reporting back to the Pentagon on what the media is doing. What I envision is not a spy, but an informed individual that members of a media group can turn to as a source.”⁴⁶ The additional benefits for this are twofold. One, the military representative can provide real-time background information or know where to find it in the vast military structure (finding the subject matter expert), not leaving the network to count on the opinion of a retired “expert” who may not have the background on the new technology being employed. Second, the military member could gain insight as to the media reporting system—what makes a story newsworthy and what does not. By

knowing the current criteria, the military can provide such stories or try to prevent certain stories from making large headlines, depending on the content and the desired message for the public. As one reporter noted while speaking to ACSC, “by getting to know the group of reporters you are with, you can develop a sense that some may have an agenda they are trying to lead you down if they already have the story mapped out.” He added, “in this case your best offense is information because you (as the military member) are the subject matter expert.”⁴⁷ This would help the relationship on both sides, but if this program does not come to fruition the military can still help itself be better prepared for media dealings.

One such recommendation is more training for all levels of military, not simply the generals at the Pentagon or the company commander with an embedded reporter. One such recommendation comes from “America’s Team: The Odd Couple,” in which the authors recommend that “the secretary of defense should ensure that the Professional Military Education System (PME) adequately prepares military officers to assist the news media in their vital role of informing the American public on the activities of the U.S. armed forces, with specific emphasis on the crisis/conflict situation.”⁴⁸ In this day and age of increasing military involvement in not just worldwide peacekeeping missions but also natural disasters both home and abroad, every military member has the opportunity to be interviewed or quoted concerning the situation. The military owes its members the training to take advantage of such situations to benefit the military’s image. Just as it would train a pilot to drop bombs or a soldier to shoot a rifle, so should it arm its members against the camera and reporter.

The steps taken here will hopefully allow the introduction of a final piece of the puzzle that is hard to quantify but necessary—instilling a sense of responsibility and restraint in the media when it comes to military matters. As one reporter with embed experience succinctly stated, “Responsible reporting contains three things: Accurate information, fair reporting, and the proper context to tell the story. Irresponsible reporting is a reckless disregard for the facts or simply a passing familiarity with reality.”⁴⁹ Hopefully by encouraging responsible reporting and rewarding those who present the facts in a fair and balanced manner (by providing choice embed locations or early access to stories) the military can gain a more consistent relationship with its press. The media also needs to develop a personal understanding of its own power and how their influence on public opinion can translate to support for our troops, or conversely, expose our troops to greater danger, such as the Abu Ghraib photos or cartoon pictures of religious icons.

This cooperation can help further the efforts of the military and by showing some restraint, the media can actually produce a greater good. Take for example when some British troops were seen “allegedly” beating Iraqi youths in Basra in February of 2006. The fallout was devastating to the efforts in that region. “With outrage over the video mounting, the governing council for Basra province, which includes Iraq’s huge southern oil fields, announced it was cutting all ties with British military and civilian operations in the area, headquarters of Britain’s more than 8,000-member military contingent in Iraq.”⁵⁰ With a single video that does not show the context of the situation (what were the Iraqi youths doing that warranted such action? Is it realistic that British troops routinely beat youths on the street?), the efforts for peace in that region of Iraq took a

dramatic setback, and may not fully recover. When the military and media work together, however, the results can be much more promising. As Boot noted, “polling data suggests that if the elites in government and the media are united in favor of a mission—as they were in the early days of Somalia—the public is willing to go along, even if the mission does not conform to the dictates of ‘national security,’ narrowly defined.”⁵¹ What this implies is the success of a military operation depends highly on how it is presented in the media. It is not this author’s suggestion that the media should go along with the military or always try to paint the military in a kind light. On the contrary, it is more on the onus of the military in a free press democracy to clearly state the intentions and reasons for any action, both real and perceived. Military-media relationship should allow both sides to see the benefits and costs of every aspect of reporting so as to minimize falsehoods and hopefully protect innocent lives.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception, the American military has fought numerous battles and campaigns, with favorable and disastrous results, and the press, in varying degrees, was there to report on it. These reports and their methods and mediums have changed significantly over time, but some constants will always remain. The media’s desire for full disclosure coupled with the military’s edict of operational security has and will continue to be the source of the informational tug of war often seen at Pentagon press conferences.

The relationship between any two organizations requires constant work, especially when the organizations do not have the same motivations for performing their primary duties. This is the case with the media and the military, but there is more middle

ground than disputed territory, and each side needs the other to produce a product that helps each other's objectives. Open dialogue, education and mutual respect are the keys to a successful coexistence. Animosity and avoidance is not the answer, and will usually favor the media because they will always report *something*, and it is prudent for the military to do all in its power to ensure accuracy. Captain Brayton Harris USN (Retired) may have put it best: "Whatever, the basic tenet must hold: an unfettered press is a burden to the military in the field, anathema at the seat of government – and vital to a free, democratic society. But, sometimes, there are reasonable constraints. About which all sides should confer, and agree, not posture and postulate."⁵² There can be common ground, albeit fleeting at times, and the military should as the primary information stakeholder take the initiative to forge lasting, responsible guidelines for both sides of the aisle. The conduct of the U.S. military, with its high standards of moral conduct, should invite this courtship, not shun it. Can mistakes be made on such a level as the Abu Ghraib prison pictures once again? One would certainly hope not, but rest assured actions will take place that the military had not planned on or are not proud of. Only through constant dialogue and truthful admissions can the consequences of those mistakes be mitigated, and even turned into a positive light. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this paper is a start, but they can only be successful with both sides as willing participants. At the end of the day the military can only control its own actions, and by doing so can go a long way to make the relationships amicable to both sides of this marriage.

Notes

-
- ¹ Aukofer, Frank and William P. Lawrence. *America's Team: The Odd Couple: a Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military*. Nashville, TN: The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1995. p35
- ² "Abu Ghraib abuse photos released." *Montgomery Advertiser*. February 16, 2006. p 8A
- ³ Aukofer and Lawrence, p36.
- ⁴ Harris, Captain Brayton USN (Retired). "To Whomever Might be Interested: The Military and the Media.", n.p. Online. Internet, 13 February 2006. Available from <http://www.civil-war-newspapers.com/military-media-relations.htm>.
- ⁵ Voss, Frederick S. "*Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II*." Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1994. p 20.
- ⁶ Aukofer and Lawrence, p38.
- ⁷ Ibid, p39
- ⁸ Venable, Major Barry E. "The Army and the Media." *Combined Arms Center Military Review*, January-February 2002. On-line. Internet, 13 February 2006. Available from <http://usacac.leavenworth.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/JanFeb02/venable.htm> p3.
- ⁹ Hammond, William M. "*Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1968-1973 (The U.S. Army in Vietnam)*." Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1996. p4.
- ¹⁰ Aukofer and Lawrence, p40. The interviews noted were conducted during a survey on military-media relations and attitudes from 1994-95.
- ¹¹ Hammond, p162-163.
- ¹² Brock, David. *The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How it Corrupts Democracy*. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 2004. p25, 292.
- ¹³ Venable, p3.
- ¹⁴ Aukofer and Lawrence, p44
- ¹⁵ Venable, p5
- ¹⁶ Aukofer and Lawrence, p45
- ¹⁷ Murray, Williamson and Robert H. Scales, Jr. *The Iraq War: A Military History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, p9.
- ¹⁸ Aukofer and Lawrence, p45.
- ¹⁹ Harris, p3.
- ²⁰ Young, Peter and Peter Jesser. *The Media and the Military: From the Crimea to Desert Strike*. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1997. p160.
- ²¹ Venable, p6.
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ "Statement of Principles: News Coverage of Combat." *The News Media and The Law*, Winter 2003, n.p. On-line. Internet, 05 March 2006. Available from <http://www.rcfp.org/news/mag/27-1/new-statement.html>.
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ Venable, p7.
- ²⁶ Lacey, James. "Who's Responsible for Losing the Media War in Iraq?" *The U.S. Army Professional Writing Collection*, October 2004. On-line. Internet, 13 February 2006. Available from http://www.army.mil/Professionalwriting/volumes/volume2/November_2004/11_04_4.html. p3.
- ²⁷ Franks, General Tommy. "Transcript: Gen. Tommy Franks on *Fox News Sunday*." *Fox News*, April 13, 2003. On-line. Internet, 05 March 2006. Available at http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,84055,00.html. p7.
- ²⁸ Tumbler, Howard and Jerry Palmer. *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis*. London, U.K.: SAGE Publications, 2004. p52.
- ²⁹ Ibid, p51.
- ³⁰ Anonymous. "LB-551: Leaders and the Military Experience." Lecture. Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 07 November 2005.
- ³¹ Ibid, p56.

-
- ³² Morris, Dick. *Off With Their Heads: Traitors, Crooks & Obstructionists in American politics, Media and Business*. New York, N.Y.: ReganBooks, 2003. p 59. The survey was performed by the Pew Research Center.
- ³³ Seib, Phillip. *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. p69.
- ³⁴ Goldberg, Bernard. *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2002. p92-93
- ³⁵ Tumbler and Palmer, p22.
- ³⁶ Lacey, p2.
- ³⁷ Morris, p 3.
- ³⁸ Goldberg, p18
- ³⁹ Brock, p317.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p 11.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, p13.
- ⁴² Morris, p62.
- ⁴³ Boot, Max. *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2002. p330
- ⁴⁴ Tumbler and Palmer, p54
- ⁴⁵ Aukofer and Lawrence, p73.
- ⁴⁶ Lacey, p5.
- ⁴⁷ Anonymous. "LB-551: Leaders and the Military Experience."
- ⁴⁸ Aukofer and Lawrence, p54
- ⁴⁹ Anonymous. "LB-551: Leaders and the Military Experience."
- ⁵⁰ "Outrage Over Abuse Grows." *Montgomery Advertiser*, 15 February, 2006. p8A.
- ⁵¹ Boot, p329.
- ⁵² Harris, p3.

Distribution A: Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited