NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONS: FINDING A SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO ALL
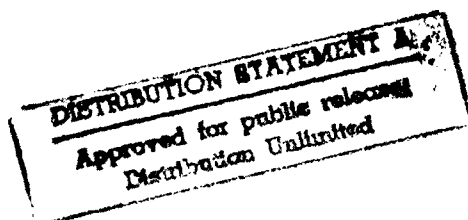
by

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Major, USAF

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College
in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department
of Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views
and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or
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ABSTRACT

MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONS: FINDING A SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO ALL

This paper addresses military-media relations in the operational theater and the need to devise a means of effectively employing the media in that environment. The option examined here to plan for the use of the electronic and print media as separate entities. By capitalizing on the strengths of each both the military and the public will be better served. The strengths and limitations of both are examined as are constitutional concerns. Past U.S. military operations are analyzed to determine lessons learned in the employment of the media in an operational theater. Research indicates that the print medium is generally more flexible, more mobile, more objective, and better able to "bond" with troops, which in turn results in more positive press coverage. Television news, because of high pressure for stories and related time and space constraints, results in more reporting inaccuracies. Consequently, the use of television and print should be maximized in the areas where they are strongest. It is recommended that this distinction be incorporated into the public affairs annex of operational plans.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since Vietnam, studies have been tasked to examine ways to improve military-media relations. Yet, problems in this area are as current as the arrival of the marines in Somalia this past December for Operation Restore Hope. What sticks in recent memory is the image of US Special Forces coming ashore and greeted by a media spectacle. The older "press pool" concept as employed in the Gulf War, initially considered a military-media relations success story, has been re-analyzed in Desert Storm's aftermath. The lack of direct access is seen as a major concern with the pool concept. Although the press did not resent the concept of security review, they viewed the role of the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) in the review process as an obstacle to getting the news out.

Although all aspects of military-media relations have been dissected, it appears that nobody has suggested employing the media according to its medium - electronic or print. Electronic and print media are routinely lumped together when establishing public affairs guidance for a military operation. Each medium has its own capabilities and limitations and should be dealt with as a separate entity.

Then Vice-Admiral David Jeremiah (currently Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) maintained in a 1986 speech, "the commander is responsible for the public affairs aspect of

any operational or administrative situation, and he must be proactive in handling the situation ....[H]e must have his organization in place and ready to deal with the media in planned as well as unexpected situations."[1]   Although the Department of Defense has been prolific in its guidance on public affairs, the operational commander has a great deal of leeway in employing media representatives as he sees fit.

In this paper, I will describe the roles of television news and print journalism, address such issues as the Fairness Doctrine and freedom of the press, and highlight media issues that surfaced during Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Somalia. Finally, I will conclude with recommendations for the commander on how to better employ the media in future military operations.

CHAPTER II

OPERATIONAL SECURITY VERSUS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Strengths and Limitations

The capabilities and limitations of television and print are significantly different. Theater and task force commanders should be making this distinction in their operational plans (the public affairs annex).

In television, there is a great deal of pressure to beat the competition for a story - "reporting tomorrow's news today."[1] Electronic media must cater to audiences that want to be entertained as well as be informed, that want action as much as they want news. This demand, in turn, drives the ratings which keep the networks in business. Television news also is constrained by time and space. The time it takes a broadcaster to read the number of typewritten lines required for an average half-hour news program would amount to less than two columns in The New York Times.[2]

The sooner one needs to respond, the less accurate is the reporting. The targeting results and aftermath of individual engagements are not yet known, much less analyzed, by the time that film of the day's events is on the evening news. Even the operational commander may be still unaware of the facts by air time.

Television can best make its case by being on the scene. (CNN gained a loyal following during the Gulf war because of

this.) Because television has visual impact, it can be employed effectively by the commander who would use the medium to his benefit by bringing the viewer closer to the story. A proactive commander can capitalize on the popularity of television to bring his stories back home. Television reporters, however, occasionally acknowledge their own limitations. NBC's John Dancy stated, "We will never replace newspapers in the amount of content or interpretation that we're able to give a news event. People will just have to read, if they want to be informed."[3]

Print, by its very nature, can devote more analysis to a story. There is more room to explain ambiguities and present opposing viewpoints. While television reporters often write to the pictures, a newspaper reporter is not sure what photograph will go with his story, if any does. A print correspondent is more flexible. He can get a story with a telephone call when a TV crew has to be on the scene. And, if a reporter is where the action is, he or she requires only a pen, notebook, and a communications means to get the story out.

Newspaper reporters also have the luxury of being able to explore a story in depth. Such stories are advantageous to the military in that they present an opportunity to highlight human interest aspects of an operation, which in turn may generate more domestic support. They may include exclusive interviews with the troops, explanation of what tactics are

used and why, or a discussion of life in the field.
Newspapers realize that they cannot compete with television
for immediacy, but they are expected to offer greater analysis
the next day.[4] This is not to imply that the print is to be
absolved of guilt for misquotes, sensationalized headlines, or
inaccurate reporting. Such events happen more than we would
wish, but the delays inherent in the print process generally
do result in greater reliability.

Operational Security

Some in the military long for a past when the phrase,
"loose lips sink ships," was sufficient to keep information on
close hold. Those days won't be back. It is no longer easy
to keep a secret in an era of instant communications. Now,
camera record events live, with no opportunity to edit the
tapes before they hit the screen. The only resort in such
cases appears to be the denial of media access to areas of
sensitive operations. it is not necessary, however, for the
media to have actual access to classified or sensitive
operations. Enough unclassified information, such as detailed
diagrams, charts, or satellite imagery, is readily available.
A good investigative reporter can uncover a lot of information
with some basic analysis. Thus, in addition to classified
information and essential elements of friendly information,
operational security must also monitor critical items of

information as well. What may be critical in one theater may not be critical in another.[5]

The Constitution and Right of Access

"In order to enjoy the inestimable benefits the liberty of the press ensures, it is necessary to submit to the inevitable evils it creates."[6] The primary argument regarding military-media relations, albeit at the policy level, is how to balance First Amendment freedoms against national security. Americans want a free press, but they also want a responsible one.

The Supreme Court, of course, guards the freedom of the press as we would expect it to do, but it has also upheld decisions where the press was denied access, based on the rationale of national security. The courts have been hesitant in most case to allow "prior restraint" (where government restrictions are imposed prior to a situation where First Amendment freedoms were to be exercised), but again, they have made exceptions in the area of national security.[*7]

The denial of access to the press in Grenada during Operation Urgent Fury in 1983 created an outcry that was to have lasting impact. Censorship was not invoked, but the military did deny right of access to the operation. While the

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[*]   Near vs. Minnesota (1931) is frequently cited as an example of the national security exception: "No one would question but that a government may prevent actual obstruction to its recruiting service or the publication of the sailing dates of transports or the number or locations of the troops."

courts assert that a journalist can search out information not readily available to the public, protect the confidentiality of his sources in most cases, and protect the resulting news without government intervention, the government is not duty-bound to provide a journalist with information that would not otherwise be in the public domain.[8]

The Fairness Doctrine and Television News

The Fairness Doctrine applies to electronic media and asserts that the public has the right to be informed and that conflicting views are to be presented. This doctrine has evolved over 40 years. The concept emerged in 1929, but was more fully stated in the 1949 Report on Editorializing by Broadcast Licensees and the 1974 Fairness Report. Its principles have been repeatedly upheld in the public's right to the opportunity to accept or reject viewpoints on controversial issues.[9] Such principles have precluded the government from hiding behind a veil of secrecy on issues that otherwise may generate criticism or embarrassment.

The Fairness Doctrine requires accurate reporting. Four fundamental requirements have emerged: 1) the broadcaster must report accurately; 2) the broadcaster may advocate his views on a controversial issues, but has a responsibility to provide all other major views on the issue; 3) the broadcaster has a duty to "seek out spokesmen on such views"; and 4) the broadcaster must provide equal opportunity for expression of

such views (not to be confused with equal time).[10]

Essentially, what is at stake is the public trust. The public should be able to believe what is portrayed through the news.

CHAPTER III

LESSONS LEARNED

Vietnam

"There can be few professions more ready to misunderstand each other than journalists and soldiers."[1] Early on in the Vietnam conflict, the Kennedy Administration leaned toward releasing as much information as possible about the war to maintain good public relations. Critics objected. The U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam insisted that the U.S. role remain in the background and that the South Vietnamese take credit for winning the war. Secondly, secrecy was a concern, but not because of national security. There were those who believed that a limited public knowledge of the war would help curb adverse public reaction to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. An easy way to deal with both issues was not to allow correspondents to accompany troops on any operation that might generate controversy.[2]

In 1964, the Army believed that it was time to review its information program in Saigon. A study tasked by then Army Chief of Staff Earle G. Wheeler recommended that the press be allowed greater access and that the military provide more accurate information on current operations. Continuous attempts to obscure information on the use of napalm, the role of the U.S. Air Force, and the employment of Army and Marine helicopters had fooled no one. Such activities were common

knowledge and a refusal to admit any information on new developments was creating a "credibility gap" with the military.[3] Although it was often considered, there was no real censorship in Vietnam. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) relied on the concept of "voluntary constraint" to limit the reporting or photography in areas labeled sensitive.

Although most correspondents had initially supported the war, as it drug on most turned against it. One critic asked how officials could expect the public, the press, and Congress to support U.S. policies in Southeast Asia if the Administration itself had a tough time defining it.[4] As U.S. ground forces built up, so did the number of correspondents in Vietnam. The number of journalists in-country went from 40 in mid-1964 to 400 a year later.[5]

As far as security was concerned, the voluntary constraint system appeared to work. During the entire time that U.S. forces were involved in the fighting, less than a half-dozen serious security violations occurred. Journalists were fairly rigorous on self-censorship; they had no desire to have access to briefings revoked, transportation denied, or sources dry up.[6] While the majority of journalists in Vietnam were professionals who were honest in their coverage, some reporters did nothing to improve the press' image with the military. Many of their stories were one-sided and

often exaggerated. Television, in particular, has been
singled out for criticism, partly because it was believed to
be more inflammatory and inaccurate in its reporting. Many
believed that TV correspondents sought any footage with action
at the expense of explanation and context.[7]

Television crews and print correspondents on occasion
were allowed in the field with the troops. When the war begin
to expand in 1965, MACV became concerned as to how to restrict
television news and still photography, particularly the
gruesome photographs of dead and wounded that might have been
broadcast into living rooms back home before next-of-kin
notification could occur. Information officers, however, did
not believe that they could place different restrictions on
television than they placed on print without losing
credibility. Voluntary guidelines were of little use when
cameramen could not self-edit in the midst of combat. Because
there were no editing facilities in-country, television crews
could not view their work before it was mailed out. DOD
representatives finally resorted to meeting with
representatives of the three major networks in Saigon, with
the warning that, should any complaints arise over footage,
access to the field would be then denied. Amazingly, in a
five-year period from 1965 to 1970, only 76 of 2,300 news
reports originating in Vietnam showed heavy fighting.[8]

The military's feelings left from the war, however, were
generally negative toward the press. There were instances of

sensationalized news and biased reporting, although only on the part of a few, but these the military still remembers. Towards the end of the conflict, when the troops became frustrated by the war and by U.S. policy, they held in even less regard the entity that they believed had turned the American people against them.[9]

If there was affinity in the field, it was often for the print correspondents, the individuals who spent their nights and days with the troops. The newspaper and wire correspondents were more mobile and more flexible. In one revealing letter to the editor of U.S. News and World Report, a soldier who had fought in the battle of Ia Drang in 1965 (one of the first major ground engagements of the war) testifies to the courage and professionalism of a 24-year-old UPI correspondent who was there with the soldier's unit.

> Since the battles at Landing Zone X-Ray, when I encounter the word "journalist", Joe Galloway comes to mind. He was absolutely contemptuous of danger and repeatedly demonstrated it by casually strolling around the battlefield to accurately record the epic....Joe is always welcome on my left or my right, especially in an emergency; he will faithfully and accurately record the incident and not slink away from a deadly situation like other , fair-weather reporters I have witnessed.[10]

The Gulf War

During the time between Vietnam and Desert Storm, the "press pool" concept was developed as a result of the furor over Grenada. In 1983, General John Vessey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Maj General Winant Sidle (USA,

Retired) to chair a panel to determine how to best conduct military operations in a way to protect lives and security and still keep the American public informed. The Sidle Panel Report resulted in the press pool that is in use today.[11]

The Gulf War provided the opportunity for full employment of the press pool, and it was used throughout the war. Control of the press was much more stringent than in Vietnam. All journalists traveled in a pool under military supervision, and all war dispatches were subject to security review. As in Vietnam, ground rules were issued with the associated penalty of revoking in-theater accreditation for violations.[12]

Several factors affected press employment in the Persian Gulf: 1) more than 1,600 news media representatives eventually converged on Saudi Arabia to report the war; 2) high technology combat weapons operated over a long distance, precluding journalists (other than Peter Arnett in Baghdad) from seeing damage effects first-hand; 3) the speed of the combined arms attacks and drives through Kuwait were rapid; and 4) this was the first U.S. war covered by news media that could broadcast instantaneously. The military, therefore, had to work closely with the media throughout the buildup and subsequent conflict to ensure that there was adequate press representation in theater. The Department of Defense even allocated a C-141 on 17 January 1991, the day after the air war began, to transport 126 journalists from the Unites States to the Gulf.

Because of the speed that the military believed that the ground combat would advance, it was necessary to establish ground combat press pools rather than allow open coverage. The media, while it appreciated the military's assistance, did object to the security review process. While they did not object to the concept of security review, they reserved acrimony for the PAOs who they believed were obstacles in getting their stories out. Despite the objections, only five of 1,300 reports filed were appealed over the head of the PAO.[13]

Both the print and electronic media played to their strengths in the Gulf war. The conflict is probably best remembered for CNN's live coverage. Television stressed an immediacy and visual impact, which print could not compete with. It was because of this, however, that many of the television reports, which to get the story out quickly, were misleading or inaccurate. Many believed that coverage of the war by the nation's major newspapers was, in general, more accurate. The medium emphasized "getting the story right," while the delays in print reduced the probability of inaccuracies.[14]

One final example of print media is worthy of note, although more of the human interest sort. A reporter from The San Diego Union was assigned to the 3rd Armor Division from the first day of the air attack on Baghdad until ceasefire was declared, and accompanied the unit into Iraq. The individual

got to know the soldiers well. This resulted in stories of a generally positive nature, basically on what daily life was like in the field, more for the people back home. These were called "Hi Mom" stories. This type of bonding with the troops, something only a print journalist can feasibly achieve, went a long way towards improving military-media relations.[15]

Somalia

The Bush Administration stated that the overarching U.S. objective was to establish a secure environment to allow the distribution of humanitarian aid. Bush special envoy Robert Oakley met with Somali clan leaders on the day prior to the marines' arrival and explained U.S. intentions. The initial operational objectives were to secure the port and airport for use as staging areas. This, too, was briefed to the warlords. This was necessary, explained the administration, to gain cooperation from rival clans.[16]

All types of media formed the gaggle on the beach that greeted the arrival of the Special Forces advance party, yet, right or wrong, television news received most of the criticism. The New York Times was quick to distance itself from what had occurred and ran an article the day after the landing entitled, "Live, and in Force: It's Somalia With Brokaw." Both the print and electronic media, however, believe that they had been actively courted by the Pentagon.[17]

15

The public affairs annex for the operations order for

Operation Restore Hope recognizes the unique aspects of

operating in Somalia, the first of which is to plan on open

coverage and a worldwide media presence. The Public Affairs

Office for Commander-in-Chief, Central Command,

(USCINCCENT/PA) made the transportation of media and media

products to and from the scene of coverage a priority second

only to operational requirements. Acknowledging that direct

media coverage may not be possible in all cases, the JTF

commander was tasked to prepare for rapid review and release

of COMBAT CAMERA video and still photographs. Security review

was also not implemented. The emphasis throughout Annex F is

on open coverage and on military assistance for the rapid

transmission of media products, so long as it did not

interfere with accomplishing mission requirements.[18]

Low Intensity Conflict

One type of operation that has not been examined in any

fashion is that of low-intensity conflict or LIC. In such

operations, political and diplomatic actions often play a more

critical role than those of the military. The military often

has to forgo short-term victories to reach long-term goals

and, if the U.S. military does have a role, it could easily be

that of advisor and support (such as involvement in the early

years of Vietnam and in El Salvador, primarily in the 1980s).

Yet, it is such operations that actually hold the greatest potential for being a media debacle.

These types of activities make the average American suspicious. It is hard to demonstrate progress. U.S. policy in this arena is often not clearly articulated, at least to the American people, and it does not lend itself easily to camera, leaving open the question as to why we are there. Such contingencies usually involve ground troops only, and are often conducted at night using small unit tactics. In other words, they do not lend themselves readily to a television crew in tow. In addition, many of the nations we assist in such a manner do not view the press in the same way that the United States does.

South Vietnam and El Salvador are two prime examples. There, the host nation, particularly the Armed Forces, was suspicious of, if not openly hostile to, the press. This hostility hampered good media relations and this translated into bad news back home. Where the host nation may be indifferent to such a result, it may become incumbent upon the U.S. commanders in theater to explain the ramifications of that indifference on U.S. aid.[19]

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS: FINDING A SOLUTION

In trying to determine the optimum way to employ media
representatives in an operational theater, several factors
must be considered: 1) the type of operation that the forces
are involved in (e.g. major regional contingency versus
humanitarian assistance); 2) the host nation's attitude toward
the press and the degree of access the press may already have
in theater; 3) the logistical nature of the theater, in terms
of logistics and transportation infrastructure; and 4) current
U.S. policy regarding the operational security of a given
situation. These factors will largely determine how much
control the military can reasonably expect to exercise over
the press, if any at all.

It is clear, however, that electronic and print media
should be treated as separate entities, with each capitalizing
on its own strengths. The advantages of the electronic media
is best highlighted in operations such as Desert Storm, a
theater involving high-technology, long-range weapons where
impact is at a distant site. Television can capture the drama
of returning aircrews, the air raid sirens, and launches of
Tomahawk missiles from ships. Television can get the on-the-
spot interviews as events occur with tactical commanders,
aircrews, or support personnel. The visual medium can
emphasize gun camera film or devise complex graphics that

illustrate friendly and enemy tactics, or show locations of activity on a map. Not the least important of the live coverage is the daily military briefings to the press, either in Washington or in-country. If television can accomplish all of these things as it did in Desert Storm, it will always be assured of an audience.

Humanitarian assistance is a mission equally suited for television coverage. Opening night in Somalia aside, television corespondents were largely responsible for fccusing U.S. attention on Somalia in the first place. Also, these are often missions where there is open coverage and security review will be limited, if implemented at all. Television can also best capture the human drama that is so much a part of humanitarian assistance operations.

In the event of ground conflict in any of the previously mentioned operations or in the case of a lesser regional contingency, it is best to restrict patrolling with the troops to the print media. Such a policy would be based on the flexibility and mobility of print media, as well as the greater opportunity to preserve operational security. Oftentimes, ground combat is confusing; a newspaper reporter, rather than a cameraman is better equipped to wait until everything settles down before analyzing what happened and filing a report. This concept reflects elements similar to the public relations policy in Vietnam in allowing correspondents to deploy with the troops.

Current DOD policy emphasizes an environment of open
coverage to the greatest degree possible and should be the
rule rather than the exception.   It also endorses activation
of press pools when access must be limited.   The treatment of
the media as separate entities will give the American people -
through the press - better access to military operations.
Secondly, by allowing reporters to deploy with the troops, a
better understanding emerges of the constraints the military
must work under and of the difficulties of operating in field
conditions.   Such understanding usually results in a more
supportive press corps.   Finally, the restriction of
deployment with units to print media (in cases where press
pools would normally be formed) enhances operational security.
The broadcast correspondent has less control over his medium
and is under greater pressure to find a story, even where none
exists.   He also operates under stringent time/space
constraints for air time, allowing little time to adequately
explain what is occurring in the footage.

What should be incorporated is not a concept of "equal
access", but one of "equal opportunity."   In situations where
open coverage is not possible, both media would be allowed
equal opportunity for the day's news from the field.   Combat
Camera should be increasingly employed in these situations to
provide footage to the networks.   Censorship is not a viable
argument since the print media would serve as "watchdogs" to
the news emerging from the battle field.   What is provided,

20

however, is edited footage that is presented in the context of what occurred and why, thus precluding any tendencies to sensationalize the news.

Ground rules must remain for both as they are now, along with a continued policy of revoking accreditation, if rules are broken. Open coverage should obviously be used in all possible situations. Where access may be constrained, keep open the communications by deploying the print with the units. Such a solution is not a magic bullet, but it is a step closer to solving the problem than what we have now.

NOTES

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