Grief Reporting: A Print Media Content Analysis of the Gander, Newfoundland Air Disaster

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

Attached

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Media; newspaper reporting; Gander, Newfoundland disasters; grief reporting; thanatology; media-military relationships
ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Grief Reporting: A Print Media Content Analysis of the Gander, Newfoundland Air Disaster

Barbara Ann Goodno, Master of Arts, 1988

Thesis Directed by: Benjamin F. Holman, Professor, and Carl Sessions Stepp, Assistant Professor, College of Journalism

When reporting grief, the media are often regarded as an insensitive monolith. This study of grief reporting shows that print media reports of a shocked, angry and saddened society in the aftermath of a disaster correspond with predictable human responses and are not necessarily the sensationalized product of an adversarial press.

The study examined 117 news stories reporting the December 12, 1985 crash of a DC-8 jetliner in Gander, Newfoundland, Canada. All 256 on board, including 248 U.S. Army soldiers returning from peace-keeping duties in Egypt, were killed.

News stories printed in The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post were compared to the five-stage human grief response observed by medical practitioners and sociologists (shock to anger to bargaining to depression to acceptance).

The analysis revealed a reporting pattern similar to the grief response. All five stages were observed and appeared progressively.

Of greatest significance was the limited appearance of stage five, acceptance. Although observed in each newspaper at various times, news stories reporting resolution to the loss were minuscule in comparison to earlier stories, which emphasized the shocking aspects of the catastrophe and the intense grieving that followed.

The failure to focus on resolution may, in fact, be the source of the media's poor reputation in regard to grief reporting. At a time when society is resolving its loss, the media typically highlight the next problem.

The media would benefit the reader if, in addition to highlighting new crises, they more effectively reported resolve to previous ones.
Report of Examining Committee

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Degree sought: M.A. 
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Chairman: 

Representative of the Graduate Dean:

(To be returned to Graduate Records Office as soon as signed by the Committee)
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OF THE GANDER, NEWFOUNDLAND AIR DISASTER

by

Barbara Ann Goodno

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of The University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1988

Advisory Committee:

Professor Maurine Beasley, Ph.D.
Professor Carl Sessions Stepp
Professor Lois T. Vietri, Ph.D.
This content analysis began as an examination of the media-military relationship in times of crises. (The relationship typically vacillates between symbiosis and adversity.) As a U.S. Army officer embarking on a career in public affairs, I'd hoped to shed new light on an oft-studied association.

At the outset of my research, however, I was struck by the emotions expressed in the news stories printed throughout the United States, and noted a pattern that I thought was remarkably reflective of grief recovery.

Thus, rather than focusing on the media-military relationship issue, I chose instead to examine the news product and measure how closely the print media reported the human response to loss.

This study breaks new ground, revealing what I believe is only one facet of grief reporting. I hope that it will become a catalyst to others for further, in-depth study.
Dedication

for dcg
Acknowledgements

Lieutenant Colonel Bruce M. Meisner
and Colonel F. William Smullen
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Chapter 1

Introduction

At 5:15 a.m., Eastern Standard Time, on December 12, 1985, an Arrow Air DC-8 jetliner crashed on takeoff after refueling at Canada's Gander International Airport in Gander, Newfoundland. All 248 passengers and the eight-member crew were killed.

The aircraft, chartered by the Multi-National Force and Observers, headquartered in Rome, Italy was hired to return soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The unit had just completed a six month peace keeping duty with the force in Egypt's Sinai desert.

The tragedy was the largest single-day loss of lives in years for the military and largest military air disaster in history. The soldiers left immediate families in 43 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, Panama and Federal Republic of Germany.

News of the disaster was first broadcast on the radio approximately an hour after the crash. Live coverage by the Cable News Network (CNN) followed shortly thereafter. By day's end, and the five days that immediately followed, the Army conducted approximately 40 "on air, live telephonic spots" on a daily basis.

The first hours after the crash, not unlike other disasters, were marked with confusion and uncertainty.
Today, some critical questions remain unanswered. Now, more than two years after the crash, the cause is still a matter of speculation. The Canadian Aviation Safety Board does not expect to officially announce its final determination until August or September, 1988.4

Purpose of Study

Tierney (1985) reported that in crises "loss is directly observable."5 How then did the media report their observations? Did any patterns emerge? As more information became available, did changes or modifications in reporting occur?

The purpose of this study is to examine print media content and measure similarities, if any, to the grief-recovery model observed by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and others.

Print media was used exclusively for the study as the most convenient and comprehensive data source.

Although the electronic media, especially television, plays an important role in the communication of critical events, it wasn't included in the study because of the many nuances that require consideration; i.e., camera angle, news source, voice intonation, etc.
Nature of the Problem

Objectivity has long been held as the hallmark of responsible journalism. In addition to presenting "news free of the reporter's opinions or feelings," this notion requires that a reporter write or tell what really happened rationally; incorporating fairness, balance and relevance.

The media have the power, however, to (deliberately or subconsciously) distort the facts of any event. The motivation might stem from an altruistic desire to manipulate a society for perceived greater good, monetary gain, or power.

For example, during what is now known as the Malvinas War, British correspondents with the BBC agreed to report only that which the task force commander would allow.

The BBC correspondent with the task force, Brian Hanrahan, testified to the parliamentary inquiry that the British commander, Admiral John Woodward, told reporters he intended to use the media 'to cause as much confusion to the enemy as possible.' The newsmen reached an agreement with him, according to Hanrahan, 'where he was entitled to stop us reporting things, but we were not prepared to report things that were incorrect.'

There are those who will argue, with some validity, the inherent differences between the American and British press. "The British press accepts a far greater amount
of government secrecy and news manipulation than American or foreign newsmen would put up with in Washington."8

Critics frequently accuse the media of sensationalizing the news, claiming that media activity is motivated by a strict profit motive. However, allegations that 'if it bleeds, it leads' or 'if it smells, it sells,' are not new, nor necessarily unfounded.

For example, studies of Civil War photographs have revealed a high likelihood of misrepresentation9 and the use of living soldiers for theatrical poses of the war dead10 in order to dramatize or punctuate the so-called death scenes.

In defense of the photographers, researcher William Frassanito proposed greater sensitivity to the situation.

"... We must remember that he was, above all, a photographer and a businessman--not a professional historian."11

The media have also been accused of inciting political crises. As a case in point, Steven Fink notes William Randolf Hearst's

... classic 'yellow journalism' cable he had sent to Cuba to cover the then non-existent Spanish-American War. Receiving the illustrator's cable that there was no war to be found, Hearst wired back, 'You supply the pictures, I'll supply the war.'12

Most researchers agree, however, that the modern American press adheres to a much higher standard than it
did in its early years. It is not easily manipulated by outside forces and it provides an accurate representation of the facts.

News Reporting is a Patterned Activity

The first newspapers published in the United States were highly partisan. However, as early as 1835, a new standard was emerging. In a prospectus to the New York Daily News, James Gordon Bennet advised reporters to set aside the subjective viewpoint.

"We shall endeavor to record facts on every public and proper subject, stripped of verbiage and coloring."¹³

In more recent times, however, researchers have shown, that absolute objectivity is impossible. The news is not a neutral product.¹⁴

Lippmann (1922) said

... Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. There are no objectives here. There are conventions.¹⁵

Ranney (1983) showed that the conventions of television journalism are further constrained by economics, time and space.¹⁶ The print media bear a similar burden.

Gans (1979) revealed that locating credible,
available sources further encumbers an already complex process.¹⁷

Gitlin (1980) reported that media conventions distort images by emphasizing certain themes and scanting others through the use of framing devices.¹⁸

In short, the media were far from mirrors passively reflecting facts found in the real world. The facts reported were out there in the real world, true: out there among others. The media reflection was more the active patterned remaking performed by mirrors in a fun house.¹⁹

Molotch and Lester (1974) described the news commodity as the outgrowth of a symbiotic trinity between three major agencies: the news promoters, the news assemblers, and the news consumers.²⁰

Tuchman (1972) observed the patterns of reporting and described the notion of objectivity as a "strategic ritual" composed of three parts: form, interorganizational relationships, and content. Patterns and strategies used by journalists, she said, were necessitated primarily by time pressures.²¹

"A reporter generally has less than one working day to familiarize himself with a story's background, gather information, and to write his assignment."²²

As a consequence, the sheer volume of information requires the media to routinize the non-routine, formulating a process that is
... so speedy and habitual as to seem almost instinctive. There is simply too much possible material; there have to be ... devices to select what shall be shown, in what order, at what length and with what stress.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, performing the primary function of news reporting, as defined by the American Society of News Editors, communicating "to the human race, what its members do, feel and think,"\textsuperscript{24} results in a product that is patterned and predictable.

Gans (1979) said that "journalists try very hard to be objective," but patterns based on ingrained values are not only inevitable, but essential.\textsuperscript{25}

... Enduring values ... are values which can be found in many different types of news stories over a long period of time, often, they affect what events become news for some are part and parcel of the definition of news.

Enduring values are not timeless, and they may change somewhat over the years, moreover, they also help to shape opinions, and many times, opinions are only specifications of enduring values.\textsuperscript{26}

Gans noted that journalistic reporting does not mirror events, but claimed the theory is useful. "... It reminds us that journalists do not make up the news but begin with what they deem an empirically graspable external reality."\textsuperscript{27}

There is news ripe for reporting. "Each day there are stories to be told because every day there is business to be done...."\textsuperscript{28}
Footnotes

1According to a December 12, 1985 Department of Defense Memorandum for Correspondents, the Multinational Force and Observers "is an international organization supported financially by Egypt, Israel and the U.S. There are ten countries that provide troops to the M.F.O.: Australia, Columbia, Fiji, France, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, U.S. and Uruguay."


3Ibid., p. 91.


8Ibid., p. 353.

10Ibid., p. 185.

11Ibid., p. 175.


19Ibid., p. 29.


22Ibid., 662.

23Ibid., Hoggart, p. X.


26Ibid., p. 41.

27Ibid., p. 79.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Crisis and Grief Reporting

The study of crisis and grief reporting is limited, but Molotch and Lester (1974) showed that accident reporting and routine reporting are inherently different.

... The suddenness of the accident and its unanticipated nature means that event makers are initially not ready and thus the powerful could give uncoordinated, mutually contradictory accounts. This process of accidental disruption, followed by attempts to restore traditional meanings can be observed empirically; and thus we take accidents to constitute a crucial resource for the empirical study of event-structuring processes."

They note that, like routine news events, not all accidents are reported. Some specific events, such as the 1969 massive escape of nerve gas at Dugway Proving Ground, "could easily be conceived as far more disastrous to the natural environment and to human life ...; yet again relatively little coverage occurred."2

Crisis reporting sometimes creates circumstances other reporters rarely encounter. Stephens and Edison (1982) found that science reporters covering the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant disaster faced new pressures. While reporting the event, their roles
changed. They were no longer pure observers; they became players accountable for their actions.

Residents of the area monitored news reports for hints on whether to flee. Overly alarming coverage could have spread panic; overly reassuring coverage could have risked lives. This was science reporting under the gun.³

Researchers have done at least fifteen news diffusion studies relating to life threatening events involving U.S. political leaders.⁴ Several have focused on grief.

Sheatslely and Feldman (1964) investigated reactions to the assassination of President Kennedy.

The assassination generally evoked feelings similar to those felt at the death of close friend or relative....

Since people responded to the assassination in personal terms, their reactions appear to have followed a well-defined pattern of grief familiar to medical practice: an initial phase of shock and disbelief; a developing awareness of the loss coupled with feeling of sadness, sorrow, shame, and anger; the onset of physical symptoms such as tears, tenseness, sleeplessness, fatigue, and loss of appetite; and finally a gradual recovery in the course of which these symptoms disappear and a normal state of well-being is re-established.⁵

Banta (1964) reported similar strong emotional responses.

Thirty four percent reported that they were 'extremely angry about the news', 27 percent said they felt 'extremely nervous and excited about the news,' 10 percent cried when they heard the news, and 8 percent said that their reaction was to joke nervously about the news.⁶
Since 1963, critical events such as the Kennedy assassination have become more a norm than aberration. The images of crime, war, and international terrorism have become the daily fare for the newspaper reader and television viewer. The result, some critics say, is a desensitized public\(^7\) and a trivialized event.\(^8\) Jeffres and Quarles' (1982) research found, however, that after the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, 66 percent of the sample verbalized "such profound emotional reactions as shock, anger, sorrow, depression or sadness."\(^9\)

They concluded that despite nearly two decades of pervasive violence, the American citizen's capacity to respond emotionally to critical events remains quite high.\(^10\)

Reports of loss can have an unpredictable response, however. The most anthologized work of war correspondent Ernie Pyle, for example, is the deeply moving account of the events that followed the death of infantryman Captain Henry Waskow. Although his story creates a sense of intense sorrow, there is no evidence of great public outcry against Pyle or the news service for which he wrote.\(^11\) (Illustration 1, page 14)

In contrast, after the terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, reporters were labeled "ghouls,"\(^12\) even though many family members asked
The Death of the Captain
His Work is His Memorial

Two men unleashed his body from the mule and laid it off and laid it in the shadow beside the stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off. Finally, there were five lying end to end in a long row. You don’t cover up dead men in the combat areas. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody comes after them.

The unburdened mules moved off to their olive grove. The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave. They stood around, and gradually I could sense them moving, one by one, close to Capt. Weaskow’s body. Not so much to look, I think, as to say something in finality to him and to themselves.

One soldier came and looked down and he said out loud, “God damn it.”

Another man came, I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the dim light, for everybody was bearded and grizzly. The man looked down into the dead captain’s face and then spoke directly to him, as though he were alive. “I’m sorry, old man.”

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer and bent over, and he, too, spoke to the dead captain, put in a whisper but awfully tenderly, and said, “I sure am sorry, sir.”

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the captain’s head, and he sat there for a full five minutes holding the dead head in his own and locking intently into the dead face. And he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

Finally he put the head down. He reached over and gently straightened the toilet of the captain’s shirt collar, and then he removed the twisted twists of the uniform around the wound, and then he got up and walked away down the road in the same direction as the others.

The rest of us went back into the cowshed.

Illustration 113
to be interviewed and others claimed the experience was therapeutic.

James J. Langon III of Lakehurst, New Jersey lost a son in the terrorist attack. "You hear a lot of criticism of the press," he said. "But in my case, they conducted themselves very well. With no exceptions, at the end of the conversations I had with reporters, they all set their jobs aside and we talked as people. I really appreciated that."

Thanatology

Thanatology, "the secular study of death and life-threatening behavior," is a relatively new field of study. Sigmund Freud may have been the first to study grief and bereavement behavior ("Mourning and Melancholia") but Dr. Erich Lindemann (1944) is credited with conducting the "first systemic study of bereavement."

Lindemann observed that the "picture shown by persons in acute grief is remarkably uniform."

He observed five patterns that seemed "to be pathogenic for grief": 1) Somatic distress, 2) Preoccupation with the image of the deceased, 3) guilt, 4) hostile reactions, and 5) loss of patterns of conduct.

Lindemann noted that the duration of the grief
response varied from person to person,

"[depending] upon the success with which a person does the grief work, namely emancipation from bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships. One of the big obstacles to this work seems to be the fact that many patients try to avoid the intense distress connected with the grief experience and to avoid the expression of emotion necessary for it."22

In the past twenty-five years, thanatology has become "almost a sub-specialty of psychiatry. ... It has already become a branch of social psychology and anthropology."23

Studies, pioneered by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) revealed patterns similar to those observed by Lindemann. She noted that grief patterns of the terminally ill and their family members are remarkably similar.24 Ross observed, as Lindemann had a quarter of a century earlier, that grief patterns share a commonality.

The grief patterns described by Dr. Ross in her book, On Death and Dying, are summarized by Hans O. Mauksch at Figure 1, page 17.

Another researcher, Doyle (1980), described a similar three stage pattern of grief: shock, intense emotion, and adjustment (Figure 2, page 18).25 Her model differs from Ross' in that she focuses solely on bereaved family members.

Doyle confirmed the necessity of the grief process. In order to reach stage three, adjustment, the bereaved
1. Denial--'No, not me.' This is a typical reaction when a patient learns that he or she is terminally ill. Denial, says Doctor Ross, is important and necessary. It helps cushion the impact of the patients's awareness that death is inevitable.

2. Rage and anger--'Why me?' The patient resents the fact that others will remain healthy and live while he or she must die. God is a special target for anger, since He is regarded as imposing arbitrarily, the death sentence. To those who are shocked at her claim that such anger is not only permissible but inevitable, Doctor Ross replies succinctly, 'God can take it.'

3. Bargaining--'Yes me, but...' Patients accept the fact of death but strike bargains for more time. Mostly they bargain with God--'even among people who never talked with God before.' They promise to be good or to do something in exchange for another week or month or year of life. Notes Doctor Ross: 'What they promise is totally irrelevant, because they don't keep their promises anyway.'

4. Depression--'Yes, me.' First, the person mourns past losses, things not done, wrongs committed. But then he or she enters a state of 'preparatory grief,' getting ready for the arrival of death. The patient grows quiet, doesn't want visitors. 'When a dying patient doesn't want to see you any more,' says Doctor Ross, 'this is a sign he has finished his unfinished business with you, and it is a blessing. He can now let go peacefully.'

5. Acceptance--'My time is very close now and it's all right.' Doctor Ross describes this final stage a not a happy stage, but neither is it unhappy. It's devoid of feelings but it's not resignation, it's really a victory.'

The Ross Grief Recovery Model

Figure 1
Stage one, shock consists of:

... protest, anger and disbelief, ... usually [lasting] from the occurrence of death until the disposal of the body.

The second stage is one of intense emotion.

There is no norm for its duration. The bereaved has disturbed and restless sleep, often with vivid dreams or nightmares; ... loss of appetite and weight.

These symptoms are accompanied by much weeping, sighing, hand wringing, brushing the hand across the brow, exhaustion and a lump in the throat that often makes speech difficult.

Stage three is the period of final adaptation.

Sleep and weight are stabilized and interest is again directed outward. The bereaved can now speak of the deceased without bursting into tears. He has resumed his daily routine and can perform ordinary responsibilities satisfactorily.²⁷

The Doyle Grief Recovery Model

Figure 2
must completely work through the first two stages. Final adaptation can be complicated and arrested if the bereaved "become sunk in a morass of anger, depression, guilt, anxiety or perturbation," what Ross defines as "unfinished business." Some religions provide the bereaved with a specific framework, intended to draw the mourner from "temporary isolation to increasingly larger personal and communal responsibilities and involvement...." Judaism recognizes that there are levels and stages of grief and so it organizes the year of mourning into three days of grief; seven days of mourning, thirty days of gradual readjustment, and eleven months of remembering and healing.

Social worker Lily Pincus, however, regards bereavement as very much a personal process, taking on different forms for different people. She advises cautious application of any grief-recovery model. Others quickly note the same point.

"An individual may repeat stages, skip some, or have stages occur simultaneously. The order, intensity, and duration also vary from person to person." Schuerer (1986) observed, however, that grief emotions are manifested for nearly everyone, "even when the death may have been expected." Further, grief recovery is not limited to death; a myriad of circumstances can cause the need for grief
recovery. One might mourn the loss of a friendship, a marriage; even intangibles, such as loss of status.35

Researchers suggest, however, that one of the single greatest coping experience is sudden death, especially when identification of the remains is delayed or the body mutilated, as in the case of the passengers and crew on the chartered Arrow Air DC-8.

Where there is sudden death and nonrecovery of the body, such as in drownings, military deaths,... the bereaved can be stuck at the first level for a long time.... The fact that the bereaved has not seen the concrete evidence of the dead body allows him to fantasize that the person is not really dead, that this event did not happen.36

Parkes and Weiss (1983) indicate further that reactions to unanticipated deaths are more intense than situations when family and friends have been prepared for death through a long illness or old age.

... People who are suddenly and unexpectedly bereaved will react more severely than those whose bereavement was anticipated because the latter started their grieving earlier.... [They] did not disbelieve what they were told, but they were unable to grasp its full implications. They seemed to be warding off unbearable mental pain. As they came to accept the reality of their loss, they entered into deep intense grief."37

Following the bereavement period, (Schucter, 1986) certain incidents, such as birthdays, holidays, wedding anniversaries, and other significant events shared with the deceased, especially the date of death, might trigger a reactivation of grieving.38
The symbolism of the occasion reawakens painful feelings that may have been successfully suppressed for weeks and months. The anniversary date of the spouse's death can be a particularly evocative time, especially the first few years, bringing vivid memories of the time of death. It can be like reliving the trauma.\textsuperscript{39}

Despite the pain, however, in order to recover, the grief work must be done.

The person must recover from the initial shock, must eventually stop denying the unfortunate event, and must endure the sadness and the depression before coming to a full acceptance of reality and beginning to reconstruct his/her life.\textsuperscript{40}

Hypotheses to be Tested

Hypothesis 1: Print media accounts of the Arrow Air crash will demonstrate a pattern of sequenced reporting with a focus changing from shock to anger to bargaining to depression to acceptance. (Figure 3, page 22)

Hypothesis 2: Emotions reflecting anger will be most intense after the remains of all the victims have been identified and returned to the next-of-kin.

Hypothesis 3: The number and length of news stories will diminish over time and stop; however, the media will again focus on the event on or about the anniversary of the crash.
Shock and denial--"No, not my--spouse, son, daughter, friend. There must be some mistake."

Rage and anger--"Why my --spouse, son, daughter, friend? Why now? Why not someone else?" Anger might be directed toward God, the president as commander-in-chief, the Army, the pilot of the aircraft, those who chartered the aircraft, those responsible for ensuring compliance with federal aviation safety guidelines, and so on.

Bargaining--"Yes maybe, but let it be a mistake. Let there be survivors."

Depression--"Yes, it really happened." Like the terminally ill patient, the survivor might mourn past losses, things not done, wrongs committed, and unresolved differences.

Acceptance--"It really happened and I'm all right. I can go on."

Figure 3
Footnotes


2Ibid., p. 110.


15 Ibid., Smith, p. 21.

16 Ibid., p. 22.


20 Ibid., Lindemann, p. 141.

21 Ibid., p. 142.

22 Ibid., p. 143.

23 Ibid., Weisman, p. XIV.


28 Ibid., p. 24.


31 Ibid., p. 51.


36 Ibid., Doyle, p. 24.


38 Ibid., Shucter, p. 146.

39 Ibid., p. 146.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The content of The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post was selected for analysis. Each newspaper enjoys a reputation as a responsible, authoritative publication.

In addition, the Los Angeles Times was selected for a west coast perspective, and the Washington Post was selected for its close proximity to the policy making bodies of the federal government; i.e., the president, the military, and federal agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

News articles were identified for analysis by a manual search of the newspapers' respective indices. The parameters for the search were December 13, 1985 through May 31, 1987.

Call words and phrases used for the search varied with the individual cataloging methods of each publication. They are as follows:

The Los Angeles Times--Airlines and Airplanes, Arrow Air, Armed forces, and Aircraft (military).


The search identified a total of 117 news stories, 46 photos, five diagrams and two editorials related to the air disaster and its aftermath.

The Los Angeles Times
(December 13, 1985-October 13, 1986)
32 News stories
12 Photographs
1 Diagram
1 Editorial

The New York Times
(December 13, 1985-April 4, 1987)
51 News stories
18 Photographs
1 Diagram

The Washington Post
(December 13, 1985-December 5, 1986)
34 News stories
16 Photographs
3 Diagrams
1 Editorial

The titles of the news stories and their respective pages are listed in the Appendix, pages 99-113.
Procedure

Ross' five-stage grief-recovery model: shock, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance was used to generate the framework for analysis.

The literature review revealed no earlier research of news reporting and grief recovery. Thus, in the absence of a measurement tool, this researcher developed verbal representations for each grief stage (Figure 4, page 30) and behaviorally observed, associated characteristics (Figure 5, pages 31 and 32).

The verbal representations and associated characteristics were adapted for use in this study from previous research done by Doyle, Lindemann, Pincus and Ross.

The associated characteristics were developed to facilitate analysis, since the visual picture presented in a news story might show one of the five stages, but not state it out-right.

For example, a reporter might write, 'many of those attending the meeting seemed dazed by the news,' or quote a source who says, 'I don't feel anything right now; I'm just numb all over.' In both cases, the appropriate coding is number one, stage one, numbness.

There are also some very narrow distinctions between several of the codes within grief stages. These
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Stage 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 numbness</td>
<td>8 fault-</td>
<td>16 missed</td>
<td>18 helplessness</td>
<td>26 resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 yearning</td>
<td>finding</td>
<td>flights</td>
<td>19 disorientation</td>
<td>27 optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 denial</td>
<td>9 intense</td>
<td>17 hope for survivors</td>
<td>20 weeping</td>
<td>28 involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 disbelief</td>
<td>emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 sighing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 anxiety</td>
<td>10 blame</td>
<td></td>
<td>22 hand-wringing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 bewilderment</td>
<td>11 guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 fantasy</td>
<td>12 agitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 distress</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 despair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 protest</td>
<td></td>
<td>24 sadness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 hostility</td>
<td></td>
<td>25 choked-up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 irritability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grief Recovery Stages and Codes

Figure 4
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>numbness: loss of sensation, going through the motions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>yearning: longing, deep desire for return to status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>denial: refusal to believe the truth, facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>disbelief: reluctance to believe the truth; facts (the distinction between disbelief and denial is narrow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>anxiety: distress, uncertainty about the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>bewilderment: thoroughly confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>fantasy: images of the deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>fault finding: petty criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>intense emotion: rage, hysteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>blame: to hold someone responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)</td>
<td>guilt: feeling responsible for wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>agitation: general nervousness, feeling uneasy, easily irritated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>distress: severe strain resulting from exhaustion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>protest: strong objection to explanation(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)</td>
<td>hostility: general antagonism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coding Guide**

**Figure 5**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16)</td>
<td>missed flight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17)</td>
<td>hope for survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18)</td>
<td>helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19)</td>
<td>disorientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20)</td>
<td>weeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21)</td>
<td>sighing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22)</td>
<td>hand wringing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23)</td>
<td>despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24)</td>
<td>sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25)</td>
<td>choked-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26)</td>
<td>resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27)</td>
<td>optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28)</td>
<td>involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

expressed as hope that friends and or family may have missed the flight or were incorrectly listed on the flight manifest

strong desire that the deceased survived the crash

inability to manage alone; without power or strength

without a sense of direction

tearful, any manifestation of tears or crying

sighing; deep breathing

hand wringing

total loss of hope; feelings of failure

expressions of dejection, unhappiness

tightness of throat

plans for the future, resolve to go on, despite the loss

belief that the situation is improving;

return to mainstream activities

Coding Guide (Cont.)

Figure 5
distinctions may not be necessary in the final analysis, but were developed in this manner to determine the degree of intensity, if any, of the studied responses.

Each news story was read by this researcher. Notation of the story's length and location was made. When the content of the story depicted any of the 28 criteria, it was appropriately coded and recorded. Corresponding quotations were recorded separately for subsequent reviews, cross-checking and verification.

The analysis did not differentiate between reporter and source material. Although the distinction may be of interest to a study of this nature, the product; i.e., the actual story printed, is most important, not the editorial process.
Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Hypothesis 1

"Print media accounts of the Arrow Air crash will demonstrate a pattern of sequenced reporting with a focus changing from shock to anger to bargaining to depression to acceptance."

This study revealed that print media reports of crisis and its aftermath match in a general way the stages of grief recovery observed by medical practitioners and sociologists.

The pattern that emerged was similar to the Ross model: shock, to anger (with depression), to depression, to acceptance (with anger), to anger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1, Shock</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2, Anger</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3, Bargaining</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4, Depression</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5, Acceptance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis Results for 117 New Stories

Figure 6
Stage 1, shock, was observed in 21 instances of the 117 stories analyzed. It was seen primarily in the first five days following the accident. On several occasions thereafter, the responses reappeared. In these cases, the responses were either first-time reactions to the news of the accident or a recollection of previously felt emotions.

Most typically the actual words, 'shock' and 'disbelief' were specifically used.

For example, Bill Peterson, reporting for The Washington Post, described many stage one responses:

They greeted the news with quiet disbelief. There was no hysteria, Army spokesmen said.

... a sense of shock invaded this base....

'It's a blow,' said bartender Charles Keesee, who retired after 27 years in the Army.

'You see a lot of death [in the military] but in peacetime it is shocking.'

'... It's pretty bad,' he said. 'I can hardly believe it.'

Stage 2, anger, appeared frequently throughout the analysis period; 66 instances of the 117 analyzed stories. Expressed largely as fault finding and blame, anger was initially aimed in multiple directions—the pilot of the aircraft, the airline, the military, policies directing the use of civilian charters for transport of military personnel, competition and the low-bid system for government contracts, and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Although the plane was chartered by the
Multinational Force and Observers, headquartered in Rome, there was no evidence of anger targeted toward that organization.

After the December 16th memorial service, and for the duration of the reporting thereafter, anger was the preponderant stage observed. This anger was primarily directed toward the airline, which, as more information became available, appeared to be culpable.

The Army was also the recipient of anger during the lengthy process of identification of the victims’ remains (Illustration 2), but once the remains of the last soldier was interred, anger was focused primarily on Arrow Air.

Stage 3, bargaining, was observed eight times and only in the first five days of news reporting. Although grief recovery is very much an individualized process, it is noteworthy that there was so little evidence of this stage.

According to Doyle, when deaths are unexpected and the bodies not recovered, the bereaved can "be stuck" at this level for a long time. The lack of concrete evidence allows him or her to fantasize that the person is not really dead.²

The media, I believe, played a critical role in dispelling the hopes for survivors through its description of the stark realities of the crash scene.
ID of Crash Victims a Tedium Process

Missing Medical Records Hamper Army Pathologists

By Norman Bluck

Despite problems involving missing medical and dental records, Army officials expressed confidence yesterday that virtually all of the 248 soldiers killed in a jetliner crash last month will ultimately be identified for burial by their families.

The service, in a brief written statement, acknowledged that identification of bodies from the Dec. 12 crash at Gander, Newfoundland, had turned into a tedious process and that only 795 identifications have been made.

"Authorities are hopeful that modern identification procedures will make it possible to identify all but a few of the soldiers," it added. "Such procedures are time-consuming, and it may be months before final determinations are made."

The soldiers, members of the 101st Airborne Division, were returning to Fort Campbell, Ky., from Cairo after six months of peacekeeping duty in the Sinai Desert.

Officials said reports that the Army was considering mass burial of unidentified remains had caused distress among many family members, suggesting that identification efforts were ending.

"What we're saying to these families is we're not going to stop trying to identify their loved ones until there's absolutely nothing else we can do," said one official, who asked not to be identified.

"As of this date, the remains of 715 soldiers and five crew members killed in the Gander crash have been positively identified for burial," the Army statement said.

It said remains that cannot be identified "will be accorded group burial with full military honors at an appropriate national cemetery. Army authorities hope that such action will not be found necessary."

The Army acknowledged shortly after the crash that, although regulations prohibited it, many of the troops had their medical and dental records on the plane. Army spokesman Elaine Herven said the Army is investigating.

She said duplicate records were obtained from other bases or from families for many of the dead and that the major problem was the severity of the crash and fire.

The chartered Arrow Air DC-8 was fully fueled when it crashed on takeoff, touching off an explosion and burning most victims beyond recognition.

Severe winter weather has hampered the recovery of remains and personal effects. Earlier this week, a team of Army specialists was dispatched to Gander to join Canadian authorities to expand the ground search.

The Washington Post, January 11, 1986
Family members, who might have otherwise been without the facts surrounding the disaster, had real-time information.

The media, then, through its descriptive accounts of the accident scene, may have reduced the amount of psychological bargaining on the part of the bereaved and served as a source of preparatory grief (emotional preparation and expectation of devastating news).

The first news reports focused primarily on the conflagration (Illustrations 3 and 4) and tended to confirm the loss of life. Very little optimism for crash survivors was expressed.

At the same time, however, media accounts provided hope for the bereaved. This was manifested primarily through the highlighting of soldiers who were listed on the plane's manifest, but for one reason or another, missed the flight. (Illustrations 5 and 6)

Evidence suggested that some of the victims' family members maintained hope until official notification because of these reports.

Another Texas family, that of Pfc. Troy Cupples, clung to what his stepfather, David Spear of Porter, called 'a far-off hope' that while Cupples' name was on the manifest, he may not have been on the plane.3

Stage 4, descriptions of depression, or deep grief, (46 observations) were noted throughout the analyzed period, but were greatest December 17, 1985, the day
258 ON U.S. TROOP FLIGHT DIE AS PLANE CRASHES IN GANDER ON WAY HOME FROM MIDEAST

The New York Times, December 13, 1985

Illustration 4
Lost Passport Keeps
G.I. Off Fatal Flight

LANE CITY, Fla., Dec. 16 (AP) —
His family says it was “God’s mira-
acle” that Pfc. Erick Harrington lost
his passport and was the only mem-
er of his company not allowed
aboard a charter flight that crashed
in Newfoundland, killing all aboard.

“Clumsy Erick,” his mother,
Jennie Harrington, said Friday be-
tween joyful tears. “He just mis-
placed his passport. I’m so happy I
don’t know what to do.”

The chartered DC-8 was carrying
248 soldiers from peacekeeping duty
in the Mideast and a crew of eight
when it crashed early Thursday.

Mrs. Harrington, 41 years old, and
her husband, Cleveland, did not know
about their son’s good luck until their
daughter-in-law, who lives nearby,
called them Thursday night. Brenda
Harrington, 20, told her in-laws that
her 20-year-old husband was stuck in
Cairo.

“It was God’s miracle,” the sol-
dier’s mother said. “It was his intent
for my son to miss that plane.”

Private Harrington is expected to
take another flight from Egypt to
Fort Campbell, Ky., sometime next
week to greet his relatives, including
his year-old son, Dwayne.

Illustration 5
The Lucky Ones — They Missed the Fateful Flight
following the memorial service attended by President and Mrs. Reagan.

Other observations of this stage were evident primarily after various memorial services, when, in the American society, the expression of such emotions tend to be more frequently publicly displayed and socially acceptable.

It must also be noted that the Army carefully shielded the victims' families from the media and therefore attendance at the public event may have been the first access reporters had with the bereaved.

Acceptance, Stage 5, was the least frequently observed emotion. There were seven observations of this stage in the 117 stories analyzed.

Inferences to the necessity of resolution were first observed December 21, 1985 in a Los Angeles Times story reporting a memorial service conducted at Fort Campbell.

"The intensity of our mourning is only equal to our resolve to meet the challenge of life...."4

It is interesting to further note that this story was printed on the last day of continuous coverage by the paper. The timbre of the story lent a type of closure to a long-running story.

The New York Times was the only newspaper of the three to specifically spotlight the healing process, in a story published January 20, 1986. (Illustration 7)
Army Replacing Men Killed in Crash

By RICHARD HALLOREN
Spokes in The New York Times

PORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — The infantry battalion of the 191st Airborne Division lost nearly a third of its soldiers in an airplane crash in New-Foundland, has begun to rebuild.

The new commander, Lt. Col. Harry E. Rothman, called the 3d Battalion, 502d Infantry, together as early as January to tell them about plans for the next six months. "We are all soldiers," the colonel said, "and we know what we have to do.

In a brief ceremony to symbolize the step into the new year, the colonel read a letter from a Marine officer who had lost colleagues in the terrorist attack in Lebanon in 1983, formally inducted two new company commanders, then led the battalion on a four-mile run.

The battalion had been the main element of the American contingent in an international peacekeeping force in the Sinai and was on the way home when a chartered airliner crashed shortly after taking off from Gandar Dec. 11, killing all 256 people aboard.

In soldiers killed, the battalion suffered a catastrophic loss. In combat, casualties of 10 to 15 percent are considered heavy. All together, the battalion lost 87 officers and soldiers, almost a third of the total.

The commander, seven staff officers, two company commanders, the chaplain and the sergeant major, the senior noncommissioned officer, died in the crash. Company A was nearly wiped out, as was the anti-tank platoon of Company D.

A battalion is the basic fighting unit of the Army and Marine Corps. In the 191st, a helicopter assault division, an infantry battalion comprises 6 officers and 59 enlisted men organized into a headquarters, three rifle companies and a weapons company with mortars and anti-tank missiles.

But an infantry battalion depends more on esprit and discipline than on numbers and weapons to become an effective combat force. Soldiers are motivated, said Colonel Rothman, "by the intangible bonds of trust, loyalty and confidence."

To reconstitute the battalion, Colonel Rothman reassigned officers and sergeants within the battalion, received others from the brigade of which the battalion is one of three, and was given several from the other two brigades in the division.

He has reassigned eight squads of nine to 11 soldiers, the smallest units, from other companies to rebuild Company A. That way, Colonel Rothman said, "we have a battalion that is associated with success in the Sinai."

The brigade commander, Col. John P. Harring, who is supervising the rebuilding, emphasized the common experience of the Sinai mission as a bond. "The whole thing," he said, "is to try to maintain the cohesion of the unit."

Attention to Morale

While the battalion is being reorganized, Colonel Harring said, equal attention will be given to morale. "You've got to heal the the spirit as well as the physical wounds," he said. "It's going to take a while to get over that loss."

A new chaplain has been named and a psychologist has been assigned to the battalion, both will look for signs of depression or other problems.

Large numbers of rifles, anti-tank weapons and communications gear were lost in the crash, but replacing those is among the least of the battalion's problems. Colonel Harring said most of the weapons would be replaced by the end of February.

Colonel Rothman, who was the brigade's executive officer before being named battalion commander the day after the crash, held meetings with all leaders in the battalion, down to the squad level, to get ideas for retraining.

"We'll start from the basics," the colonel said, "just as if we were starting a football season. We'll go through the drills and learn the plays again."

In February, the battalion will go to the field for platoon-level exercises, troops will be trained in air assault tactics and leaders will take part in a command-post exercise to train them in making tactical decisions.

Emphasis Was on Safety

In March, the battalion will stay in part-time to serve guard duty, and soldiers to specialist schools like the communications officers academy and communications school, and work on shortages spotted in the field.

In April, Company A will go to amphibious warfare school to train on its own and to build company cohesion. The battalion will also be given its first tactical evaluation to see if it is ready for combat.

In May, part of the battalion is scheduled to train with forces from other
Sgt. Steven Stone, right, and Specialist 4 Curtis Lilly, center, checking into the 3d Battalion, 82d Infantry, at Fort Campbell, Ky. Sgt. Terry Miley, left, observes the procedure.

Survivors in a joint exercise while one company will go to Fort Irwin, Calif., to act as the adversary for other battalions training there.

A grim irony, Colonel Hettinger said, was that the 3d Battalion, 82d Infantry, had emphasized safety in its six-month tour in the Sinai. Earlier units had lost soldiers in accidents or drownings, but the worst the battalion had suffered until the crash was a broken leg.

In his first formation with the battalion, Colonel Ruchhaken said he hoped to set a tone. For that reason, he read to the soldiers the letter from the Marine officer whose battalion was hit by a terrorist attack in Beirut, saying that both battalions "lost people who were performing their duties in the service of the nation."

The marine's letter included a check for $300,000 in troops and stipulated for survivors of the soldiers. Letters from all over the country, Colonel Ruchhaken said the battalion, "reflected recognition from the people of this country that we are their soldiers."


Illustration 7 Continued
Since reporting tends to focus on action, emotion, and drama, it is most noteworthy that the story calmly describing a spirit of renewal, was printed.

It is possible that other reporters were developing similar stories, but re-channeled their efforts eight days later when another air disaster, the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, occurred.

News stories printed in the months following the crash tended to focus on stage two, anger. However, since the media’s role is to probe, ask critical questions, and periodically maintain an adversarial role, describing print media as predominantly angry is perhaps presumptuous and inappropriate.

Molotch and Lester wrote that the empirical study of the media is most relevant when accomplished during and immediately following crisis events, when would-be event makers and reporters find themselves outside their traditional, somewhat routinized roles.5

For that reason, I refined my analysis and focused primarily on news stories printed the week following the crash (December 13-21, 1985).

During the first week of reporting the accident, the principal focus changed almost daily, in a pattern similar to those identified by Ross and others.

Stories printed on the first day (Figure 7), Friday, December 13, 1985 focused primarily on the shocking
aspects of the accident: the tremendous loss of life, the horrendous extent of the fire that followed the crash, and the jarring, unanticipated changes in the lives of many. (Illustration 8, page 48)

For the most part, stage one behaviors were easily identified. Phrases such as 'quiet disbelief,' 'a sense of shock,' 'it's a blow,' and 'I can hardly believe it' were printed frequently in all three papers. Even the nation's spokesperson, President Reagan, was quoted as being "shocked and saddened" by the disaster.
Instead of the Band and Banners,
All-Night Chapels at Ft. Campbell

By JOHN MOLLISON

"FORT CAMPBELL, Ky., Dec 17 — The banners had been hung in the post
gymnasium and the division band was
preparing to play at a ceremony wel-
coming 300 members of the 101st Air
borne back from almost six months in
Sou.

"When Col. John P. Herring went
before a gathering of about 300 people
at Ft. Campbell on Dec. 7, the band
were down and the band instruments still in
their cases.

Colonel Herring's message was:

"Yes, he told them, a plane that
crashed in Gander, Newfoundland, was
the one that had been chartered to
bring their husbands, fathers, brothers
and friends home.

Family Aid Center Set Up

Then, the methods the Army has de-
veloped to handle casualties and grief
in wartime were put into motion for
this unexpected wartime tragedy. A
family assistance center was set up to
comfort the relatives of the probable
victims, even though positive identi-
fication of the dead was not expected be-
fore next week.

Two chapels were kept open all night
with clergymen available for anyone
who wanted to visit.

Officers of the famed airborne divi-
sion, which has headquarters at this
sprawling base in the rolling hills
outside the Tennessee-Kentucky bor-
der, described the mood on the post as
one of "shock and disbelief."

Gen. Burton P. Patrick, the com-
mander of the division, spoke in
halfing tones later in the morning:

"Loss Will Be Everlasting."

"We have suffered a tragic loss that
will be everlasting," he said. "And our
hearts go out to the families and loved
ones of these soldiers.

"These soldiers will be missed," he
added. "And I love each of them deeply.

Army officials here are advising
relatives of soldiers in the 101st detach-
ment to call the unit to which they were
attached. Those who are identified as
relatives will be told if an individual's
name is on the list of those designated
to take the flight, officials said.

"The families knew there was an air-
craft due to come in," said Maj. Gen.
Glensberg, a spokesman for the divi-
sion. "The soldiers had been able to
telephone home, so the relatives were
warned.

The tragedy had a major emotional
impact on this base of 31,000 soldiers,
with 13,000 family members quartered
on the post and thousands more scat-
ered around in nearby communities.

About 40 percent of those on the plane
are believed to have relatives on the
area, Army officials said.

Early in the evening, teams of offi-
cers and senior noncommissioned offi-
cers began to fan out across the base
and outside to inform people that their
relatives had been scheduled for the
flight. The visits were to continue well
into the night.

"Normally we step knocking on
doors at 11 p.m. out of considerations
for the individuals involved," Maj.
Glensberg said. "We may extend that a
little longer in this situation.

Base officials said 65 local families
had been notified that their relatives
had been scheduled for the flight. They
said a total of 80 had been informed.

The extra 15 being people who called in for
information.

The entire 1,800-member contingent
that had been sent to the Middle East
on July 8 was to have been home by
Christmas. Earlier groups arrived on
Nov. 27 and Dec. 4.

Officials here said the accident was
the largest noncombatant loss of life for
the Army in recent years. They said
they would try to maintain the normal
operations of the entire division while
giving the process of notifying the fami-
lies of the victims and helping them
deal with their loss.

A Christmas concert by the division
band, which had been scheduled well in
advance, was held as scheduled, but
Army officials said it was more of a me-
morial service for those who had been
lost than a typical holiday celebration.

The New York Times, December 13, 1985

Illustration 8
One of the common human responses to crisis is gathering facts and putting them into perspective, much like joining the many pieces of a jumbled jigsaw puzzle. The three newspapers facilitated this response through graphic representations of the events, as if to help answer the question, 'what happened?' (Illustrations 9-11)

Other explanations, also in answer to this query dealt with the journalistic five w's: who the soldiers were, why they were on board this particular flight, and what their mission as part of the multinational force entailed.

Although shock was the primary stage observed, anger, bargaining and depression were also seen. Anger, especially fault-finding, was primarily observed via speculation of the cause of the crash. Reporters noted that the pilot had not ordered the de-icing of the plane's wings, despite a freezing rain mixed with snow which began approximately 75 minutes before the crash. In addition, other news stories reported that the carrier, Arrow Air, had paid fines totalling $34,000 for various civil violations.

There was some bargaining observed, but it was limited. The primary emphasis of bargaining was the spotlighting of soldiers who missed the flight and their families' associated joy.
Broken line (left) indicates southward route of plane along runway. It crashed less than a mile from the end of the runway, just beyond the Trans-Canada Highway.

The New York Times, December 13, 1985

Illustration 9
The Washington Post, December 13, 1985

Illustration 10
TAKEOFF Arrow An DC 8 lifts off Gander airport. Runway 22 crosses Trans Canada Highway then loses altitude.

CRASH: Plane crashes in hilly sparse woods half a mile from runway. Bursts into flames near Gander Lake.

The Los Angeles Times, December 13, 1985

Illustration 11
Deep grief (depression) was also frequently observed. In most of the cases, the families had prior knowledge of their soldiers' presence on the plane. For example, two had expressed great anxiety about the return flight, and one predicted his own death.

A number of other soldiers called their respective families from Gander, Newfoundland. This heightened awareness on the part of the bereaved may have thrust them directly in deep grief.

For example, Michael Wines, a reporter for The Los Angeles Times, recounted one family's brief telephone contact before the crash.

Malinda Parris received a call from her husband, Rudy, at 4 a.m. Thursday from Gander, Canada.

... He said, 'Hi ... I just wanted to talk to you.' Then he had to go because the plane was taking off.

The phone rang again at the Parris home two hours later, with the news that the jetliner had crashed on take-off at Gander and all were presumed dead. Malinda Parris burst into tears. Similar stories were told here Thursday.

On the second day after the accident (figure 8), as the shock began to wear off, the focus of reporting shifted to stage two, anger.

The majority of the anger was not specifically targeted. Some inferences to problems at Arrow Air were made, and the pilot's decision to not have the plane de-iced continued to be questioned, but for the most part
For example, The Los Angeles Times quoted a mother who had been worried about her son's assignment in Egypt; "So he survives all that and he gets on a plane to come home and it crashes. It's just not fair."

She was clearly angered at the loss of her son, but at that time, did not direct it toward a particular person or federal agency.

Others, vocalizing similar anger, described an
emotional transition; anger emerging from shock. A father told a Washington Post reporter,

'We're left with desbelief, horror,' said Peter Thornton.
'We're not only asking why this is happening,' he said, 'we're still saying to ourselves: What is happening?'

As it had done the day before, print media spotlighted the "lucky ones" who, for various reasons had missed the flight. On this day, however, the tone was not as optimistic. For example, the "far-off hope" that some missed the flight was expressed, but one such statement was followed by "other families voiced resignation or sought comfort in memories."10

Stage four, depression, was observed with the same frequency as anger. This may be linked to individual differences of the family members. Many, but not all of the victims' families had already received official confirmation; a critical factor in accepting the loss.

For example, a chaplain at Fort Campbell told a Washington Post reporter that for those who had been notified, little could be done. "There are no right words for a wife who has lost her husband, parents who have lost their son or a child who has lost his mother."11

Stories printed on December 15, 1985, the third day (figure 9), continued to primarily express anger.
Earlier, non-directed anger became more directed, mainly aimed at Arrow Air.

![Bar chart](image)

**December 15, 1985**

For example, The New York Times reported that the airlines had mechanical difficulties and had been forced to abort two take-offs in the previous six months. The Washington Post reported that the Canadian Aviation Review Board's investigation was paying specific attention to an incident that occurred with the same plane approximately one month before the crash. The Los Angeles Times wrote that Arrow Air had encountered
mechanical difficulties earlier in the year.

During this time the media was trapped in a news vacuum. New information was scarce, much to the frustration of many American reporters. (Illustration 12)

Very little information was provided by the Department of Defense, not necessarily because information was being withheld, but because the Canadian authorities had jurisdiction over the crash investigation, and the United States carefully respected that sovereignty.

This apparent lack of new information may have accounted for the change in positioning of stories related to the accident.

On previous days, the crash was a front page story with numerous side-bars. In contrast, the stories printed in The New York Times were located on pages 21 and 23. There were no photos.

The Los Angeles Times coverage included three news stories (none on the front page), an updated listing of the victim's names and an editorial. One photo was used.

The Washington Post's coverage included one front page story, a list of the victim's names, and an editorial. Once again, there were no photos.

The decreased quantity and intensity of the news stories, though unintended, provided a psychological
Scanty crash information frustrating for reporters

GANDER - Reporters from across North America flocked here Thursday to cover the crash of the DC-8 jetliner.
However, frustration was the order of the day for the estimated 150 reporters and technicians as they attempted to uncover details of what caused the loss of 84 lives.

"In that all we get," shouted one American reporter after Transport Canada officials held a brief news conference Thursday night.

Two reporters breached security Thursday night at the crash site.
They were not charged by security officials after they were apprehended.

However a Transport Canada spokesman warned reporters during a briefing Friday morning that further breaches would not be tolerated.
"If it happens again, security personnel will take the appropriate action," he said.
He didn't identify the two who breached security.

As could be expected in the early stages of a tragedy of such dimensions, the officials had very little to offer about the cause of the crash.
Generally they stuck to short, prepared statements and answered very few questions.

That didn't sit well with the more than 50 reporters who crammed into the briefing room at the airport.

Many reporters were anxious to see the crash site but couldn't until Friday afternoon. A Transport Canada official said the press wasn't allowed on the site until all the bodies were evacuated and all vital evidence removed.

Newfoundland Telegram, December 14, 1985

Illustration 12
opportunity for the far-off facts to be assimilated and become near-term reality.

The following day (Figure 10), December 16, 1985, signalled a major change in the tone and focus on news stories. The quantity of stories was significantly reduced, but all three newspapers shared a common focus: stage four, depression and deep grief.

A great deal of the observations were made by reporters attending memorial services; one held in Gander, Newfoundland and one held in Clarkesville,
Tennessee, a small town near Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Many of the outward signs of grief were easily identified. For example, "... some ... cried audibly while others wiped away silent tears."12

The transition through various grief stages was also evident. "Now that the initial shock of the crash has passed, the mood of the community here has shifted toward honoring the dead and helping the survivors."13

The townspeople of Gander were evidently concerned that the sincerity of their message and the solemnity of the ecumenical gathering might be misinterpreted by the American media.

At the beginning of the memorial service, Gander's mayor, Douglas B. Sheppard said, "This is not a media event, this is a memorial service. ... We are feeling for all those people across the United States who lost their sons and daughters."14

The decrescendo of the third day had metamorphosed into the beginnings of a new crescendo.

The fifth day (Figure 11), December 17, 1985 was one of intense mourning. (Illustration 13)

The majority of the outward signs were easily observed. 'Sadness,' 'grief,' 'tears,' 'sobs,' 'wailing,' were common, for example. Other signs, such as hand wringing, were not as obvious, though some might interpret the clutching, re-clutching, and fingering of
President Honors Troops Killed in Canadian Crash

By David Hoffman

PORT CAMPBELL, Ky. - Dec. 16 - President Reagan paid an emotional tribute today to the 348 U.S. soldiers who died in the Newfoundlan'd air crash, but work and official duties to their families, saying, "No family were any stranger to our loved ones, our darlings."

"I know there are no words that can make your pain better, or ease your sorrow in general, how we share your sorrow," Reagan told 700 family members and friends, who gathered in Hanover to mourn the loss of men and women of the 101st Airborne Division.

"But of one thing we can be sure: as a post and of those young soldiers in another war, they will never grow out, they will always be you," Reagan said. "And we know one thing with every bit of our being, they are now in the arms of God."

As the president spoke in a low voice, emotional but firm, a small group surrounded him in the audience, a mother fended the framed portrait of her son, and young women broke into sobs, choking back their tears, her last husband, a widower and on duty with the U.N. peacekeeping force in the Sinai desert.

Then the president and First Lady Nancy Reagan personally comforted every family member, moving slowly through the hangar for nearly an hour. Reagan greeted them all with both arms outstretched, signing tributes to the fallen soldiers on the division's death register. Mrs. Reagan embraced many of the grief-stricken mourners, a white handkerchief cradling tightly by her hand.

It was a scene of emotional sorrow that brought tears to soldiers of the 101st Airborne " Screaming Eagles" who had seen home only the week before. Today, they announced their fallen comrades were being testamentary to the skies above.

"They were full of happiness and laughter as they prepared for flight," Reagan said. "They were happy when they were returning to their homes. And then the terrible news, the tragic news. Now we must all bow our heads and remember: how could this be? How could it happen?"

"We wonder at the unfair tragedy of it all, the enormity of the loss. For last were not only the boys, but all of us, the nation, the world, and the families that they had accomplished, that we were theirExperiment and their nation's dreams."

"Tragedy is nothing new in mankind, but somehow it's always a surprise. It never comes in power to conquer," Reagan said. "Those of us who did not have a brother or a son or daughter or friend or father are shaken momentarily."

At the rear of the hangar, Mrs. Ellen Kizer held a photo of her son, lt. Rick Kizer, 25, of South Bend, Ind., who died in the crash. "He had been at President Reagan's first inaugural as an honor guard," she said, "and now the president is coming to honor him."

The Washington Post, December 17, 1985

Illustration 13
Emotions were great at the ceremony for several reasons. For many surviving family members, this gathering was their first contact with other survivors after the accident. For others, who went to Kentucky from their homes throughout the United States, it was their first ever and perhaps only contact.

The presidential presence also played a key role in the reporting. A great part of the newsworthiness of the stories, hinged on his attendance at the service. Nearly
all of the photographs showed President or Mrs. Reagan embracing family members. (Illustrations 14-16)

Anger was expressed by some of the surviving family members. Christine Manion, the wife of one of the company commanders in the 101st, was perhaps the most vocal. (Illustration 17)

The fact that shock and bargaining was observed is insignificant. The news story in which these characteristics were seen reported the reactions of an Egyptian family who had befriended one of the soldiers. The response was remarkably similar to those expressed in the United States, the day following the crash.

Armanious, a customs inspector, at first did not want to accept that 'Mr. Abe,' as the family called him, was dead. 'Mr. Abe lived near Canada,' he said in broken English, 'so maybe he got off there.'

It appears that some reporters or editors carefully avoided some of the emotion of the ceremony, perhaps due to concern about potential sensationalism. For example, throughout the memorial service, a young child cried for his father. The Los Angeles Times reported: "Adding a special poignancy to the Christmas tragedy, a toddler cried, 'I want my Daddy,' throughout the ceremony...."
At memorial service at Fort Campbell, Ky., President and Mrs. Reagan console families of 101st Airborne soldiers killed in Newfoundland crash.

The Washington Post, December 17, 1985

Illustration 15
FORT CAMPBELL SERVICE — President Reagan meets with family members of Fort Campbell soldiers killed in a plane crash near Gander, Newfoundland, during a memorial service at Fort Campbell Monday.

The New York Times, December 17, 1985

Illustration 16
Widow Says Army Officer Feared Plane’s Condition

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn., Dec. 16 (AP) — The widow of an Army officer killed in the crash of a chartered jetliner in Canada says her husband was fearful of the plane’s condition before he and other military personnel boarded it.

The officer, Capt. Edward J. Manion, was one of 248 soldiers killed Thursday when an Arrow Air DC-8 crashed after takeoff from Gander International Airport on its way to Fort Campbell, Ky., from the Middle East. Eight crew members also died.

"He told me, 'I'm going to survive the Sinai but I'm not going to survive the trip home on the plane,'" Christine Manion said in a telephone interview Sunday night from her home in Fort Campbell. "My husband called me 48 hours before he left and told me he had no confidence in that plane. It made me physically sick."

Mrs. Manion said her husband told her he had heard that the plane that was to take them home "was all screwed up and having many problems."

"They also had such a bad reputation," she said, referring to Arrow Air. "Their planes had broken down so many times. They were always delayed and there were so many problems."

Officials of Arrow Air, in Miami, have declined to comment on the crash while an investigation is under way. An airline spokesman, Robin Mattei, has said only, "This is the first fatality we've had."

Mrs. Manion said her husband, who had finished a five-month tour of duty with the 11-nation peacekeeping force in the Sinai peninsula and was returning to the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, was distraught when she talked to him by telephone before the flight.

"He broke into tears and cried, and all I know is he's not a person to be frightened," she said. "It was like he was saying goodbye forever. It tore him apart."

Mrs. Manion said she would miss today's ceremony at which President Reagan and his wife, Nancy, met the victims' families.

"The only thing that will make me feel better is to see a change" in the way the Army uses charter planes, she said. "When Captain Manion left for the Sinai last summer, Mrs. Manion said, he boarded an Arrow Air DC-10 "that was so bad it's a miracle they got there."

"I was standing on the main strip and watching that plane barely get off the ground, it was shaking and waverling so badly," she said. "We were so sure it wasn't going to make it off the ground."

Mrs. Manion said she had received "calls from all over the country from both active-duty and retired people, begging me to help by saying these things."

Television networks Sunday night played a tape recording from one of the victims, Specialist 4 Jeff S. Kee of Pensacola, Fla., that complained about the aircraft chartered by the military.

Specialist Kee, in a tape sent from Egypt to his fiancée, Tracy Walker of Hopkinsville, Ky., said, "I just hope everything goes all right. I hope the plane gets back all right, 'cause the plane we fly on is really bad."

The New York Times, December 17, 1985

Illustration 17
In contrast, Washington Post staffer David Hoffman wrote, ". . . a small child wailed for a lost father....", while the incident was not at all mentioned in the New York Times.

In the days that followed, stage two, anger was the predominant stage observed.

Most remarkably, it was the only stage observed December 18 and 19 (Figures 12 and 13). According to the Army's After-Action Report, this change of focus signalled the "beginning of [the] end of [the] media honeymoon. Subsequently media angle shifts to allegations that the military is seeking to evade responsibility."18

During this phase of analysis, the distinction between fault-finding and blame (Chapter 3, figures 4 and 5) became quite useful. There was substantial evidence that the nature of the expressed anger had changed.

Earlier expressions of anger, for the most part, were not directive. After the memorial service, anger was directed toward specific organizations.

Some of this directed anger (blame) was inferred by pointing to earlier failures or errors of the pilot, the
December 18, 1985

Figure 12

December 19, 1985

Figure 13
airline, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Army and the use of civilian charters for military transport. In other cases, blame was outright, and more often than not, via quoted sources.

The Los Angeles Times editor, Otis Chandler, wrote that the Department of Defense should take a stronger role in the selection of civilian carters rather than relying on the FAA. "It's not good enough," he wrote.19

Coverage on December 20 and 21 was limited to The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times.

There was no singular focus in stories printed December 20, 1985 (Figure 14), but stage five,

![Figure 14](image_url)
acceptance, was observed in a New York Times story. "We're all philosophical about what happened ... life goes on." 20

On the final day of continuous coverage (Figure 15), both newspapers covered a memorial service held at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The Los Angeles Times focus was stage five, acceptance. The tone of the story was one of resolve.

"The intensity of our mourning is equal only to our resolve to meet the challenge of life. We dedicate ourselves anew...." 21

December 21, 1985

![Bar chart showing frequency of stages](image)

**Figure 15**
The New York Times report of the ceremony was more somber. "We often take for granted the quiet, unsung duties of others who perform for us. Then tragedy strikes and it shocks us into awareness."\(^{20}\)

Anger was strongly expressed in the last paragraph of the story. "'It's hard to take,' he said. 'If anyone is responsible, it's someone in the airline industry. If they are culpable, they should be punished.'"\(^{21}\)

Figure 16 shows the movement from stage to stage during the period of continuous coverage by the print media.

![Figure 16](image-url)
The frequent return to stage two, anger, may simply reflect the nature of journalism; i.e., to identify problems and find causes. Journalists are conditioned to probe for explanations, even if the role becomes adverse in nature.
Hypothesis 2

"Emotions reflecting anger will be most intense after the remains of all the victims have been identified and returned to the next-of-kin."

There was no marked increase in the reporting of Stage 2, anger, after the remains of all the victims were identified, February 25, 1986.

This may be due, in part, to the process of identification. For many, the waiting proved to be very stressful. The identification of remains and subsequent interment may have signaled closure.

In addition, individual soldiers were identified singly, one at a time. Although each soldier's story may have been the subject to coverage on a local level, it apparently was not considered unique enough to be newsworthy by the three newspapers.

For example, Christine Manion, whose husband Captain Edward J. Manion died in the crash, continued to crusade for changes in the military charter system after her spouse was buried. By her own admission, she was not ready to grieve, until appropriate actions were taken. (Illustration 18)
NEWSMAKERS

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH PEOPLE IN THE HEADLINES

Charter crash widow leads fight for safety

Saying "no" to Christine Manion only makes her angry.

And today, as she heads into meetings with lawmakers, military officials and her congressman on the Arrow Air tragedy, she's pretty angry.

Manion, 29, lost her husband, Capt. Edward Manion, 29, when a chartered troop transport crashed Dec. 12 in Gander, Newfoundland, killing 31 soldiers.

"We just can't let those men die in vain," Manion said.

Among the goals of the 29 relatives of crash victims Manion leads into today's meetings: Improved safety standards for planes transporting military personnel and allowing soldiers to refuse to travel on planes they consider unsafe.

Years of study in ballet and martial arts prepared her for the battle: "I've learned that anything you put your mind to, you can do," said Manion.

"She's the pivotal point," said Sandy McCormick, of Bristol, Tenn., whose son, 2d Lt. Scott McCormick, 24, worked under Capt. Manion.

Manion started the campaign when she sent letters to the families of her husband's company in January.

"I thought one of the families would take over and get involved, but it never happened," said Manion.

The only other thing she'd done before was MFA Tech's School of Ballet in Franklin, Tenn.

"Getting involved" has cost her last month's phone bill was $376. And she's made overtures at Fort Campbell, Ky., where her husband was based.

So she's moving soon to near Clarksville, Tenn., with her daughter from her first marriage, Thomas 17.

She married Capt. Manion on Aug. 1, 1984. She still wears his white gold wedding band.

"I always made my husband a promise that anything he couldn't finish, I would. When this is finished, I can get on with my life."

—Steve Marshall

CARrying On: Christine Manion will carry pursuit of her husband's unit to meetings with officials investigating Air crash.

USA Today, March 19, 1986

Illustration 18
Hypothesis 3

"The number and length of news stories will diminish over time and stop; however, the media will again focus on the event on or about the anniversary of the crash."

The greatest number of stories appeared immediately following the crash and remained relatively high the first five days that followed. Both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times had nine days of continuous coverage, The Washington Post, seven. (Figure 17)

Thereafter, news stories were sporadic and varied. There were only two other days, January 10, 1986 and February 5, 1986, when news stories relating to the crash were printed by each of the three newspapers. There was, however, no singular focus; each newspaper covered different aspects of the crash.

Since anniversary reporting is a common practice in journalism and very much a part of grief recovery, it would seem then that a story recounting the accident would appear on or about the anniversary of the disaster. Surprisingly, there were none.

This may be due to the lack of a declared cause of the crash by the Canadian Aviation Safety Board. The media cannot yet provide resolution to the disaster.
Figure 17
The lack of anniversary reporting might also reflect journalist conventions; i.e., since the accident took place in Canada and not the United States, it is not "newsworthy."

For example, the media often focuses on similar disasters as part of the story line. In 1987, after a jet crashed in Detroit, Michigan, The Washington Post published a list of the ten worst air crashes. (The measurement 'worst' was based on the number of passengers killed.)

Interestingly, the accident in Gander wasn't included because the accident occurred outside the United States. However, the Post published a very similar story December 13, 1985. This story described the crash of the Arrow Air DC-8 as the "eighth worst in aviation history."22

There was only one story printed near the anniversary of the crash. The story, the last story of the 117 analyzed, was printed in The Washington Post on December 5, 1986. Although nearly one year later, it was more a news story with a time peg than an anniversary story.

The primary focus of the story was the cause of the crash:

After a year-long probe, investigators believe the crash of a military charter plane that killed 248 U.S. soldiers most likely was caused by the crew's failure to clear ice from

78
the wings before it left Gander, Newfoundland, according to Canadian and U.S. sources.

The Canadian Aviation Safety Board findings are not expected to be released until late spring or early summer of next year [1987].
Footnotes


3--------, "For One Mother, Sudden Loss Leaves Her 'Tricked, Robbed,'" The Los Angeles Times, December 14, 1985.


8Mary Kosh, speaking to an Associated Press reporter, reported in The Los Angeles Times, December 14, 1985, p. 34.

Ibid, "For One Mother, Sudden Loss Leaves Her 'Tricked, Robbed,'" p. 34.

Ibid.


Ibid.


--------, "Howitzers Thunder a 248 Gun Salute to


23 Ibid.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study shows that media reports of a shocked, angry, and saddened society in the aftermath of a disaster correspond with patterns of predictable human responses and are not necessarily the sensationalized product of an adversarial press.

The analysis revealed that print media reports of the Arrow Air jetliner crash in Gander, Newfoundland followed a pattern similar to patterns observed in grief recovery. The pattern was primarily evident during the first nine days following the accident.

Stage 1, shock, was the first stage observed. It was, however, seen briefly and only after initial reports of the accident and tended to appear concurrently with stage three, bargaining.

When the recovery of the body is delayed, as in drownings or accidents similar to the crash in Gander, Newfoundland, thanatologists report that this stage and grief recovery, as well, is often repeated after the victims' remains are interred. This was not observed.

Instead, Stage 2, anger, was more frequently seen. Throughout the analyzed content it continued to appear, even though the main focus of the coverage moved from
stage to stage. The continued presence of this stage, I believe, is not the outgrowth of a biased press, but rather, the product of the print media's probing nature.

For example, the anger expressed immediately after the crash differed significantly from the anger observed in news stories printed several months thereafter. The anger that was observed immediately following the crash more closely followed a human pattern rather than the conventions of journalism.

Stage 3, bargaining, was the only stage observed out of the expected sequence. It tended to occur simultaneously with stage one observations; much like a surprise within a surprise, or calm in the midst of disaster.

Observations of bargaining were reduced, I believe, by the media's presence. First person accounts of the disaster vividly explained the extent of the fire and photographs of the plane, still burning hours after the crash, painted a very pessimistic picture.

In addition, the evidence of bargaining might have been limited because of the nature of the flight's passengers.

For example, many military families prepare themselves psychologically for the loss of a loved one, especially when the assignment is in hostile or potentially hostile areas. This preparatory grief may
have hastened the advent of depression and deep grief.

Observations of Stage 4, depression, were present primarily in stories written about the formal memorial services held at various sites in the United States and Canada. There was a clear event orientation to observations of this stage. However, it is not possible to determine the type or nature of reports that might have been made in the absence of these events.

Stage 5, acceptance, was the least frequently observed emotion, but did occur to some degree in each of the three newspapers.

Although the results of the analysis showed a similarity to the patterns noted in grief recovery, they may be exclusively unique to the crash at Gander, Newfoundland or air disasters in general.

This study should be replicated many times, preferably in the aftermath of the crisis when the process used by both print and electronic media can be observed, and the relationship examined.

In addition, future studies should look at other areas of enquiry. Does reporting change, for example, in non-military or less restrictive environments? Do news stories reporting crises outside the United States differ from those reporting crises within the United States? Is there a uniquely American way of reporting grief?

When formulating further conclusions, researchers
must allow for individual differences, since grief recovery varies from person to person and situation to situation. Lily Pincus reminds us that

An individual may repeat stages, skip some, or have stages occur simultaneously. The order, intensity and duration also vary....

This study showed that despite individual differences and the conventions of journalism, a human pattern emerged when reporting crisis. These conventions did not disguise the human grief response but rather, revealed it.

The most significant finding in this study, I believe, is lack of strong closure to the disaster in the form of stories focused on stage five, acceptance. Certainly recovery from such a great loss will take time, but recognizing that healing is in process is also important.

The scarcity of optimism and recovery in particular, may be the by-product of journalistic convention. The tendency to focus on conflict, drama, and emotion may cause the media to overlook acceptance. The previously 'hot' story is no longer highly valued and is easily replaced by other, journalistically more important, events.

This tendency might very well be the source of the media's reputation as an insensitive monster with an insatiable appetite for grief stories. For example,
according to C. Fraser Smith, when reporting the terrorist truck bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon,

If a family agreed to be interviewed or sit for photographs, it was soon overrun by photographers and reporters—and for many days. Then press attention ended as abruptly as it had begun. The families discovered that enduring grief is not necessarily enduring news.²

Thus, when everyone else is resolving their grief, the media are already highlighting the next problem, crisis or disaster. New, more urgent problems are more likely to be printed and the concomitant resolution to previous ones dismissed entirely.

The problem with grief reporting then, is not so much that media focus on grief, but how the task is accomplished. Every event has a beginning, a middle and an end. Over time, the beginning and middle are strong components of journalism, but the ending (resolution) all too often, is weak or non-existent. The reader is left with unresolved issues and unresolved grief.

The notion of social responsibility and the press is yet another lengthy subject, but it seems to me, that editors have a responsibility to their readers and society as well, when reporting grief.

The media, as an information source, becomes a functionary in the recovery process. It brings to the forefront evidence of the loss, the factors that led to
it, and sometimes (not often enough) the grieving that follows. To complete the cycle, focus on recovery should become more the norm than the signal of a slow news day.

Public criticism that the media is insensitive is not without merit. By focusing only on the shock and sadness of the loss, the media imparts a skewed sense of reality, hopelessness and helplessness.

Reporters and editors would better serve the public by consciously reporting the denouement of crises as a matter of routine, rather than exception. In so doing, they will more honestly reflect what members of the human race do, feel and think; the primary function of news reporting.
Footnotes


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Gaddy, Gary D. and Enih Tanjong. "Earthquake


Appendix

The news stories used for this content analysis are listed chronologically, by date.

The Los Angeles Times

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<th>Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>1986-88</td>
<td>M.A. 5-26-88</td>
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<td>Moorhead State University</td>
<td>1974-79</td>
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<td>Moorhead State University</td>
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