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An Analysis of the Liberal/Negative Bias in Network News Coverage of the 1989-1990 Panama Invasion (Operation Just Cause)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE LIBERAL/NEGATIVE BIAS IN NETWORK NEWS COVERAGE OF THE 1989-1990 PANAMA INVASION (OPERATION JUST CAUSE)

by

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ABSTRACT

As long as there have been military forces and media there has been tension and conflict between the two organizations. For the contemporary American military and media these tensions are intensified by lingering resentments of the media coverage of the Vietnam War and the exclusion of the media during the Grenada invasion.

The perception exists among many government and military leaders that since the Vietnam War the media, especially the broadcast media, will cover any American military conflict with a liberal/negative bias. This translates into coverage that focuses on negative themes: death, destruction, suffering, and mayhem caused by the American actions; and stories that treat the administration's policy decision to engage in a military action negatively.

Although in the post-Vietnam, post-Grenada era there has been much discussion on how to improve the military-media working relationship, there has been little analysis of media performance in a post-Vietnam American military operation.

This study is a content analysis of the three major television networks' (ABC, CBS, and NBC) coverage of the Panama invasion from start to finish. The research question asked, "Did network television news coverage of the 1989-90 Panama Invasion (Operation

JUST CAUSE) have a liberal/negative bias?" Since the Panama Invasion was quite brief, less than three weeks in duration, all 144 stories from the 54 broadcasts of evening newscasts that the three networks made during the course of the invasion were reviewed.

The study instrument for this content analysis was a scaled down replication of Hallin's (1984) code book from his content analysis of television coverage of the Vietnam War. Seven of the variables used in this study address themes: Is there video showing Americans helping Panamanians? Are casualties and/or grieving survivors shown on video? Who is responsibility for the casualties attributed to? How are military results and the hopes for Noriega's capture/surrender presented? Three additional variables address policy issues: What is the content of statements on the invasion policy? How is the invasion policy interpreted? Are statements about the policy balanced by the opposite view?

The findings of the study did not find support for the idea of a liberal/negative bias in network news coverage. News coverage focused on policy issues far more prevalently than "war" themes. Graphic scenes of death and suffering were nearly non-existent. While negative statements were frequently made about the administration's invasion policy, they were balanced by views that supported the administration. Because of this balancing and other supportive statements, the majority of stories had a positive tone, thus negating the study's research question.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THE PROBLEM

Introduction

As long as there have been military forces and media there has been tension and conflict between the two organizations. While many people assume the animosity between the military and media reached an all-time high during the Vietnam War, a review of history shows that the military - media tensions during this conflict were probably no greater than they were during the English Crimean War or the American Civil War (Sharpe, 1987a).

Regardless, the ghosts of Vietnam remain. Many government and military leaders still maintain that liberal/negative media coverage of the Vietnam War was an essential element in America's defeat (Hallin, 1986; Henry, 1991). The media, meanwhile, remains resentful and suspicious of the military's motives of dealing with them since the media blackout of the Grenada invasion of 1983 (Denniston, 1984; Dorfman, 1984; Sheahan, 1988).

Despite these tensions, throughout the 1980s and 1990s the American military and media have put considerable effort into improving their working relationship (Boyle, 1984; Sharpe, 1987c, Pyle, 1988). However, even in the wake of the Persian Gulf War of 1991, which is generally considered a success story for military - media relations (Boyle, 1991), strong voices of

dissent still arise. In accepting his 1991 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting (for his coverage of the Gulf War) on April 7, 1992, *Newsday* reporter Patrick Sloyan said:

> I wouldn't have gotten this award today if it weren't for George Bush's effort to prevent the American public from seeing the face of battle. A lot of editors and publishers and network news managers got conned into going into the Pentagon's pool system. They went into the bag ("Papers on Opposite", 1992).

In the post-Vietnam, post-Grenada era there has been much discussion about, but little analysis of, media performance in covering American military operations. Television coverage has been intensely debated both for the logistics of getting television crews and their equipment access to combat areas, and for the strong impact that television footage is widely assumed to have on the American public (Hallin, 1984; Denniston, 1984).

Statement of the Problem

The perception exists among many government and military leaders that the media, especially the broadcast media, have a liberal/negative bias when covering military operations (Hallin, 1986, Hammond, 1989). It is assumed that broadcast journalists, if "cut loose" on the battlefield or surrounding area, will focus their cameras on the destruction and human suffering caused by the American military, and show the failures and stalemates of military operations and administration policies to the exclusion of any stories that show the military and administration in a successful or positive light. Studies of television coverage of

the Vietnam War show that this is not an accurate description of coverage of that conflict (Bailey, 1976a, 1976b; Epstein, 1975, Hallin, 1984), however the studies did find that coverage of the Vietnam War was more negative in the final years of that conflict. Some media critics say that in any post-Vietnam American military conflict, the media's coverage would simply pick up where it left off at the end of Vietnam with a predominant liberal/negative bias.

For nearly twenty years this "theory" remained just that - a topic to be discussed and speculated on by scholars. The isolated military "skirmishes" of the 1980s were executed swiftly and secretly with no advance warning to the American public or media. Additionally, these incidents; the attempted rescue of the Iranian hostages, the bombing of Libya, and the firings in the Persian Gulf, were single maneuvers, not prolonged operations which involved large numbers of American forces. The controversial 1983 invasion of Grenada, in which the media was "blackouted" in the initial stages, obviously did not provide an adequate forum for evaluating media performance. So the 1989-90 American military invasion of Panama, (titled Operation JUST CAUSE by military planners), presented the first real opportunity to examine the American media's performance in a post-Vietnam military conflict.

Significance

This study, which was a content analysis of the three major American broadcast television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) coverage of the Panama invasion as shown on their nightly newscasts, looked specifically at the charge that the broadcast media, have a liberal/negative bias when covering American military conflicts. The findings of the study can be a useful tool in the continuing effort to improve military - media relations. In the rhetorical volleying between military and media spokespersons on this timeless and important issue, much is said about developing mutual trust and understanding. If the liberal/negative bias of the media is an unfounded myth it should be dispelled. If there is evidence to support the bias, it is an issue to be confronted head on.

Even in light of the subsequent Persian Gulf War, an analysis of the Panama invasion is still valuable for several reasons. First, there were tremendous logistic and tactical differences between the two conflicts. Panama was a surprise attack - with little pre-positioning of troops; it was a total ground attack, and was waged predominantly in a heavily populated, urban area. Panama is located in America's traditional "backyard", which meant the movement of additional troops (and reporters) into the area was quite easy. The Persian Gulf War was nearly the opposite in every respect. Large troop build-ups, as well as repeated warnings to Iraq to retreat from

Kuwait - or else, were accomplished months before the war began. By and large it was an air war, waged across the wide open spaces of the desert in a country on the other side of the globe.

Additionally, an analysis of the Panama invasion is useful is because it can act as a historical bridge between broadcast media coverage of the Vietnam War and coverage of the Persian Gulf War.

Research Question

In addressing the issue of li! ral/negative bias in the broadcast media's coverage of American military conflicts, this study asks the research question:

"Did network television news coverage of the 1989-90 Panama invasion (Operation JUST CAUSE) have a liberal/negative bias?"

Although the term "liberal bias" is frequently used by conservative media critics, it is an inexact and confusing label. In this study the term is always referred to as "liberal/negative" bias to help eliminate some of the confusion, but a more exact definition is still required. One media critic said the broadcast media is opposed to any sort of governmental authority and focuses on stories that show the government in an unfavorable light. He specifically said broadcast coverage develops the themes, "none of our national policies work, none of our institutions respond, none of our political organizations succeed" (Robinson, 1976, p. 429). In applying this rationale to

the research question, the idea of liberal/negative bias is clarified by asking two sub-questions:

1. Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of coverage of the Panama invasion?

2. Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?

In the context of "war" coverage, negative themes are stories that concentrate on the destruction, human suffering, and general mayhem the military actions caused, with a focus on blaming the American military and administration for these conditions.

Unfavorable presentations of the Bush administration's invasion policy are stories that focus on criticism of the invasion and its aftermath without any balancing positive statements.

Before embarking on this study, it is useful to examine the literature that has examined the military - media relationship in past conflicts, for this previous work gives great insight on how the relationship has developed to where it is today.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Military - Media Relationship

It was in 1917 that Senator Hiram Johnson made his often paraphrased remark, "The first casualty when war comes is truth" (Knightly, 1975, p. iii). To many in the media this remark strikes at the core of the problem of reporting military operations. Governments have traditionally censored press coverage of military conflicts or used public relations campaigns in an attempt to influence the types of stories to which the media have access. William Howard Russell, who covered the Crimean War in 1854-56 and is generally recognized as the first war correspondent, described himself as "the miserable parent of a luckless tribe" (Knightly, p.4).

Russell's biographer wrote that to the Victorian readers who read Russell's dispatches "war ceased to be an objective undertaking taking place in some far-off field. Russell brought war to the fireside, the breakfast table, the government office and the Treasury Bench" (Sharpe, 1987a, p. 4). Dispatches that have portrayed the military in a less than favorable light, which many of Russell's did, are the oldest and most enduring source of military - media conflict. Even before Russell's day many military leaders misunderstood, mistrusted, resented, or feared

the media and its function. Napoleon once said, "Three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than one thousand bayonets" (Sharpe, p. 3).

In America, although the Tory newspapers had naturally been critical of the Revolutionary War effort, the military - media conflict really developed during the Civil War. Following the recent European Crimean War precedent, there were numerous war correspondents making prompt, on-the-scene reports. Censorship and access to the battlefield and soldiers emerged as the major controversial issues. When Union General Henry W. Halleck expelled all correspondents from his forces in the East, the *New York Times* reacted strongly writing,

> More harm would be done to the Union by expulsion of correspondents than these correspondents now do by occasional exposure to military blunders, imbecilities, peccadilloes, corruption, drunkenness, and knavery or by their occasional failure to puff every functionary as much as he thinks he deserves. (Sharpe, 1987a, p. 5)

It is said that when General Sherman was told that three correspondents had been killed by an artillery shell he responded, "Good, now we shall have the news of hell before breakfast" (Sharpe, p. 5).

The battle lines in the military - media conflict were clearly drawn by the end of the Civil War, but for the next 100 years it seemed a truce was called while America engaged in "popular" wars. In fact, the media acted almost as agents of the government to promote the cause of the Spanish - American War and World Wars I and II (Sharpe, 1987a). However, the old hostilities began to surface again in the early days of the

Korean War, an unpopular conflict that was not censored in its early stages. When stories that American military leaders perceived as unfavorable to their cause became prominent in the American media, General MacArthur issued strict censorship controls over correspondents, going so far as to place all journalists in the war zone under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. This meant that any journalist who violated the controls could be court-martialed. The media reacted strongly, calling MacArthur's policy "political and psychological", but the rules remained unchanged (Sharpe, 1987a).

The fragile relationship between the media and the military clearly has deep roots. However, most analysts agree that the problem came of age during the Vietnam conflict.

Vietnam, Background

The first 200 American military advisors were sent to South Vietnam in 1954 to aid the South Vietnamese military in their struggle against the Communist North Vietmanese forces and their guerrilla operatives in the South, the Viet Cong. This action was consistent with the American foreign policy of the time, which was to control Communist expansion around the world. The American media paid little attention to this developing situation until 1960, when rebels in the South Vietnamese Army killed 400 civilians in Saigon. *The New York Times*, the Associated Press, and United Press International then sent full-time correspondents. Other major news organizations would send in

stringers for occasional stories (Knightly, 1975).

The early correspondents' job was not easy. Although there was no official media censorship, the South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem was extremely uncooperative because it did not accept the American idea of a free press and it saw the media as an agent of psychological warfare (Mercer, Mungham, & Williams, 1987). American officials in Saigon and Washington were not much better. Both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations manipulated the media through deception and secrecy (Hallin, 1986).

Domestically, American was in the middle of the Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union. Therefore, one of the prevalent political policies of the time was to unquestionably accept the administration's foreign policy decisions as being synonymous with national security. Neither Congress nor the media would second guess a national security issue (Hallin, 1986). Consequently, both Kennedy and Johnson worked hard to ensure the Vietnam issue was kept in the context of foreign policy and out of the arena of political discussion.

In the early phase of the war they were largely successful. Americans, including journalists, did not question the nation's "global commitment" to aid the South Vietnamese. Any debate that occurred questioned tactics, and not the principle of America being in Vietnam (Knightly, 1975). The few voices that tried to challenge the principle were largely ignored. For example, in 1962 photographer Dickey Chapelle took a shocking picture of a

Viet Cong about to be executed by his captor, a South Vietnamese soldier, who stood over him with a drawn gun. No major American publication would run the photo (Morris, 1972). In 1964, Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska made a speech on the Senate floor advocating total withdrawal from Vietnam. His remarks received no press coverage (Whitcover, 1971).

The American media did attack Diem's South Vietnamese government as inept and corrupt. The foremost example of such an attack were stories that sympathetically portrayed the plight of Buddhist monks. Diem, a Catholic, implemented harsh policies against the practice of Buddhism, the religion of the majority of South Vietnamese (Hallin, 1986). Unlike the Diem government, the Buddhist monks were extremely hospitable and cooperative with Western journalists. So when several of the monks immolated themselves in the streets of Saigon to protest their government's actions, the American media contingent was there in force (Hallin). The resulting stories infuriated both the Washington and Saigon governments, which in turn tried to more closely monitor and control the media. The government efforts were largely unsuccessful, because there were now enough Americans in Vietnam that the media correspondents had developed a network of alternative sources for story information (Hallin).

In Washington, the Johnson administration worked so diligently to control the media through public relations campaigns that the war was dubbed the "Madison Avenue War". Successes were played up and negative information was down-played

or concealed (Mercer, et al. 1987). The assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Arthur Sylvester, initiated "Operation Candor" in which reputable reporters were taken to Vietnam at government expense (Whitcover, 1971). Many of these reporters returned with glowing reports of how well the war effort was going.

In 1964, government reports of attacks by the North Vietnamese on American gunboats on patrol enraged the American public. Congress quickly passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which authorized the deployment of large numbers of American troops. This action was supported by all three television networks, and nearly all major news magazines and newspapers across the country (Stillman, 1970).

As a result of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, American troops began to move into South Vietnam in earnest in 1965. On their heels were American journalists. The Vietnam War was unprecedented in its accessibility to correspondents of all types. The American military's free-lance press accreditation system was incredibly lax. Knightly (1975) explained,

> All [one] needed were two letters from agencies or newspapers saying they would be prepared to buy his material. The Associated Press, for one, would [provide] virtually anyone with a camera, complete with film, light meter, and brief instructions on its use, promise to pay a minimum of $15 for any acceptable picture, and provide a letter to help the man get his accreditation. A local or home-town newspaper would usually be prepared to provide the second letter. (p. 419)

The fledgling network newscasts had recently expanded their format from 15 minute to 30 minute broadcasts, and all three of

the networks assigned full-time camera crews to cover the war.

During this middle period of the war television stories focused almost exclusively on the deployed Americans. Howard K. Smith said that from 1965 to 1968, "Television covered only one third of the war - the American third" (Epstein, 1975, p. 217). Additionally, the stories carried certain pro-American themes, primarily that of the brave soldier fighting in the glorious tradition of the American fighting man (Epstein). Analogies to World War II were common in television reporters' narrations and Viet Cong controlled territory was occasionally referred to as "Indian country" (Hallin, 1986).

One memorable exception to this trend was Morley Safer's report from Cam Ne in the fall of 1965. The report, which was broadcast on CBS, showed American Marines burning a village of 150 homes with Zippo lighters while the terrified villagers pleaded with them to stop (Epstein, 1975).

Meanwhile, the print media's stories, especially in the prestige papers like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were becoming more critical of American policy and covered more controversial topics (Hallin). The anti-war movement was receiving limited media coverage, but the stories focused on the violence associated with the protest activities and not the message that the protesters were voicing (Gustainus & Hahn, 1988).

On January 30 and 31, 1968 in an action that became known as the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese launched simultaneous

attacks on more than 100 cities and towns across South Vietnam, including Saigon, which until this time had been the site of very limited fighting (Hallin, 1986). For the first time, instead of having to travel to the "front" to see combat action, reporters could look out of the windows of their city hotels and see combat in the streets. Therefore, they broadcast graphic images to the American public, which was shocked at this drastic turn of events. The most vivid example of this new type of coverage was the execution of a Viet Cong prisoner in the streets of Saigon by a South Vietnamese officer. The film of this scene was broadcast on NBC and the Pulitzer-prize-winning still photos were run in hundreds of newspapers across the nation (Bailey & Lichty, 1972).

The media portrayed Tet as a terrible setback for the American war effort. Americans were shown on the defensive, endangered and hopelessly frustrated. Television reports focused for several months on the battle of Khe Sahn, where American Marines were under heavy fire by the Viet Cong and defeat seemed imminent (Epstein, 1975). Although in retrospect it became obvious that Tet was not the North Vietnamese victory it originally appeared to be (the Marines at Khe Sahn never fell, and the offensive has been called a tactical defeat for the North Vietnamese), the impression of defeat remained in the American mind. NBC producer Robert Northshield said, "Tet was already established in the public's mind as a defeat, and therefore it was an American defeat" (Braestrup, 1977, p. 509). In April 1968, for the first time public opinion polls found that the

majority of Americans were opposed to the war (Braestrup).

From the time of the Tet offensive until the eventual conclusion of the war, negative stories about troop morale, atrocities, official opposition in Washington, and anti-war protest became common.

Media Theories and the "Television War"

As previously noted, the half-hour newscast format was first adopted by the three major television networks in the mid-1960s. Many media theorists note this period as a time of major change in the focus of the American news media.

One of the theories has been labeled the "oppositional media" thesis (Hallin, 1984). This thesis argues that the American news media, especially television news, have evolved into a powerful institution that opposes all forms of governmental authority. The thesis' proponents further maintain that this powerful media is responsible for a decline of public confidence in governmental institutions.

Robinson, one of the champions of the oppositional media thesis, coined the term "videomalaise" to describe "our doubts about ourselves and our hostility toward our institutions... made more severe by the images we receive from network journalism" (1975, p. 98). He further said, "television journalism with its constant emphasis on social and political conflict, its high credibility, its powerful audio-visual capabilities and its

epidemicity" (p. 99) causes some viewers to doubt their own understanding of politics and eventually to develop a hostility towards government and politics. These disgruntled viewers, Robinson argued, then pass their cynicism along to those with which they come into contact.

Huntington (1975) echoed these sentiments when he said,

> There is ... considerable evidence to suggest that the development of television journalism contributed to the undermining of governmental authority. The advent of the half-hour news broadcast in 1963 led to greatly increased popular dependance on television as a source of news. It also greatly expanded the size of the audience for news. At the same time, the themes that were stressed, the focus on controversy and violence, and, conceivably, the values and outlooks of the journalists, tended to arouse unfavorable attitudes towards established institutions and to promote a decline in confidence in government. (p. 98)

Huntington (1975) pointed out several symptoms of what he described as the crisis of democracy which began in the late 1960s. He said the power of the political parties declined significantly as more voters labeled themselves as independents; in the 1950s an estimated 80 percent of voters voted a straight party ticket, but by 1970 that number had dropped to 50 percent. There was a substantial drop in voter turnout, in the 1974 midterm election turnout reached an all-time low of 38 percent. Polls showed that Americans were losing confidence in their government. In 1958 a University of Michigan Center for Political Studies survey found that 76 percent of the respondents believed that the government was run for the benefit of all. When polled in 1972, only 38 percent of the those surveyed gave this response. In 1966, 41 percent of the respondents in a

Harris poll had "a great deal of confidence" in the federal executive branch of the government, but by 1973 that number had dropped to 19 percent. Huntington pointed out that at the same time poll respondents who expressed a great deal of confidence in television news increased from 25 to 41 percent.

Robinson (1976) examined 1968 survey results from the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan and concluded that people who depended more heavily on television journalism for information had more social distrust, political cynicism, inefficacy, partisan disloyalty, and third party viability. He argued that network news programs emphasize the anti-institutional themes that, "none of our national policies work, none of our institutions respond, none of our political organizations succeed" (p. 429).

Previously Robinson (1975) purported that television news draws much of its power because it is an effortless communication source. It therefore attracts what he referred to as an "inadvertent audience". These people are usually among the least educated in the country and they have either never read newspapers or have stopped reading newspapers because they are satisfied that television news provides them with enough information about federal politics and government. According to Robinson, millions of Americans are members of this inadvertent audience. "No one single factor helps explain videomalaise more fundamentally", he said, "than these unique, if relatively obvious, characteristics of the inadvertent audience" (p. 110).

The oppositional media thesis' keystone is that the media have powerful effects that are manifested in viewers' political actions (or inaction). However, the premise of powerful effects is undercut by what is known as "uses and gratifications", another theory heavily examined in the late 1960s and 1970s. The uses and gratifications approach, first described by Elihu Katz in 1959, includes three elements. Scholars conceive the audience as active and assume that an important part of media use is goal directed. Next, the audience member in the mass communication process has much of the initiative in linking need and media choice. Finally, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction (Severin & Tankard, 1988). Supporters of the uses and gratifications theory would argue that if television newscasts were making viewers hostile and frustrated, the viewers would simply avoid the newscasts and turn to another media source.

Like those of the uses and gratifications theory, studies of television news "recall", another audience effects theory, also contradict the oppositional media thesis' powerful effects premise. Levy (1983) said the concept of an active audience is fundamental to the study of television news effects. This active news-watching audience appears to be far from reality. Researchers have found from 60 to 80 percent (Levy, 1983; Perloff, Wartella, & Becker, 1982; Stauffer, Frost, & Rybolt, 1978) of audience members engage in concurrent activities (ranging from knitting, to cooking, to eating, to reading) while

watching newscasts. When queried on the day's newscast stories, the top respondents recalled less than half of the stories (Neuman, 1976; Perloff, et al., 1982; Stauffer, et al., 1978, 1983). Additionally, viewers are more likely to remember human interest stories than "hard news" (Booth, 1971; Neuman, 1976; Stauffer et al., 1978; Woodall, Davis, & Sahen, 1983).

Some researchers claim a viewer's understanding and recall of television news is inherently dependant on educational level (Berry, 1983; Hill, 1985; Levy, 1978, 1986). Woodall et al. (1983) asserted that remembering information and understanding information are two separate, but related, processes. Therefore it is possible to remember things you do not understand and to understand things you will not remember. The researchers claim television viewers who remember news items they do not understand will persistently have misconceptions of important issues that may affect their ability to understand related issues. Stauffer et al. (1978) contended that television newscasts are systematically biased against people with low educational levels because the programs use complex sentence structure, multisyllabic words, and a specialized vocabulary that is difficult for these people to understand. However, this argument is countered by Robinson and Levy (1986) who found that television news watching makes viewers with less than a high school education better informed than their non-viewing counterparts.

Proponents of these varied media theories have differing

opinions on the effects the media's coverage of the Vietnam War had on television viewers. Yet Vietnam and television news coverage are intrinsically linked in the minds of many. The Vietnam War is frequently referred to as America's first "television war" (Arlen, 1969). Not surprisingly then, television coverage of the Vietnam war has been reviewed by several researchers.

Bailey (1976b) did a content analysis of sample broadcasts from 1965 through 1970, examining the frequency of Vietnam stories. This analysis found that the three networks' amount of coverage was very similar. In 1965 (the time of the first big build-up of American troops) there was war coverage on 90 percent of the days reviewed, but in 1967 coverage dropped to 77 percent of the days reviewed. During the Tet offensive each newscast had some Vietnam coverage, but by 1969 the number of days containing war coverage had dropped to 61 percent. It was further noted that only 25 percent of these Vietnam war stories contained film from field correspondents in Vietnam, while 73 percent were "talking head" anchor presentations.

In another content analysis, Bailey (1976a) examined network news anchors' presentations to determine whether they reported the news about the Vietnam war with a positive or negative interpretation. The study concluded that over half of the stories contained no interpretation, opinion, argument, or special pleading. Of the 35 percent labeled "interpretive", most appeared in the later years as the war waned on.

In Hallin's (1984) content analysis of network news broadcasts he found that in the years following the Tet offensive (post-1968) there was more negative coverage of the war. However, 49 percent of domestic criticism of the war appearing on television came from public officials. Hallin said the "mirror theory" of news, which states that news coverage reflects reality, has some validity in this examination of the failure of United States policy in Vietnam and the growth of domestic dissent. It appeared that as prominent politicians began to oppose the administration's policies, anti-war sentiment was legitimized and became an acceptable subject for media coverage. This view was echoed in Hammond's (1989) review of press performance during the war. He stated that negative press resulted from cues from prominent politicians, most notably President Johnson's decision not to run for re-election in 1968.

There is a wide diversity of anecdotal opinion about the impact of media coverage of the Vietnam war. Marshall McLuhan said, "A hot war like Vietnam over a cool medium like TV is doomed" (The press, 1967, p. 78). Media critic Michael Arlen said, "The physical size of the television screen still shows one a picture of men three inches tall shooting at other men three inches tall" (Arlen, 1969, p. 8).

Polling data, however, countered the view that television coverage was the factor that changed Americans' attitude about the war (Braestrup, 1977; Epstein, 1975) . Even after the pivotal 1968 Tet offensive, according to Roper polls, most

Americans supported the war. One Roper poll (Braestrup, 1977, chap. 14) concluded that the Tet offensive appeared, "merely to have caused a minor ripple in a steadily changing public attitude toward our involvement in the war" (p. 699). Roper emphasized that the Tet coverage had its largest effect on American leadership. A 1968 survey for *US News and World Report* found that television coverage tended to reinforce viewers' previously held opinions about the war (Mercer, et al., 1987).

Four years after Tet, little had changed. A 1972 survey (Hoffstetter & Moore) found that frequent watchers of television news were more supportive of the military and defense spending than those who didn't watch much news on television. A 1972 *Newsweek* poll, moreover, indicated that the public was developing a tolerance for scenes of brutality in Vietnam (Hammond, 1989). Morris (1972) echoed this view, "No matter how powerful the images of war ... our fascination tends to outweigh our horror. Photography provides insulation along with access" (p. 78).

Although evidence to support the argument is far from conclusive, Richard Nixon and many others (including a number of military officers) blamed the media for causing a national failure of will that eventually led to the nation's defeat in the Vietnam war (Mandelbaum, 1982; Nixon, 1978; Porter, 1976). Hallin said in his book *The Uncensored War* (1986):

> The view that, for better or worse, television turned the American public against the war is accepted so widely across the American political spectrum that it probably comes as close as anything to being conventional wisdom about a war that still splits the American public. (p. 105-106)

In the final years of the war the friction between the media and the Nixon administration was intense. Vice President Agnew attacked the media for their "liberal bias", marking the first time the entire institution of journalism had been so attacked, rather than an individual news organization (Hallin, 1986). The accusation of the media having a liberal bias carried over beyond the end of the war and into the late 1970s and then throughout the 1980s.

The Post-Vietnam Military Attitude

In 1981 Lichter and Rothman published results of a survey of journalists they conducted and concluded:

> Substantial numbers of the media elite grew up at some distance from the social and cultural traditions of small town "middle America." Instead they were drawn from big cities in the northeast, and north central states. Their parents tended to be well off, highly educated members of the upper middle class, especially the educated professions.
>
> All these characteristics might be expected to predispose people toward the social liberalism of the cosmopolitan outsider. And indeed, much of the media elite upholds the cosmopolitan or anti-bourgeois social perspective that Everett Ladd has termed the "new liberalism." (p. 43)

This work has been widely quoted by media critics as proof of the media's bias. Many senior military officers share the view that the media has a "liberal bias".

A 1986 survey of 105 students at the Army War College revealed that many of these senior Army officers had little personal experience working with the media and even less formal training about how the media works and their role and mission in American society. However, the survey responses showed that many of the officers had a negative attitude about the media (Sharpe, 1987b). When asked to give their views on the chief cause of conflict between the Army and the media, responses included: Respondent A: "Basic difference in aims, goals, and personal (individual) values." Respondent B: "Lack of balance in presentation. Presenting of opinions as fact." Respondent C: "Lack of knowledge on the part of the media. Media focus on 'selling' the news rather than objective reporting. Lack of a cohesive, consistent national strategy which forces the Army into a 'knee-jerk,' constantly changing series of programs." (Sharpe, p. 8)

A 1985 poll of career Marine Corps infantry officers on the same topic had similar answers. Respondent A: "Telecommunications, the media explosion, the shrunken world, national pluralism, all magnify the potential (of the media) for abuse and impact." Respondent B: "The so-called investigative reporting has (now) stretched its limits to absurdity. There always seems to be some journalist seeking information about some incident. The result is more sensationalism than journalism." (Henry, C., 1986, p. 11)

In a 1986 interview, Drew Middleton of the *New York Times*

said much of this negative military attitude can be traced back to Vietnam:

> Most of the general officers I know now were colonel rank or lower in Vietnam. There were a lot of people only too quick to blame the media for selling them out, for writing the bad news, not for giving away secrets, there weren't a lot of secrets given away, but for writing bad news. "You are against us," sort of thing. Most of those guys are generals now and it has held over. (Sharpe, 1987b, p. 18-19)

The Post-Grenada Media Attitude

If media coverage of the Vietnam war is viewed by the military as a painful blow in the military - media relationship, then the media blackout of the 1983 military invasion of Grenada is considered by many media members to be a nearly fatal punch.

Although government officials insisted that short-notice planning and the need to maintain total secrecy were the only reasons the media were excluded from the early stages of the operation, nearly all media personnel were skeptical and understandably outraged. Denniston wrote,

> As many journalists interpret history, Grenada stands out as the first American military operation ever to leave the press behind with the explicit aim of assuring that only the "official" picture of combat got out....Whatever happened in the past, the government and the press now have a very different relationship, and there is no chance that the press will easily or eagerly be brought back "onto the team" (1984, p.12).

In his October 26, 1983 *NBC Nightly News* commentary John Chancellor called the invasion, "a bureaucrat's dream: Do anything. No one is watching" (Stepp. 1984). Dorfman scoffed at military secrecy as a government excuse,

> No journalist objected to being kept in the dark about Desert One, the attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran. Secrecy was plainly appropriate and the logistics clearly did not permit even a press pool ... By contrast, the invasion of Grenada was a mammoth expedition and it came as no surprise to the Grenadians, the Cubans, or anyone concerned except the American public and press ... Obviously, the purpose of the secrecy was political containment rather than military security. (1984, p. 15)

Initial public support for the administration's media blackout was very high. Letters, like this one to *Time*, were common: "Journalists are the spoiled, arrogant brats of our world. Americans heartily endorse this long-overdue comeuppance" (Stepp, 1984, p. 13). The *American Spectator* observed, "At the Pentagon there was a little too much joy in thwarting the press over Grenada ...[but] ... after Vietnam ... the elation was understandable" (Mercer, et al., 1987, p. 309).

Despite the worst fears of some journalists, who were stunned by the public reaction to this incident, neither the public nor the military intended to "write-off" the media. As early as December 1983, a Harris survey found that 65 percent of those polled believed that the media should have accompanied the soldiers (Stepp, 1984). Government officials also recognized the necessity of some sort of plan for dealing with the media in future operations.

In 1984 General John A. Vessey, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, established a commission, called the Sidle Commission after Retired Army Major General Winant Sidle who was chosen to head it, to address the military - media problem. The commission was composed of 14 journalists, journalism professors,

and military public affairs specialists from all branches of the service. Additional media representatives also testified at the commission's hearings. The Sidle commission easily agreed on its recommendation, "the media should cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible consistent with mission security and the safety of U.S. forces" (White, 1984, p.20). The problem the panel had to hash out was the mechanics of how to satisfactorily achieve this recommendation.

The media representatives who appeared before the commission agreed on many issues, but had differing opinions on the issues of Department of Defense accreditation for journalists, and the idea of formulating media pools. William Headline of CNN spoke for many in the media when he voiced the opinion that pools were the worst possible solution to the problem, but better than nothing. He went on to say that if pools were absolutely necessary, the military operation should be opened to full media coverage as soon as possible (White, 1984).

Military - Media Relationship Today

The Pentagon initiated news media pools several times throughout the 1980s, most prominently in the Persian Gulf area during the tensions with Iran in 1987. Journalists have differing opinions of the useful and effectiveness of these pools (Pyle, 1988; Sheahan, 1988). Many pool journalists have perceived a lingering ill will among the military. *Time*

magazine's William A. Henry III said, "Ever since the Vietnam War many military officers have contended that U.S. troops in combat face two foes: one on the battlefield, the other in the news media" (1991, p. 17). Sheahan tells of a notice posted on the officers wardroom of a ship in the Persian Gulf in 1987,

> We are scheduled to have CBS News embark ... Mr. John Sheahan and four other correspondents. We must of course be on our best behavior and be extremely careful of what we talk about ... Please be careful what you tell them. Remember, interviews are voluntary. (1988, p. 35)

Analysis and scholarly evaluation of media coverage of post-Vietnam American military operations is scarce. The 1980 failed rescue attempt of the Americans held hostage in Iran and the 1986 attacks on Libya were planned with utmost operational secrecy and were quickly executed (Church, 1986; Strasser, Martin, DeFrank, Clift, & Clifton, 1980). The media was in the position of responding to rather than reporting these events. While much has been written about the military - media conflict over Grenada, little examination of the coverage the media finally did execute when they belatedly were allowed on the island has been made. There were media pools in the area during the Persian Gulf incidents with Iran in 1987, but more often than not journalists were not present on the American ships when fire was exchanged with the Iranians (Pyle, 1988; Sheahan, 1988).

The American public overwhelmingly supported all of these military actions (Barnett, Fromm, Horton, Manning, & Shapiro, 1986; Mayer, et al., 1980; Watson, Walcott, Barry, Clifton & Marshall, 1986). Some media critics, such as those who endorse

the oppositional media theory, might argue that this strong support was the because of the absence of the media, particularly the broadcast media. But it has been noted that Americans have traditionally supported the President in any show of force, it is only when military operations linger on without apparent success that the public becomes disenchanted (Braestrup, 1977).

Nearly 20 years have passed since the end of the Vietnam War, so an assessment of media performance in a more contemporary military setting is clearly called for. Does the media present military operations in an unfavorable light (using a "liberal/negative bias"), or is the media being unduly restricted by paranoid military and government officials whose actions are shaped by tainted memories from Vietnam?

The 1989-90 invasion of Panama (labeled Operation JUST CAUSE by the government) resulted from long-standing tensions between the United States and Panamanian governments. These tensions were heightened by the killing of an off-duty American soldier and harassment of a Naval officer and his wife by Panamanian Defense Forces in Panama City on December 17. Because of this situation, several American reporters, including broadcasters, were already in the country (Vasquez, 1990). Still, the December 20 midnight initial attack by 3,300 paratroopers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and 1,700 Special Operations "Rangers" took even these reporters by surprise. One Army report said, "By the time early morning network television programs were in full gear and details were beginning to drift in, all primary

objectives had been taken." (Steele, 1990, p.35)

The Pentagon initiated a media press pool (which contained one broadcast journalist), but the pool members arrived in Panama 48 hours after the operation was initiated. As the previously mentioned Army report pointed out, by this time the main thrust of the operation was over. Under the Sidle commission rules, a pool technically was not necessary, since there were already American journalists in the country. Government officials said the activation of the pool was a gesture of good will toward the media (Komarow, 1990). Many media members said the pool was a failure - the journalists were kept away from the action, and as one member said. " eputized into the public affairs department of the military" (Garneau, 1990, p. 4). Yet another pool member said the pool allowed the media to present the military point of view, something that otherwise would be hard to get (Garneau).

While the success or failure of the Panama media pool is debatable, the performance of the other American reporters warrants examination One journalist, a veteran war correspondent, ventured out into the fighting in the pre-dawn hours of December 20 and got both video and still shots from the rooftop of a building near the Noriega compound where fighting was intense. After the initial phase of the invasion, numerous journalists freely roamed the streets of Panama City with their camera crews. Their stories were beamed back to American television viewers without any government control or censorship (Vasquez, 1990). This video provided the first real opportunity

to examine the stories the American broadcast media chose to cover and the themes they chose to emphasize in a post-Vietnam military operation.

Summary of the Literature

Retired Army colonel and military analyst Harry Summers Jr.(1991) said the military and the media must learn to live and work with each other. He cited a 1985 Twentieth Century Fund task force on the military and media (formed as a result of the handling of the Grenada invasion):

> The presence of journalists in war zones is not a luxury, but a necessity. Imperfect though it is, our independent press serves as the vital link between the battlefield and the home front, reporting on the military's successes, failures, and sacrifices. By so doing, the media has helped to foster citizen involvement and support, which presidents, admirals, and generals have recognized as essential to military success.
>
> Our free press, when it accompanies the nation's soldiers into battle, performs a unique role. It serves as eyewitness; it forges a bond between citizen and the soldier; and, at its best, it strives to avoid manipulation, either by officials or by critics of the government, through accurate, independent reporting. (p. 23)

Although the stormy military - media relationship has deep, historical roots, it is still clearly a contemporary issue for both the military and the media to further analyze.

3. METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The aim of this study is to add to the body of knowledge analyzing the dynamic relationship between the American military and media. This study is a content analysis of all of the evening news broadcasts of the three major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) throughout the duration of the Panama invasion. This includes coverage from December 15, 1989, the day that Manuel Noriega announced to the world that Panama was in a state of war with the United States; through January 5, 1990, the day Noriega was extradited to Miami to stand trial in the United States on drug trafficking charges.

The content analysis focused exclusively on television news coverage because television has been called the "ultimate mass medium" (Shaw and McCombs, 1977). In the 1970s television surpassed newspapers, radio, and newsmagazines as Americans' primary source of news (Bowers, 1985). Two out of three Americans now say they receive most of their news from television, and on any given day one out of five Americans will watch one of the three network newscasts (Stevenson & White, 1980). Survey respondents consistently name television news as the news medium that they find most believable (Bowers).

Research Question

This study looks at the concept of a liberal/negative bias in television news reporting of the Panama invasion, America's first post-Vietnam military operation to receive extensive independent news coverage. The research question for this study is:

"Did network television news coverage of the 1989-90 Panama invasion (Operation JUST CAUSE) have a liberal/negative bias?" The question is more specifically addressed through two sub-questions which are:

1. Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of the Panama invasion?
2. Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?

Definitions

Content analysis has been described as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). In order to maintain the scientific standard of objectivity and to be systematic, a list of definitions is necessary to clarify the terms used in the research question and sub-questions. These definitions help ensure consistency in coding throughout the content analysis.

Network television news: ABC, CBS, and NBC regularly scheduled 30-minute evening broadcasts, including broadcasts on weekends and holidays. This is a crucial clarification, because the Panama invasion took place over the traditional Christmas and New Years holiday season, a time when newscast schedules are frequently upset by football bowl games and other holiday schedule changes. Because of this, some of the days reviewed did not have three broadcasts. This content analysis looked exclusively at the evening broadcasts of the three major networks and did not consider morning or late night news programs, news specials or special reports, or any coverage on CNN or PBS.

1989-90 Panama Invasion: The United States military operation, labeled JUST CAUSE by military planners at the Pentagon, directed at removing Manuel Noriega from power in Panama. The days examined in this study begin with December 15, 1989 when Noriega publicly declared war on the United States, and end on January 5, 1990 when Noriega surrendered to U.S. authorities and was extradited to Florida to stand trial.

Liberal/negative bias: Story coverage that constantly and predominantly maintains that the administration's policies and military execution are morally wrong, deceptive, elitist, ineffective, or will result in eventual defeat; without presenting any positive or balancing perspective on these policies and executions.

Negative themes: Reoccurring story emphasis on topics such as how badly the operation is going, the harm being done to civilians, the destruction of property, lack of public support for the effort; all placing blame for these conditions on the American military and/or administration.

Parameters

Since the Panama invasion was such a brief operation, lasting less than three weeks from start to finish, every edition of the three major networks' evening news broadcasts from December 15, 1989 through January 5, 1990 were evaluated in this content analysis. A review of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive abstracts for December 1989 and January 1990 determined that there were 144 stories from 54 broadcasts. ABC ran a total of 19 broadcasts, CBS a total of 18, and NBC had 17 broadcasts. Weekends and holiday schedules account for the slight variation among the networks.

The Vanderbilt Television News Archive abstracts are a useful tool for any research involving network newscasts. Published monthly since 1968, the abstracts contain a log of each evening news program broadcast by ABC, CBS, and NBC during the month. Information featured in the log includes: who anchored the program, a chronological order of when stories appeared in the broadcast, running time of each story, a brief description of what each story was about, times of commercial breaks, and products featured in the advertisements.

The information gleaned from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive abstracts can be utilized in a number of different ways, depending on the nature of the study undertaken. In this case, by reviewing the December 1989 and January 1990 abstracts before embarking on the content analysis, a complete list of all the stories on the Panama invasion broken down by date, network, running time and general content was developed.

Limitations

In order to keep the scope of the study feasible for a single researcher on a limited timescale and budget, only the evening news broadcasts of the three major broadcast networks were reviewed. Morning and late night news programs, special reports, local newscasts, and CNN coverage were not considered.

The study was limited to the three major networks evening broadcasts for two reasons. First, the three networks evening news programs have traditionally been considered the showcase of broadcast journalism, the place where most Americans turn for information. Second, the Vanderbilt Television News Archive contains only tapes of the broadcasts from the three major networks. CNN has matured rapidly, but in 1989 its broadcasts were not yet being archived.

However, the emergence of cable television has changed the nature of traditional television. In light of the news coverage of the Persian Gulf War of 1991 (Boyle, 1991) CNN's increasing role as a major source of news and information cannot be ignored.

Future studies should certainly incorporate analysis of CNN in some manner.

Because the goal of any content analysis is to be systematic and objective, the reliability of the coder is important. The coder should make every attempt to code objectively, rather than subjectively. The best way to gauge if the coding is systematic and objective is to have more than one coder review the material and then compare the results of the various coders. However, the budget for this study did not allow for taking a second coder to the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. This limitation was recognized from the onset of the project. However, this limitation is partially offset by the fact that the coding variables used in this study are a replication of those used in a content analysis of television coverage of the Vietnam War (Hallin, 1984). They are quite descriptive, and since they were not designed by this researcher do not contain the researcher's subjective bias.

Study Instrument

Hallin's 1984 content analysis of television coverage of the Vietnam War examined the keystone of the oppositional media thesis, which is the theory that the American media has become oppositional to government and military authority. He used a stratified sample of 779 television news broadcasts from a period beginning on August 20, 1965 and ending with the cease-fire on January 27, 1973. From the results of this sample he developed tables that addressed how frequently a variable (such as video of survivors grieving) appeared in the sampled stories. He also analyzed the tone of stories, to determine whether or not they were supportive of or oppositional to the American military and/or administration.

The start date for his content analysis was hampered by the unavailability of broadcasts from before 1965. The Defense Department began keeping copies of selected broadcasts after the Morley Safer Marine story shown on CBS in August 1965. These tapes are maintained in the National Archives (Hallin, 1984). However the real boon to Hallin, and all researchers of television news broadcasts, came in 1968 with the establishment of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee. This one of a kind facility maintains copies of all the evening news broadcasts from the three major networks since August of 1968. This extensive collection is cataloged in the Archive's abstracts.

Since the Panama invasion was short, less than three weeks duration, and since all of the three major networks' broadcasts were readily available at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, this content analysis reviewed all of the 144 stories the three major networks presented during the Panama invasion. The study was conducted on March 2-5, 1992.

This study replicated Hallin's work. The coding key for this study is derived from his code book. However, the Panama invasion was not another Vietnam so many of Hallin's 49 variables such as those addressing war demonstrations, U.S. troop morale, and the success of the pacification program were inapplicable. Also, Hallin's study was more in depth than this one. In addition to the question of story tone and theme, Hallin looked at the issues of story placement, the identity of people speaking or cited in reports, as well as the focus and direction of domestic statements on the Vietnam War. From his extremely detailed code book, 17 variables that deal directly with the two research sub-questions: "Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of coverage of the Panama invasion?" and "Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?" were gleaned. (See Appendix A)

The variables were adapted, when necessary, from Vietnamese to Panamanian context. This was basically a matter of changing the names, but in one case Variable 13, where Hallin's study addressed references of hopes for peace, this study's code book

looked at hopes for Noriega's capture or surrender.

Data Coding

Once the coding key for the content analysis was finalized, a breakdown of coding variables was made (see Appendix 2). This breakdown details which sub-question each variable addresses.

The first six variables address neither question, but rather address the sample number, the date of the broadcast, the network, length of the story, and the type and nature of the story.

Variables 7-13 address the first sub-question, "Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of the coverage of the Panama invasion?" by looking for the following themes: Does the video showing Americans helping Panamanians? Are casualties are shown on video? Are survivors are shown grieving on video? Who is responsibility for casualties attributed to? What type of reference is made to casualties? How are the military results described? What sort of references are made to hopes for Noriega's capture/surrender?

Variables 14-16 address the second sub-question, "Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?" by looking at the content of statements on the invasion policy; interpretations of the invasion policy; and the balancing of coded statements.

Variable 17 looks at whether or not the video shown was from Department of Defense sources. This variable was recorded for

possible future analysis and is not addressed in the findings of this study.

The breakdown further details if a given response to each variable supports, negates, or makes no determination of the research sub-question which that variable addresses. For example; in the case of Variable 7, which refers to video of Americans helping Panamanians, if the response was B: Video shows Americans helping Panamanian civilians (i.e. giving medical aid, candy to children, etc.) then sub-question one is negated because this scene shows a positive theme rather than a negative one.

This breakdown was completed before the content analysis was conducted to minimize bias that may have subconsciously developed during the viewing of the tapes. Additionally, the coding sheets were not compared to the breakdown until after the viewing at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive was completed.

Data Analysis

Using the 17 variable coding key as a reference, a coding sheet was completed for each of the stories reviewed in the content analysis. After all 144 stories were coded, each variable response was checked against the breakdown sheet to determine if the response supported, negated, or made no determination of the applicable research sub-question.

In order to track the overall tone of each of the 144 stories, a system of pluses and minuses was used. Each variable

response that supported the applicable research sub-question (as determined by the breakdown sheet) was given a plus. Conversely, each response that negated the applicable research sub-question was given a minus. If the variable response made no determination towards answering the research sub-question if was not marked.

The marks on the 17 variables on each of the 144 sheets were tallied to determine the tone of each story. If there was a surplus of one or two pluses (responses that supported the research sub-questions), the story tone was labeled *negative*. Stories with a balance of three or more pluses were labeled *very negative*. While it may seem contradictory that negative stories were marked with pluses, remember the research question has a negative tone. Therefore, negative stories support the research question. If the content analysis found that the majority of the stories reviewed were either negative or very negative in tone, the research question would be affirmed.

However, if the story had a balance of pluses and minuses, or had no markings at all, it was labeled *neutral*. Further, stories that had a surplus of one or two minuses were labeled *positive*, while stories with a net of three or more minuses were labeled *very positive*. Because of the negative tone of the research question, positive stories negate it. If the majority of stories coded fell into the neutral, positive, or very positive categories, the research question would be negated.

Figure 1: Example of Coding Sheet for Very Positive Story

Coding Sheet

Variable 1: 129 (Number of story reviewed)

Variable 2: Thursday, January 4, 1990

Variable 3: NBC

Variable 4: 1:40

Variable 5: G (Story Type: Commentary from field)

Variable 6: A (Story Nature: Report of event, current situation, or policy announcement)

\- Variable 7: B (Video shows Americans helping Panamanian civilians i.e. giving medical aid, candy to children, etc)

Variable 8: O (No casualties shown)

Variable 9: E (No survivors shown grieving)

Variable 10: G (No reference to casualties - responsibility)

Variable 11: L (No reference to casualties - type)

Variable 12: I (Not a report on military operations)

Variable 13: N/A (Not applicable, Noriega has surrendered)

\- - Variable 14: B (Support for administration policy expressed or implied)
F (Statement of public opinion, favorable to administration)

\- + Variable 15: F (Speculate positively on future events)
G (Speculate negatively on future event

\- - Variable 16: B (Newscaster gives counter arguments)
F (Statement balanced by two or more opposing views on video)

Variable 17: B (No attribution for video source)

Total: 6(-), 1(+) Net: 5(-) Story Tone: **Very Positive**

Figure 2: Example of Coding Sheet for Negative Story

Coding Sheet

Variable 1: 53 (Number of story reviewed)

Variable 2: Friday, December 22, 1989

Variable 3: CBS

Variable 4: 2:00

Variable 5: G (Story Type: Commentary from field)

Variable 6: A (Story Nature: Report of event, current situation, or policy announcement)

Variable 7: A (Video doesn't show Americans helping Panamanian civilians)

\+ Variable 8: M (Casualties shown on video: Destruction of homes, businesses, etc)

Variable 9: E (No survivors shown grieving)

\- Variable 10: C (Responsibilities for Casualties: Attributed or clearly linked to Noriega's forces)

\- + Variable 11: Hbb (Type of Reference to Casualties: Abuse of civilians (stealing, looting, etc) by Noriega's forces)
J (Destruction of Homes, businesses, etc.)

\+ Variable 12: C (Description of Military Results: Actions result in success for Noriega's forces)

Variable 13: G (No References to Hopes of Noriega's Capture/Surrender)

\+ - Variable 14: E (Statement about facts or situation, unfavorable to Bush administration)
F (Statement of public opinion, favorable to administration)

\+ Variable 15: D (Evaluation of administration policy as mixed)

\- Variable 16: F (Statement balanced by two or more opposing views on video)

Variable 17: B (No attribution for video source)

Total: 4(-), 5(+) Net: 1(+) Story Tone: **Negative**

4. RESULTS

A total of 144 stories about the Panama invasion were coded from 54 network evening news broadcasts beginning on December 15, 1989 and ending on January 5, 1990. Of the 54 broadcasts, 19 were on ABC, 18 on CBS, and 17 on NBC. An interesting note is that while ABC aired the most newscasts in the period reviewed, that network had the fewest stories dealing with the Panama invasion, 45. CBS had 50 stories, while NBC had 49. Table 1 indicates story tone for each network, as determined by the plus and minus criteria.

Table 1: Overall Tone of Stories about the Panama Invasion by Network

Network/ Story Tone	All Networks	ABC	CBS	NBC
Very Positive	19 13%	6 13%	7 14%	7 12%
Positive	42 29%	13 29%	14 28%	15 31%
Neutral	30 21%	12 27%	8 16%	10 20%
Negative	27 19%	6 13%	11 22%	10 20%
Very Negative	26 18%	8 18%	10 20%	8 16%
Total	144 100%	45 100%	50 100%	49 100%

The stories were well distributed, both by categories and by network. *Very positive* stories were those with an overall balance of three or more positive statements, *positive* stories had a balance of one or two positive statements, while *neutral* stories were balanced. *Negative* stories had an overall balance of one or two negative statements, and *very negative* stories had a balance of three or more negative statements. The single largest number of stories, 42 or 29%, fell into the positive category. The three networks' stories were very similarly distributed throughout the five categories. Although ABC had more neutral stories and fewer positive stories than CBS and NBC, the difference balanced out between these two categories so that ABC fell in line with the other two networks in the remaining three categories. Since the network distribution of stories is so similar, other data findings were not addressed by network.

Several researchers who analyzed television coverage of the Vietnam War (Epstein, 1975; Hammond, 1989) have speculated that individual memories of Vietnam television coverage inaccurately recall "theme" stories as more prevalent than "policy" stories because theme stories are more graphic and memorable. In reflecting on the Panama invasion, it is reasonable to assume that images of thousands of homeless refugees in a makeshift camp will linger longer in the American memory than images of a Washington correspondent standing in front of the Capitol saying that Congress overwhelmingly supported the administration's invasion policy. Table 2 and Table 3 look at the themes vs.

policy issues breakdowns.

Table 2: Topics addressed in Stories about the Panama Invasion as a Percentage of the Total Coverage (N=144)

Themes only (casualties shown, survivors grieving, military situation, etc)	15 10%
Policy issues only (content, interpretation and balancing of statements about the administration's invasion policy)	48 33%
Themes and Policy issues	71 49%
Neither topic addressed ("Wrap-ups, and other brief statements)	10 7%

While perhaps more memorable, stories that focused exclusively on themes were clearly in the minority. Only 10 percent of the stories reviewed looked exclusively at themes while one third of the stories dealt with only policy issues and 49 percent examined both themes and policy issues. Seven percent of the stories were simple "wrap-ups" or other brief statements that addressed neither themes of war nor invasion policy issues.

Table 3: Overall Tone of Stories about the Panama Invasion by Topics Addressed

Topic/ Story Tone	All Stories	Themes Only	Policy Issues Only	Both	Neither
Very Positive	19 13%	1 7%	6 13%	12 17%	N/A
Positive	42 29%	4 27%	25 52%	13 18%	N/A
Neutral	30 21%	1 7%	7 15%	12 17%	10 100%
Negative	27 19%	8 53%	7 15%	12 17%	N/A
Very Negative	26 18%	1 7%	3 6%	22 31%	N/A
Total	144 100%	15 100%	48 100%	71 100%	10 100%

The assumption that all "theme" stories are negative is inaccurate, although 60 percent of the "theme" stories were labeled either negative or very negative in this analysis. Conversely, 65 percent of the "policy issue" stories were labeled either positive or very positive (balanced and/or supportive presentations of policy issues were placed in these categories). It is important to remember, as the data in Table 2 shows, that there were considerably more policy issue stories than theme stories (48 vs. 15).

When stories contained both themes and policy issues they were well distributed across the very positive through negative categories, but the very negative category for these stories was

larger than any of the other four categories.

The bulk of war associated themes; descriptions of dead, wounded, misplaced civilians and extensive destruction of property are by nature negative. But the data shows that positive themes, giving medical aid to Panamanian civilians, establishing refugee shelters, handing out Christmas candy to children were not ignored.

So if the majority of stories did not concentrate on war themes, what was the most prevalent focus of stories on the Panama Invasion? Table 4 indicates the frequency with which the 10 variables which dealt with themes and policy issues occurred throughout the content analysis.

Table 4: Description of Topics Discussed in Stories on the Panama Invasion

Topic Addressed	Occurrences
Statements on Invasion Policy (i.e. support for the administration's policy expressed or implied, See Variable 14)	173*
Interpretation of Invasion Policy (i.e. evaluation of the policy as successful or the situation as favorable, See Variable 15)	126
Balancing of Coded Statements (i.e. newscaster gives counter arguments, See Variable 16)	120
References to Casualties (i.e. military, numbers and/or names given, See Variable 11)	88
Casualties on Video (i.e. military, shown in hospitals, See Variable 8)	64
Responsibility for Casualties (i.e. attributed or clearly linked to Noriega's forces, See Variable 10)	54
Description of Military Results (i.e. actions result in success for U.S. forces, See Variable 12)	44
References to Hopes of Noriega's Capture/Surrender (i.e. negative reference, major theme of story, See Variable 13)	35
Video of Americans Helping Panamanians (i.e. American troops giving medical aid, See Variable 7)	21
Video of Survivors Grieving (i.e. U.S. civilians, Panamanian civilians, See Variable 9)	6

* Some stories contained more than one policy statement, for example both a criticism and supporting statement about the administration's policy were given equal weight.

Tables 5-8 provide the specific variable responses most frequently given for the top four topics from Table 4.

Table 5: Specific Statements on Panama Invasion Policy

Response	Occurrences
Statement about facts or situation, unfavorable to the administration	53
Statement about facts or situation, favorable to the administration	39
Criticism of administration policy expressed or implied	29
Statement of public opinion, favorable to the administration	28
Support for administration policy expressed or implied	14
Statement about the aims of U.S. policy, unfavorable	3
Expression of hope for peace, no policy position expressed or implied	2
Statement of public opinion, unfavorable to the administration	2
Other statements	2
Statement about the aims of U.S. policy, favorable	1
Total	173

Table 6: Specific Interpretation of Invasion Policy

Response	Occurrences
Speculate negatively on future events	30
Speculate positively on future events	22
Evaluate policy as successful, or situation as favorable	18
"Loaded" word choice, negative i.e. "irrational murder", "vigilantes", etc.	10
Evaluate policy as unsuccessful, or situation as unfavorable	8
Evaluate policy as inconclusive or stalemated	8
Other interpretation, negative	8
Speculate negatively on the effects of policy	6
Evaluate as mixed	4
Explicit argument against policy	3
Speculate positively on the effects of the policy	2
Evaluate negatively the importance of the policy	2
Explicit argument to end the invasion	2
Evaluate positively the importance of the policy	1
"Loaded" word choice, positive i.e. "heroic troops"	1
Explicit argument for the policy	1
Total	126

Table 7: Specific Balancing of Coded Statements

Response	Occurrences
Newscaster gives counter arguments	57
Statement balanced by two or more opposing views on video	29
Statement not balanced, anti-administration policy	11
Statement balanced by one opposing view, on video	11
Statement not balanced, pro-administration policy	6
Newscaster refers to specific opposing view	6
Total	120

Table 8: Specific References to Types of Casualties

Variable	Occurrences
Military, with context - portraits of American soldiers killed	18
Other (Refugees)	17
Destruction of homes, businesses, etc.	12
Military, numbers only	10
Civilian, with context - injured by Noriega's forces	8
Military, minimal elaboration or context	6
Civilian, numbers only	6
Abuse of civilians, by Noriega's forces	6
Civilian, with context - injured by Americans	3
Civilian, interview with victim	2
Total	88

These tables show that the vast majority of the network's stories on the Panama invasion focused on policy issue topics. There were nearly twice as many statements on the invasion policy as there were references to the invasion's casualties, the most frequently occurring "theme" topic.

Although statements of facts or situations unfavorable to the administration were frequently made (53 occurrences), these remarks were nearly always balanced by presentation of the opposite view. Consequently, policy issue discussion was likely to be balanced or positive toward the administration.

One of the scenes that often comes to mind when considering negative war themes is that of survivors weeping for their dead loved ones. This type of coverage was by far the least prevalent, with only a total of 6 occurrences.

5. CONCLUSION

When the findings of this study are applied to the research question, "Does network television news coverage of the 1989-90 Panama invasion (Operation JUST CAUSE) have a liberal or negative bias?," the answer is a qualified "No". This answer is better explained by applying the findings to the two research sub-questions.

To the first sub-question, "Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of the invasion?," the answer is "No". The network stories did not carry negative themes throughout the duration of the invasion. Although sixty percent of "theme only" stories had a negative or very negative tone, some theme stories did portray positive themes, such as American soldiers helping Panamanian citizens trying to clean up and rebuild in the aftermath of the fighting. Overall, "theme" stories were much rarer (only 10 percent of the total) than "policy issue" stories, or stories that dealt with themes and policy issues.

This leads to the second sub-question: "Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?". Again, the answer is "No". "Policy issue only" stories, and stories that dealt with both policy issues and themes made up the majority of the networks coverage. Although statements critical of the Bush administration's policy were

frequently made, opposing supportive statements were usually given so that the stories had an overall balanced or positive tone. In all, 65 percent of the policy issue stories were either positive or very positive in tone.

This study found that the worst nightmares of those who fear the "unleashed" media's coverage of a military operation were not realized. Of the many reporters that covered the invasion, from both Panama City and Washington D.C., only NBC's Fred Francis was part of the Pentagon's media pool. The other unrestricted reporters were only occasionally critical of American military operations, and never blasted individual fighting units or soldiers.

The most heavily criticized action was the placement, by American troops, of loudspeakers blaring heavy metal rock music outside the Vatican Embassy were Noriega was seeking asylum. While the original official reason given for this action was to foil any listening devices aimed at the building, many reporters speculated that this was a sort of psychological warfare to induce Noriega into surrendering. Even one military intelligence source admitted, "It was a stupid decision by somebody" (Jaco, 1990). The March 1990 issue of *Army* magazine reported that the Army's 16th Psychological Operations Battalion was responsible for giving the order to play the music (Steele, 1990).

Even the stories with negative themes, were less severely negative (if that is an appropriate way to address the suffering of war victims). In contrast to the infamous Saigon street

execution shown during the Tet offensive coverage of the Vietnam War, the most vivid scenes from the Panama invasion were of looters ravaging business places in broad daylight. No broadcast journalist can be criticized too severely for showing scenes of men carrying televisions, sofas, and even refrigerators out of shops, for these were indeed incredible visuals. Yet these scenes speak almost as strongly to the question of personal integrity in modern society as they do to the ravages of war.

Still, the most stringent media critics would say that even one story that portrays a negative theme or criticizes the administration's invasion policy is one too many. This view is simply unrealistic in contemporary society. As Stepp said in 1984, "Never again will the press, public, and government march in a locked-arm partnership lubricated by mutual trust and good motives all around. Vietnam, Watergate, and the escalating complexities of high-tech society have scattered skepticism and adversarial attitudes throughout our culture." (p. 13)

Carl von Clausewitz, the renown military strategist said, "It is clear that war should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy" (Air Force Manual 1-1, p.1). Military leaders recognize that war is an integral element of political policy. As such, it should be expected that acts of war will be, and should be, scrutinized by the American media and public. The days of blind acceptance of our leaders' political actions are gone (if they ever existed).

A review of post-Vietnam American military actions leads one to ask if the question of a media with a liberal/negative bias is even relevant. Most military experts and "armchair analysts" will agree that the American military will never have another Vietnam. Every military conflict that America has been involved in throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Grenada, the attack on Libya, Panama, and the Persian Gulf War) indicates that contemporary American military operations are swift, nearly surgical applications of force, that overwhelm the less than formidable adversaries who are their targets. The demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War reaffirms the evaluation that small "bush fires" are the wars of the future. The political realities of the world's hot spot, the Middle East, further indicate that the aims of future American military conflicts are likely to be to stop the "maniac/terrorist leader du jour", thus protecting American interests. An all out war to protect the very existence of democracy and the American way of life seems highly unlikely.

Given this new nature of war, it would be difficult for the media to focus on negative themes, even if they chose to. The "fighting" is usually over before the adversary, or the American media, knows it has begun. With modern weaponry, the collateral damage, although it does still exist, is minimal. Instead of devastated war victims, reporters often find the citizenry of the attacked country (Grenada, Panama, Kuwait) are jubilant to be freed from an oppressive leader.

The premise that the American media wants to focus on the failures of the government and military is a shaky one. The post-Vietnam American military actions have enjoyed enormous public support. A few "elite" print publications aside, the bottom line for the commercial American media is to give the public what they want. To an American viewing public weaned on detective television programs and "Rambo" movies, violence is acceptable, as long as it is quickly and decisively applied to a recognized "bad guy", with a minimum of American casualties. The only post-Vietnam American military action to receive extensive media criticism was the 1980 attempted rescue of the hostages in Iran, called DESERT ONE by its military planners. The vast majority of this criticism was directed at the failure of the operation (blamed on then President Carter), and not at the fact that a potentially bloody operation was initiated (Mayer, et al., 1980; Strasser, et al., 1980).

After the initial stages of conflict are over, the media subsequently focus on the deeper policy issues involved by covering press conferences at the Pentagon and White House and interviewing military and political analysts. However, most of the fickle viewing public has probably gone back to watching "Wheel of Fortune". The victorious forces return home heroes, but they are quickly forgotten as life returns to normal. The fact that a year and a half after the immensely popular and successful Persian Gulf War, President Bush cannot run his campaign as a war hero president graphically demonstrates this

point.

In any event through design or default, the alleged "liberal/negative" bias in network news coverage was not conclusively demonstrated in this study. This finding is consistent with studies of the Vietnam War which also failed to find a liberal/negative media bias in coverage of that conflict (Bailey, 1976a, 1976b; Hallin, 1984).

While the military and media continue to struggle to build mutual trust and understanding and attempt to improve their working relationship, perhaps it is time to dispel the notion of liberal/negative media bias and focus on more important elements of contention in the military/media relationship.

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APPENDICES

Coding Key

Variable 1: Sample Number

Variable 2: Date of Broadcast

Variable 3: Network

Variable 4: Length of Story

Variable 5: Type of Story
- A. Anchor in studio
- B. In-studio interview
- C. Voice-over narration by anchor
- D. Audio report from correspondent
- E. Conversation with correspondent in studio
- F. Commentary from studio
- G. Commentary from field

Variable 6: Nature of Story
- A. Report of event, current situation, or policy announcement
- B. Report of reaction to event or statement
- C. Report of statement
- D. Report of ongoing process, situation, or policy
- E. Background report
- F. Analysis or commentary
- G. Human interest story
- H. Other (including interviews)

Variable 7: Video of Americans helping Panamanians
- A. Video doesn't show Americans helping Panamanian civilians
- B. Video shows Americans helping Panamanian civilians (i.e. giving medical aid, candy to children, etc.)
- C. Report not from Panama
- D. Not a video report

Variable 8: Casualties on Video
- A. Bodies, faces not visible
- B. Bodies, faces shown
- C. Wounded, faces not visible
- D. Wounded, faces shown
- E. Wounded, focus on an individual
- F. Wounded or killed on camera, faces not visible
- G. Wounded or killed on camera, faces shown

H. Wounded or killed on camera, focus on an individual
I. Displaced civilians in crowds
J. Displaced civilians, tight shots
K. Capture of an individual prisoner
L. Capture of a group of prisoners
M. Destruction of homes, businesses, etc.
N. Other
O. No casualties shown
P. Report not from Panama
Q. Not a video report

Variable 9: Video of Survivors Grieving
A. U.S. civilians
B. Panamanian civilians
C. U.S. soldiers
D. Panamanian soldiers
E. No survivors shown grieving
F. Not a video report

Variable 10: Responsibility for Casualties
A. Not attributed, no clear responsibility
B. Attributed or clearly linked to U.S. actions
C. Attributed or clearly linked to Noriega's forces
D. Attributed or clearly linked to "friendly fire"
E. Attributed or clearly linked to "war"
F. Attributed or clearly linked to both sides
G. No reference to casualties

Variable 11: Type of Reference to Casualties
A. Military, quantitative (numbers) only
B. Military, minimal elaboration or context
C. Military, with context (description of situation, identity of victim, etc)
D. Effects on families in U.S.
E. Military, interview with victim
F. Civilian, quantitative only
G. Civilian, with context
aa. injured by Americans
bb. injured by Noriega's troops
H. Abuse of civilians (stealing, looting, etc.)
aa. by Americans
bb. by Noriega's troops
I. Civilian, interview with victim
J. Destruction of homes, businesses, etc.
K. Other
L. No reference to casualties
* Soldiers referring to the death of a buddy without details are coded B. All casualties shown on video are coded "with context"

Variable 12: Description of Military Results
- A. No description in terms of success or failure
- B. Actions result in success for U.S.
- C. Actions result in success for Noriega's troops
- D. Results inconclusive, mixed, or a stalemate
- E. No contact, frustration for the U.S.
- F. No contact, success for the U.S.
- G. Enemy cleared out, but "will return"
- H. U.S. troops "sweep" area, otherwise no description in terms of success of failure
- I. Not a report on military operations

Variable 13: References to Hopes of Noriega's Capture/Surrender
- A. Negative reference, major theme of story
- B. Negative reference, but not major theme of story
- C. Neutral or mixed reference, major theme
- D. Neutral or mixed, not major theme
- E. Positive reference, major theme
- F. Positive reference, not major theme
- G. No reference made

Variable 14: Content of Statements on Invasion Policy
- A. Expression of hope for peace, no policy position expressed or implied
- B. Support for administration policy expressed or implied
- C. Criticism of administration policy expressed or implied
- D. Statement about facts or situation, favorable to administration
- E. Statement about facts or situation, unfavorable to administration
- F. Statement of public opinion, favorable to administration
- G. Statement of public opinion, unfavorable
- H. Statement about the aims of U.S. policy, favorable
- I. Statement about the aims of U.S. policy, unfavorable
- J. Statement about the aims of U.S. policy, neutral
- K. Advocacy of an alternative policy
- L. Criticism of alternative policy
- M. Other
- N. No statement on invasion policy

Variable 15: Interpretation of Invasion Policy
- A. Evaluate policy as successful, or situation as favorable
- B. Evaluate policy as unsuccessful, or unfavorable
- C. Evaluate policy as inconclusive or stalemated
- D. Evaluate as mixed
- E. State that evaluation is impossible based on current information

F. Speculate positively on future events
G. Speculate negatively on future events
H. Speculate positively on the effects of policy or event
I. Speculate negatively on the effects
J. Evaluate positively the importance of policy or action
K. Evaluate negatively the importance of policy
L. Loaded word choice, positive (i.e. "troops are brave, heroic", "area is liberated from oppression", etc.)
M. Loaded word choice, negative (i.e. "Noriega is showing a vengeance", "the troops are committing irrational murder", "wild and vicious riot", etc.)
N. Explicit argument
   aa. to end the invasion
   bb. to continue the invasion
   cc. to escalate
   dd. to offer concessions, etc.
   ee. for policy
   ff. against policy
O. Other interpretation, positive
P. Other interpretation, negative
Q. Other interpretation, neutral
R. No interpretation

Variable 16: Balancing of Coded Statements
A. Statement not balanced
   aa. pro-administration policy
   bb. anti-administration policy
B. Newscaster gives counter arguments
C. Newscaster refers to specific opposing views
D. Newscaster balances by referring to public opinion (i.e. "not everyone thinks that way")
E. Statement balanced by one opposing view (on video)
F. Statement balanced by two or more opposing views (on video)
G. Statement balanced within the context of the broadcast as a whole (several arguments on both sides spread through various stories)
H. Other balancing
I. Statement not controversial (i.e. witness describing situation)
J. No statement made

Variable 17: Source of Video
A. Video attributed to DOD sources
B No attribution for video source
C. Not a video report

Breakdown of Coding Variables

Variables 1-6 "Housekeeping"

Variables 7-13 Sub-question 1

"Did network news stories carry a preponderance of negative themes throughout the duration of coverage of the Panama invasion?"

Variable 7
B, negates negative themes
A, C, D, no determination

Variable 8
A, C, F, L, negates negative themes
B, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, M, support negative themes
O, P, Q, no determination

Variable 9
A, B, C, D, support negative themes
E, F, no determination

Variable 10
B, D, E, F, support negative themes
C negates negative themes
A no determination

Variable 11
A, B, D, F, Gaa, Haa, I, J, support negative themes
C, E, Gbb, Hbb, negate negative themes
L no determination

Variable 12
B, F, negate negative themes
C, E, G, support negative themes
A, D, H, I, no determination

Variable 13
A, B, support negative themes
E, F, negate negative themes
C, D, G, no determination

Variables 14-16 Sub-question 2

"Were reports of the Bush administration's invasion policy presented in an unfavorable manner?"

Variable 14
B, D, F, H, L, negate unfavorable reaction to admin. policy
C, E, G, I, K, support unfavorable reaction
A, J, N, no determination

Variable 15
A, F, H, J, L, Nbb, Ncc, Nee, O, negate unfavorable reaction
B, C, G, I, K, M, Naa, Ndd, Nff. P, supports unfavorable reaction
D, E, Q, R, no determination

Variable 16
Aaa, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, negates unfavorable reaction
Abb supports unfavorable reaction
I, J, no determination

Variable 17 Secondary analysis