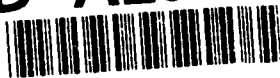


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**PRESS COVERAGE OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR:  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND QUESTIONS OF  
POLICY BEYOND THE SHADOW OF VIETNAM**

by

Kimberly Ann Cochran

June 1992

Thesis Advisor:

Donald Abenheim

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92-30722



UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION Naval Postgraduate School		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Naval Postgraduate School		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) NS		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Monterey, CA 93943-5006	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Monterey, CA 93943			9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION Naval Postgraduate School		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Monterey, CA 93943			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.
			WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.		
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) <i>Press Coverage of the Persian Gulf War: Historical Perspectives and Questions of Policy Beyond the Shadow of Vietnam</i>					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Cochran, Kimberly A.					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Master's thesis		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, month day) June, 1992	
				15. PAGE COUNT 114	
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	Press; military press coverage; military media coverage; freedom of the press; First Amendment; military-press relations; military press policy; military public affairs; military public relations; censorship; Vietnam War; Persian Gulf War		
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Widely held views of military-press relations in the United States rest upon an incomplete image of the past. This became overwhelmingly evident during the recent Gulf War with its generalizations about the experience of the Vietnam War. This thesis seeks to correct such failings through a brief discussion of the role the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press has played regarding U.S. national security interests, followed by a thorough description of military-press relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Chief emphasis is upon American war since 1965, with an analysis of press policy both before and during the Gulf War. It is shown that policy decisions have evolved from historical precedent and "lessons learned" from previous wars. Moreover, preliminary review of the secondary literature suggests that there exists far more continuity in U.S. military press relations than is widely perceived in the body politic and among the press. The Vietnam case, most often portrayed as devoid of military press control, can be seen as an exception, rather than the rule. Further, the Sidle Commission as well as the experiences in Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 reflect a backlash against the press policy of the Vietnam War. A close examination of USCENCOM's public affairs guidance suggests that the makers of DOD and theater press policy fully understand the need to avoid the perceived mistakes of Vietnam as well as the requirement to argue the military's case in a forceful and persuasive manner. The public backlash against the electronic media in the Gulf War, coupled with the general affection felt in American hearts and minds for the professional military, suggests that present aggressive U.S. military policies toward the press will continue. The thesis concludes with an examination of those outstanding areas of policy that demand careful attention along with recommendations toward improving future military-press policy.					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL Donald Abenheim			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (408) 646-2208		2c. OFFICE SYMBOL NS/Ah

DD Form 1473, JUN 86

Previous editions are obsolete.

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

S/N 0102-LF-014-6603

UNCLASSIFIED

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*Press Coverage of the Persian Gulf War: Historical Perspectives and  
Questions of Policy Beyond the Shadow of Vietnam*

by

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Lieutenant, United States Navy  
BS, Florida State University, 1984

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

From the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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Accession For	
NTIS CRA&I	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification _____	
By _____	
Distribution /	
Availability Codes	
Dist	Avail and/or Special
A-1	

## ABSTRACT

Widely held views of military-press relations in the United States rest upon an incomplete image of the past. This became overwhelmingly evident during the recent Gulf War with its generalizations about the experience of the Vietnam War. This thesis seeks to correct such failings through a brief discussion of the role the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press has played regarding U.S. national security interests, followed by a thorough description of military-press relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Chief emphasis is upon American war since 1965, with an analysis of press policy both before and during the Gulf War. It is shown that policy decisions have evolved from historical precedent and "lessons learned" from previous wars. Moreover, preliminary review of the secondary literature suggests that there exists far more continuity in U.S. military press relations than is widely perceived in the body politic and among the press. The Vietnam case, most often portrayed as devoid of military press control, can be seen as an exception, rather than the rule. Further, the Sidle Commission as well as the experiences in Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 reflect a backlash against the press policy of the Vietnam War. A close examination of USCENTCOM's public affairs guidance suggests that the makers of DOD and theater press policy fully understand the need to avoid the perceived mistakes of Vietnam as well as the requirement to argue the military's case in a forceful and persuasive manner. The public backlash against the electronic media in the Gulf War, coupled with the general affection felt in American hearts and minds for the professional military, suggests that present aggressive U.S.

military policies toward the press will continue. The thesis concludes with an examination of those outstanding areas of policy that demand careful attention along with recommendations toward improving future military-press policy.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: NATIONAL SECURITY VS. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Every newspaper now asks itself with respect to every story, "Is it news?"  
All I suggest is that you add the question, "Is it in the national interests?"

—President John F. Kennedy  
(Metzner, 1972, p. 72)

### A. DEFINING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

#### 1. Reasonable Limits

Since the beginning of the Republic, national security interests have been at odds with the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press—especially in time of war. Although the First Amendment clearly states that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging freedom of the press," by no means does that grant *absolute freedom*. The First Amendment also provides for the "free exercise" of religion, but to quote the sarcastic view of one journalist, "That right does not permit Satan worshipers to sacrifice virgins in public squares." (Heid, 1986, p. 42) "Freedom" implies no limits, yet reasonable limits are the inherent byproduct of any rights within society—it is a matter of balancing individual rights against those of society as a whole. National security is as fundamental a collective concern to the United States as the individual concepts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The friction lies less in substance than in scope: Where do press freedoms end and U.S. security interests begin?

During the Persian Gulf War the question was debated fiercely among military and government officials and press representatives alike. The debate

was shaped in part by an incomplete image of the past, centering on generalizations about the press coverage of the Vietnam War. This thesis will explore those generalizations as well as the experiences of previous wars, emphasizing the proposition that although the coverage of the Persian Gulf War was unique in many ways, this occurred because of and not in spite of the perennial battle between pen and sword. The press policy that emanated from this war was in effect a product of historical evolution.

To fully comprehend the evolution of military press relations it is important first to examine the meaning of "freedom of the press" as regards U.S. national security interests, as well as the rights and responsibilities this freedom entails. Whereas the First Amendment specifically bars Congress from enacting laws that abridge the freedom of the press, it has not constitutionally deterred Congress from enacting laws regarding the press. (O'Brien, 1981, p. 48) Further, national security interests have provided the bulwark of legal precedent. The implications for military-press controls should be readily apparent. The framework from which military-press relations have developed and the pertinent issues therein require a review of the origins of the First Amendment in U.S. political thought.

## **2. The Bill of Rights**

The inclusion of a bill of rights was pursuant to the ratification of the United States Constitution. It was added less because of a universal belief in its necessity than as a compromise in the struggle between the Anti-Federalists, who in opposition to the new Constitution insisted on a bill of rights, and the Federalists, who supported it in order to pass the new charter of government. It is not surprising that debates on the meaning of a free

press guarantee were vague and lacked thorough exposition. (Lofton, 1980, pp. 9-11) Hamilton, leader of the Federalist Party, defended its initial omission on these very ground. In the *Federalist Paper LXXXIV*, he argued

What signifies a declaration that "The Liberty of the Press shall be inviolably preserved?" What is the Liberty of the press? Who can give it any definition which does not leave the utmost latitude for evasion? I hold it to be impracticable; and from this I infer, that its security, whatever fine declarations may be inserted in any Constitution respecting it, must altogether depend on public opinion, and on the general spirit of the people and of the Government. (Mott, 1962, p. 6)

Nonetheless, the Bill of Rights was an important issue in the first session of Congress, and the First Amendment, regardless of its definitive limits, was meant to be an additional structural provision to harness the powers of the federal government within its prescribed boundaries. The framers of the Constitution feared the powers inherent in centralized government, as evidenced by the numerous checks and balances written into the system—freedom of the press was meant to be an extension of this. Moreover, press freedom was viewed as being closely linked to the idea of representative self-government. (Powe, 1990, pp. 47-49) This view was expounded by James Madison in 1922:

Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means to get it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both. (Daniels, 1985, p. 1)

By including the First Amendment in the Constitution, freedom of the press could not be restrained by the President or by Congress without Constitutional amendment or resistance from the courts. However, although the specific mention of freedom of the press was a conscious addition to the

common law recognition on the subject, upon which the British have depended as a safeguard, it is important to note that the concept was nonetheless based in English Common Law. (Emery, 1984, p. 91)

There is a strong case that the First Amendment was not intended to bring about a radical change in press freedom, that it was simply meant to reaffirm the principle already established in English Common Law, that the press could not be restrained prior to publication. (Lofton, 1980, p. 10) The leading British legal authority of the day, William Blackstone, had defined what was meant by freedom of the press in the classic, *Commentaries in the Law of England* written in 1769. He wrote: "The liberty of the press is indeed essential to the nature of the free state: but this consists in laying no previous restraints upon publications, and not in freedom from censure for criminal matter when published." (Powe, 1990, p. 6) That the Federalists held this restrictive view of press freedom became apparent during the passage of the first national censorship law which paradoxically served as a milestone on the road to defining the scope of freedom of the press as we know it today.

## **B. LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

### **1. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798**

In the summer of 1798 and war with France seemingly imminent, a predominantly Federalist Congress passed a series of wartime measures known as the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. The Sedition Act declared "that if any person shall write, print, utter ... any false, scandalous, and malicious writing ... against the government of the United States, or either House of Congress ... or the said President ... or to excite against them the

hatred of the good people of the United States ... or to resist or oppose, or defeat any law ... shall be punished by a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars, and by imprisonment not exceeding two years." (Powe, 1991, p. 57)

The law did not explicitly forbid criticism of the government, only false and malicious statements—"the truth" could be offered as defense whereby a jury could determine both the law and the fact. Furthermore the original bill called for a declaration of war against France with penalties attached concerning all who might give aid and comfort to an enemy. (Emery, 1984, pp. 101-102).

To justify the legitimacy of a law seemingly precluded by the First Amendment several explanations were given. Representative Harrison Gray Otis reasoned that the power was inherent: "Every independent Government has the right to preserve and defend itself against injuries and outrages which endanger its existence." (Lofton, 1980, p. 26) Buttreassing this position, it was argued that Congress had already been given an expressed grant in Article 1, Section 8 "to make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers and all other Powers vested by the Constitution in the Government of the United States or any Department of Officer thereof."

However, instead of making the textual argument that the Sedition Act was "necessary and proper" in order to facilitate war powers during an impending crisis with France, Representative Robert Harper concluded it was "necessary and proper" because the government could not function "if sedition for opposing laws and libels against its officers, its proceedings, are to pass unpunished." (Powe, 1991, p. 57) Freedom of the press, added Otis "is

nothing more than the liberty of writing, publishing, and speaking one's thoughts, under the condition of being answerable to the injured party ... [it] is merely an exemption from all previous restraints." (Lofton, 1980, p. 27)

Ironically, the Sedition Act actually expanded the scope of freedom of the press. Although "there may be circumstances—as even Abraham Lincoln [later] noted—where forgetting the Constitution is necessary in order to preserve it—" this was not one of them. (Powe, 1991, p. 57) The declaration of war was not included in the bill, and war with France did not materialize. The Sedition Act essentially became a partisan tool in the hands of the Federalist Party to curb administration criticism. The public outrage towards the ensuing prosecutions of seditious libel made it clear that freedom of the press in America had come to mean much more than its English Common Law origins. Instead of being confined to the issue of prior restraint, a more liberal interpretation of the amendment as a bar to prosecutions of seditious libel became accepted. (Lofton, 1980, p. 10) When the Sedition Act expired on the last day of the Adams administration in March 1801, President Jefferson, upon assuming office, pardoned all those convicted under this "unauthorized act of Congress." (Mott, 1962, p. 152). It was not until World War I that such a law was again enacted and the boundaries of press freedom were again redefined.

## **2. Wartime Measures of Censorship**

Upon entry into World War I in 1917, the Wilson administration had three legislative goals: one that would authorize the president to censor information that "might be useful to the enemy"; a second that would prohibit "willfully" making false statements interfering with military success

or causing insubordination in the military or obstructing the draft; and a third that would render "non-mailable" the publications that ignored the provisions of the second. (Powe, 1990, p. 67) What eventually emerged were three significant laws dealing with censorship: the Espionage Act of 1917 and its 1918 amendment, the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, and the Sedition Act of 1918.

In its final form, the Espionage Act imposed criminal liability on those who "shall make or convey false reports or false statements with the intent to interfere with the operations or success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies ... or shall willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny or refusal of duty in the military forces of the United States." (Grossman, 1989, p. 22) The censorship provision sought by the administration was not included, because it was a prior restraint and because it could have been used to suppress administrative criticism. Most of the litigation involved provisions toward the second legislative goal and in support of that, the non-mailability clause remained. Although non-mailability could be considered a form of censorship, it only effects those materials carried by the postal services, presidential censorship, on the other hand, could have prevented the circulation of all information. Historian David Rabban argues that the legislative history "suggests that the majority wanted to restrict antiwar speech it considered dangerous while protecting main newspapers and other non-threatening expression." (Powe, 1990, pp. 67-69) Regardless, as the war progressed, First Amendment concerns increasingly took a back seat to national security concerns and the propagation of the war.

The Espionage Act was followed by the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 which authorized censorship of all communications moving in and out of the United States and required any newspaper or magazine published in a foreign language to file a sworn translation with the Post Office, and, if appropriate, withhold military privileges from offending publications. The Sedition Act of 1918 broadened the Espionage Act by making it a crime to write or publish "any disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the Constitution, military or naval forces, flag, or the uniform" or to use language intended to bring these ideas and institution "into contempt, scorn, contumely or disrepute." (Emery, 1984, p. 359)

In general, mainstream press reaction to these measures was surprisingly supportive. The St. Louis Republic remarked,

There never was any such thing in the United States as freedom to encourage treason. There never was any freedom in this country to aid the enemies of the country by word of mouth or any other way. There can be no law which abridges a freedom which never existed.

Congress has power to punish reasonable utterances because its first duty is to maintain the Government of the United States. (Lofton, 1980, p. 174)

However, after the wartime hysteria and patriotic fervor subsided, the true test of the appropriateness and constitutionality of these acts was decided in the courts. Moreover "the First Amendment's expansion to include the ramified issues of free expression, either not considered at the time [of its creation] or not existing, came only through a history of such national experience and through judicial interpretation." (Lofton, 1980, p. 10) World War I with its widespread restriction of freedom of expression, more so than



any previous time in U.S. history, signalled the beginning of authoritative interpretation of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press by the Supreme Court. (Lofton, 1980, p. 169)

## **C. JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION**

### **1. Clear and Present Danger**

Out of the prosecution of the Espionage and Sedition Acts came several landmark cases balancing national security concerns against First Amendment rights. The Espionage Act was upheld most notably in *Schenck v. U.S.* in which Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes advanced what has become known as the "clear and present danger" test. He said, "The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent. It is a question of proximity and degree." (Emery, 1984, p. 365) This strengthened the theory of balancing competing public and private interests usually presented in First Amendment cases. The needs of wartime mobilization reinforced the emphasis on subordinating the individual to the social order. So even as the Espionage Age "did not incorporate the boldest efforts at censorship, its underlying premise was that criticism of wartime policies could and should be limited." (Powe, 1990, p. 70)

The Sedition Act was also upheld in its first Supreme Court test, but with a decidedly pronounced concern over First Amendment rights. Although the majority view held to the clear and present danger rule, Judge Holmes and Judge Louis Brandeis dissented, arguing that the best test of truth

was by "free trade in ideas" and the "power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." Furthermore, Holmes added, "Only the emergency that makes it immediately dangerous to leave the correction of evil counsels to time warrants making an exception to the sweeping command "Congress shall make no laws ... abridging the freedom of speech." (Emery, 1984, p. 366) However, crisis times happen and the pathology they give occasion to is unchanging. (Powe, 1990, p. 76)

The more sweeping mandates of the Sedition Act were revoked when the act was repealed in 1921, but both the Espionage Act and the Trading with the Enemy Act remained on the statute books and to be recalled again during World War II. (Emery, 1984, p. 477) Moreover, the Espionage Acts of 1917 and 1918 serve as the primary source for government restrictions on the dissemination of information relating to national security today and the constitutionality of the acts has been upheld in every challenge. (Grossman, 1989, p. 22) In fact in most First Amendment cases the court has found exception to matters of national security.

In *Near vs. Minnesota* (1931) the opinion's most famous passage implied that national security interests may even provide grounds for prior restraint: "No one would question but that a government [during actual war] might prevent obstruction to its recruiting service or the publication of sailing dates of troops and transports or the number and location of troops." (Powe, 1990, p. 145) However, although most would agree, including the courts, that the First Amendment does not guarantee the right to provide secrets, walking the line between freedom of the press and national security has nonetheless been tenuous.

It is important to note that prior restraint was not authorized in the case of *Near*; although the exception to national security interests was opinioned it did not include this particular case. Consequently *Near vs. Minnesota* stands as a landmark case for both freedom of the press and national security interests. Both views were cited in the *Pentagon Papers* case (1971) when the government issued a temporary restraining order on publication by the *New York Times*, of secret documents pertaining to policy decisions of the Vietnam War. Although the government argued that the publication of the papers might prolong the war, the courts ruled against prior restraint. But instead of ruling the government had no right to issue an injunction, it cited "the government carries a heavy burden of showing justification for the enforcement of such a restraint"; in effect the government had not proved a "clear and present danger" to national security. (Emery 1984, pp. 598-600)

As a rule the press is free to publish most information without fear of injuncture, and those statutes providing criminal sanctions against publication of classified information after the fact, are generally limited in scope, and often require the government to prove the person acted with intent to injure the U.S. or confer an advantage on a foreign country. (Grossman, 1991, p. 26) The question of postpublication punishment was raised, although not acted upon, in the *Pentagon Papers* case. In fact when it was demanded that the *Times* stop its publication, the government referenced both the sensitive nature of the material and that its possession violated the Espionage Act. (Powe, 1990, p. 152) This leaves open the question

about how this information was obtained. What about the right of the free press to access information?

## **2. Media Access: The Public's Right to Know**

The Supreme Court has addressed the issue of media access numerous times, and in its opinion the First Amendment does not give the news media special authority to access government information or activities. Chief Justice Earl Warren stated, "The right to speak and publish does not carry with it the unrestricted right to gather information." (O'Brien, 1981, p. 122) In *Saxbe vs. the Washington Post Co.*, (1974), the court ruled that, "The Constitution does not ... require government accord the press special access to information not shared by members of the public generally." Although in *Richmond Newspapers vs. Virginia*, the court opined, "The right of access to places traditionally open to the public, as criminal trials have long been, may be assured by the amalgam of the First Amendment guarantees of speech and press" (Grossman, 1989, pp. 22-24); the key phrase was, "places traditionally open to the public" (Braestrup, 1985, p. 129). The Department of Defense could feasibly argue that battlefields are not such places. (Denniston, 1984, p. 13)

The press contends that special access is necessary in order to fulfill their responsibilities to the public's right to know--although some would argue that this is a self-appointed responsibility. In *Dayton Newspapers, Inc., vs. City of Dayton*, the Ohio Court of Common Pleas commented:

"The so-called 'right of the public to know' is a rationalization developed by the fourth estate (the press) to gain rights not shared by others ... to improve its private ability to acquire information which is the raw asset of its business ... the Constitution does not appoint the fourth estate the spokesmen (sic) of the people. The people speak

through their elective process and through the individuals it elects to positions created for that purpose. The press has no right that exceeds that of other citizens. (O'Brien, 1981, p. 10)

A more pervasive view is that the public's right to know is tied to a need to know by virtue of some functional status. By the same token, the right to withhold information, as for the right to know, must also be the necessity of legitimate function. (Grossman, 1989, p. 24) It could be said national security is the most important legitimate function of any government. Media access and the public's right to know should be balanced against this legitimate function. The conduct of military-press relations has been effectively built on this premise—but not without some friction.

The development of military-press relations has centered on the debate over access—access to information on the battlefield, as the military arm of national security policy takes hold. Given that there is no clear legal basis for access to the battlefield, admission has generally been at the prerogative of the military. The military, as an arm of government, has accepted the basic proposition that knowledge is the key to popular government and that to enlighten the public the press must have the fullest possible access to the news—including the battlefield. Military press policies have generally taken into account the public's right to know but only when balanced against the needs of operational security—a most tangible adjunct to national security. It is here that the friction lies, again less in substance than in scope, concerning the degree of access to, and dissemination of, affecting the conduct of military operations.

#### **D. A POTENT WEAPON**

Having reviewed the legislative actions and judicial interpretations that have helped define the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press within the context of national security, the following chapters will explore the development of military press relations. The past suggests that freedom of the press can be a "potent weapon in the political arsenal" and both a tangible and psychological factor to consider in national security planning. (Howell, 1990, p. 149) Furthermore the continuities of military-press policies far outweigh the discontinuities, as national security concerns, and with it, operational security, have overwhelmingly found preeminence over freedom of the press during war. Although the record of the past was not ignored during the Gulf War, neither was it fully comprehended. It is to this endeavor that the remainder of this paper is devoted.

Chapter II focuses on those historical events central to the evolution of the military-press relations from the Revolutionary War era through the Korean War. This analysis includes accounts of the Mexican War, Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II. Such substantive issues as the changing natures of warfare and the press, the growth of propaganda, the role of field press censorship and the technological innovations affecting media coverage complete the chronology. These same categories of issues are also covered in Chapter III on Vietnam, but with a more decided focus.

Particular attention is given to the Vietnam War as a watershed in U.S. military-press relations and as the starting point of analysis of the Persian

Gulf War. The perceptions and misperceptions of how the Vietnam War was covered deeply affected military press relations for years after and shaped military-press policies both before and during the Gulf War. Chapter IV analyzes the press policies that developed in the Persian Gulf as a result of the Vietnam experience. DoD guidance reflected a keen awareness of the need for press controls, and the need for some offensive public relations platform in the Gulf—both seen as lacking in Vietnam. Such were the lessons of history, and to further that understanding, these issues will be reexamined along with other lessons that may have been missed. By better understanding how the military-press relationship has developed up to and now including the Persian Gulf War, recommendations for improving this relationship can more effectively be evaluated and implemented for future military conflict.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY PRESS RELATIONS

### A. RISE OF THE POPULAR PRESS

#### 1. The Revolutionary War

It is much to be wished that our printers were more discreet in many of the publications. We see in almost every paper, proclamations or accounts transmitted by the enemy of an injurious nature. If some hint or caution could be given them on the subject, it might be of material service.

—General George Washington, 1777  
(Grossman, 1989, p. 3)

U.S. military concern over war reporting is as old as the nation itself, and its fledgling newspaper profession. There were approximately 35 newspapers in publication in the colonies on the eve of the Revolution, and although only 20 of the original survived, six and a half years of war generated enough news to create another 35, of which 15 remained in publication by the end of the war. Of these 70 papers, nearly all weeklies, only 15 were of the Tory persuasion. (Mott, 1962, p. 95) The remaining were quite sympathetic to the patriot cause. In fact, the printers, publishers and editors were important influences in garnishing public support for the revolution and in maintaining the fighting spirit during the war. (Emery, 1984, p. 77)

Given the growing tide of patriot sentiment, censorship was not deemed prudent by Royalist authorities. Lieutenant Governor Colden of New York remarked, in 1765, "that considering the present temper of the people this is not a proper time to prosecute the printers and publishers of the



Seditious Papers." The Revolutionaries seized upon this very temper to effect their own censorship laws once independence had been declared. In fact all the colonies passed wartime laws prohibiting the publishing of materials supporting the King although most censorship was achieved covertly through the use of threats and mob violence on the part of the Sons of Liberty and other Patriot organizations. (Linfield, 1990, p. 16) (Mott, 1962, pp. 103-104)

The importance of the print media to the revolutionary cause was also recognized by the military leadership. General Washington himself issued a plea to patriot women to save all available material that could be converted to printing paper when wartime shortages of printing supplies emerged. He was also instrumental in the founding of the *New Jersey Gazette*, which for a time served as a kind of army newspaper. (Emery, 1984, p. 83) Not surprisingly common attitudes and actions made for relatively amiable military-press relations. Moreover, the nature of war reporting, along with the limitations of time and space in communications, rendered the concept of military censorship moot.

War correspondence as it exists today was unheard of during the War for Independence, although the most notable war reporting of the conflict came from the chance eyewitness account of the Battles of Lexington and Concord by patriot-editor Isaiah Thomas. (Emery, 1984, p. 83) The fact is newspapers had no organized means of covering the war, but relied almost completely on the random arrival of private letters and of official and semi-official messages. Furthermore, editors clipped copy from other newspapers—both foreign and domestic—that used similar methods of

reporting. (Mott, 1962, p. 99) The Royalist *New York Gazette and Mercury* published this report on February 2, 1778 from a month old Boston paper:

The *Hartford Post* tells us, That he saw a Gentleman in Springfield, who informed him that he (the Gentleman) saw a letter from an officer in Gen. Howe's army to another in Gen. Burgoyne's, giving him to understand, war was declared on both sides of France and Spain against the mighty kingdom of Britain.

As concerns France, the report was premature, while regarding Spain, the event was anticipated by more than a year. (Mott, 1962, p. 100)

The great preponderance of war reports at this time was in any combination, second-hand, inaccurate and considerably tardy. Military operations compounded the obstacles which post riders normally encountered as detours around war-blocked regions caused increased delay. These less than propitious conditions of war correspondence also plagued the War of 1812, with coverage of campaigns and incidents almost as haphazard as that during the Revolutionary War. (Mott, 1962, p. 196) Not until the Mexican War did newspapers make any attempt at organized war coverage, thus marking the beginning of modern war correspondence as we know it today (Mott, 1962, p. 248).

## 2. The Mexican War

Journalism is literature in a hurry ...

—Mathew Arnold  
(Emery, 1984, p. 159)

According to historian Frank Luther Mott, "the news coverage of the Mexican War was far more copious than that of any previous war in any part of the world." (Mott, 1962, p. 248) Historian F. Taurision Bullard adds that it

was "the first war to be adequately and comprehensively reported in the daily press." (Mathews, 1957, p. 53) This trend developed out of a distinctly American attitude toward journalistic enterprise and the emergence of the war correspondent as a regular feature of war reporting:

In sharp contrast to the dignified professionalism of the Europeans, the Americans reported wars as they fought them: they ignored rules and precedents, introduced a spirit of competition unknown to the European press, and welcomed rough writers as enthusiastically as rough riders. There were no legal restrictions on reporting on the Mexican War. More than that, there was very little to distinguish a reporter from an ordinary soldier. Writing men fought and a number of fighting men wrote. (Mathews, 1957, p. 54)

Unlike today, where correspondents are noncombatant, the first American War correspondents were generally attached to an army group. This early precedent was unintentionally set during the War of 1812 when James M. Bradford enlisted in Jackson's army while in defense of New Orleans and then proceeded to write a series of letters back home to his paper the *Time Piece* in St. Francisville, Louisiana. (Mott, 1962, p. 196) During the Mexican War there were a score of these "special correspondents," the most notable being George W. Kendall of the *New Orleans Picayune*. He covered all the major battles from Monterrey to Chapultepec, gave accurate accounts of the operations and tactics involved and was later attached to General Worth's staff. Likewise the *Delta's* leading correspondent, James L. Freaner, occasionally acted as an official dispatch carrier. Freaner capped his successful career as a war correspondent by personally delivering the peace treaty from Mexico to Washington in a record 17 days. (Emery, 1984, p. 166) (Mott, 1962, pp. 249-250)

In addition to these writer-soldiers, there were soldier-writers who acted as "occasional correspondents." These men, mainly former printers and reporters, had joined the army for the sole purpose of fighting, but later found time to write to their former editors back home on an informal basis (Emery, 1984, p. 167). These soldier-printers were also responsible for establishing another new development—the camp newspaper—the most important of which, the *American Flag* of Scott's army, was used by many papers as a chief source of war news. (Mott, 1962, p. 250) In general, the reports, whether written by soldier writers or writer-soldiers supported U.S. involvement in the war and the imperial idea of Manifest Destiny. They also generated favorable publicity and promoted the popular war-hero images of military leaders such as Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. (Emery, 1984, p. 167) Still, as supportive as the press was toward the military, it was nonetheless a synergistic relationship; after all, war was big news.

When War with Mexico broke out in May 1846, the telegraph extended no further than Richmond and the Southern railway system was quite fragmentary (Mott, 1962, p. 244), yet by combining these abilities with the pony express, the press was able to establish a 2000-mile communication link that repeatedly beat the military couriers and other official sources with news from the front. This express system was so effective that President Polk was first informed of the American victory in Vera Cruz via telegraph by the publisher of the *Baltimore Sun*. One casual observer remarked, "If our troops do make as vigorous a charge upon the enemy as newsboys do upon the public with their extras the victory will be ours without a doubt." (Emery, 1984, pp. 165-166)

Although newspaper circulation surged during the Mexican War, covering it was costly. Quite according to the tradition of news-gathering at the time, the News Orleans papers, which were closest to the war zone, led the coverage of the conflict; but getting this news back to the East Coast via the express system was just as expensive an enterprise. Several newspapers therefore began to pool their efforts. Not long after the war, this cooperation in news-gathering led to the genesis of the Associated Press, which expanded correspondence at all important points through cooperative telegraphic news reporting. (Mott, 1962, pp. 251-252) In fact, much of the groundwork for modern war correspondence emerged at this time. But while developments like the use of the telegraph to speed delivery, and of war correspondents to provide comprehensive coverage, were in their infancy and of little concern to the waging of this popular, successful war, the same could not be said of the coverage of the next American conflict, where not only North and South, but pen and sword were pitted against each other as the nation struggled for survival.

### 3. The Civil War

Now to every army and almost every general a newspaper reporter goes along, filling up our transports, swelling our trains, reporting our progress, guessing at places picking up dropped expressions, inciting jealousy and discontent, and doing infinite mischief.

—General William T. Sherman  
(Knightley, 1989, p. 28)

No war had ever been so fully and freely reported before the Civil War. The North by itself had some 500 correspondents in the field (Knightley, 1989, p. 20) Furthermore, for the first time the telegraph was

available for large-scale use, with nearly 50,000 miles of telegraph line in just the Eastern states alone, thus allowing for not only more extensive but more immediate press coverage of the war. It was now possible for the American public to have a first-hand report of what happened yesterday, rather than an outdated opinion of what occurred weeks prior. (Knightley, 1989, pp. 20-21) More important, the possibilities for disseminating information of potential use to the enemy increased tremendously as a result of these developments—much to the chagrin of the military and civilian leadership alike.

In July 1861, William Howard Russell, Special American correspondent to *The Times* of London, observed:

A swarm of newspaper correspondents has settled down upon Washington, and great are the florifications of the high-toned paymasters, gallant doctors, and subalterns accomplished in the art of war, who furnish minute items to my American brethren and provide the yeast which overflows in many columns; but the government experience the inconvenience of the smallest movements being chronicled for use of the enemy, who by putting one thing and another together, are no doubt enabled to collect much valuable information. (Weisberger, 1953, p. 74)

Undoubtedly the War Department felt a little more than “inconvenienced.” It was well known that President Davis and his Confederate generals took great pains to secure northern papers for news of troop and vessel movements. (Mott, 1962, p. 337). General Robert E. Lee was particularly studious in reviewing northern papers for intelligence information—especially on the reports by one correspondent from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* who, Lee said, “knew what he reported and reported what he knew.” (Mathews, 1957, p. 86) Is it any wonder that when Florus Plympton of the Cincinnati *Commercial* arrived at General William T.

Sherman's command in September 1861 to learn the "truth," Sherman flew into a rage. "We don't want the truth told about things here," Sherman exploded, "... We don't want the enemy any better informed than he is." (Andrews, 1991, p. 78)

Although there had been some isolated attempts at military censorship during the Mexican War, there is no record in the War Department files of military censorship prior to the Civil War. (Emery, 1984, p. 195) However, with each passing month of modern war, it became clearer that "the government which governed least was likely to lose most," and so as the war dragged on, "necessity" dictated the restriction of many civil liberties, not the least of which was freedom of the press. (Weisberger, 1953, p. 77) This was not an easy task either. Not only was there no prior system of censorship from which to draw on, the problem was exacerbated by an American press that had become so prosperous, aggressive and independent, it balked at any form of restriction. (Emery, 1984, p. 195) Consequently, the rules had to be written and learned as the fighting went on, and the learning process was more often than not punctuated by much bad faith and criticism. (Weisberger, 1953, pp. 78-79)

The development of Civil War military censorship began by restricting the mailing privileges of newspapers and other correspondence to enemy areas. (Emery, 1984, p. 195) But these restrictions did not make up for lax security. Commander of the Union Forces, General Winfield Scott complained in fact that he would prefer a hundred spies in camp, to one reporter. (Weisberger, 1953, p. 79) Although the better correspondents used much skill in concealing information of value to the enemy, and some

editors imposed their own censorship, it was deemed prudent that some sort of understanding be made between the press and the military early on in the conflict.

On August 2, 1861, General B. McClellan called a historic press conference of Washington area correspondents laying out a plan of voluntary self-censorship. The correspondents agreed not to transmit information of military value to the enemy, and in exchange the general guaranteed the army's assistance in providing the reporters facilities for transmitting their stories if "suitable for publication." This so called "gentlemen's agreement" met with little success. The Baltimore newspapers which were not included in the conference, continued to enlighten its readership with troop movements in the capital area, while many of the correspondents included in the conference were quite generous in their estimate of what was "suitable for publication." (Weisberger, 1953, p. 81)

Of course the generals were doubly obstreperous and alternately banned many correspondents from their respective armies. By the end of August 1861, there was a marked sharpening of official tone and the War Department issued a general order calling attention to the 57<sup>th</sup> Article of War which provided for the court martial and possible death sentence of those giving military information either "directly or indirectly" to the enemy. However, like many other restrictions, this order was largely disregarded. As it stood, regulations were imposed here and there by civil and military authorities alike, but with no consistent enforcement of any fixed body of rules controlling the press. (Mott, 1962, p. 337)



The impotence of these early censorship measures stemmed in part from confusion over the enforcing agency. At different times during the war censorship was administered by the Treasury, State and War Departments. (Knightley, 1989, p. 27) While under the State Department telegraphic dispatches from Washington relating to both military and civil operations of the government were prohibited. (Emery, 1984, p. 146) Questions of inadequate administration and inconsistent application prompted an investigation by the House Judiciary Committee which ultimately concluded that wholesome discussion and criticism had been restrained under the State Department system (Mott, 1962, p. 338) By February 1862 censorship was placed under the War Department and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton where it stayed for the remainder of the war.

Secretary of War Stanton clarified the triple set of restrictions by which correspondents had been bound voluntarily, by the State Department, or by the hands of the generals. Correspondents were to submit copy to provost marshalls for approval before transmission, understanding that deletions would apply only to military matters. (Emery, 1984, p. 196) Furthermore, the War Department assumed supervision of *all* telegraphic lines in the country and announced that newspapers would be banned from publishing so much as inferences as to "the number, position, or strength of the military force of the United States." (Weisberger, 1953, p. 91)

Soon the War Department, in an attempt to affix responsibility, requested newspapers to adopt by-lines to their war stories. (Mott, 1962, p. 338) Related to this issue of press responsibility came the new practice of accreditation. Instead of allowing "spies" to wander about the military camps,

correspondents now had to be recognized journalists, and they had to be acceptable to commanders in the field. This procedure established a precedent which has been followed ever since by military correspondents. (Emery, 1984, p. 196)

Moreover, the War Department insured compliance to those and other measures by suspending newspapers, arresting editors and banning correspondents that broke the new censorship rules. Additionally, Stanton issued his own dispatches through the Associated Press to combat the rumors and alarmist reports made by some war correspondents. These daily war bulletins began the practice developed in later wars to set forth briefly the war situation and administration policy. (Knightley, 1989, p. 27)

So while the struggle to set up rules concerning press coverage during the Civil War evoked bitter criticism on the part of both the military and the press, by the war's end, certain principles had been established regardless. First, although "Freedom of the Press" was recognized as a fixed national tradition in America, an aggressive newspaper industry would not reign supreme on the battlefield. Second, advances in communication increased potential security risks to the extent that some controls over the dissemination of information would be necessary to the propagation of war. And third, because access to the battlefield was in essence a function of the military, it effectively became the responsibility of the military to create guidelines for the press that would be both uniform and consistent in application and enforcement. Moreover, the valuable lessons that emerged from this war over the control and use of communication agencies set the tone for wartime censorship in the next century. (Emery, 1984, p. 195)

#### 4. The Spanish-American War

Before the type size reached its maximum, "War Sure" could be put in one line across a page, and it was put in one line and howled through the streets by patriotic newsboys many and many a time. As war was sure it did no harm.

—Arthur Brisbane, *Journal* editor  
(Emery, 1984, p. 291)

Because of the rise of the popular press, the increased use of the telegraph, and lack of organized rules of censorship, the period between the Civil War and World War I is considered a "Golden Age" for war correspondents. According to Phillip Knightley "the military establishment was slow to realize the power of this newly awakened section of public opinion and allowed correspondents to write virtually what they liked." (Knightley, 1989, p. 42) More likely, however, the uninhibited press coverage of the Spanish-American War of 1898 occurred out of proximity and degree than from any lack of acknowledgement over the power of the press. Indeed, if anything, this war fully illustrated that power.

The yellow journalism indigenous to turn of the century reporting is said not only to have spawned the Spanish-American War but also to have fought it. The spirit of "Manifest Destiny" was alive and well in U.S. foreign policy at this time and had brought the United States and Spain on the verge of war over the neighboring Spanish colony of Cuba. Many newspapers reflected the imperialist proclivities and democratic idealism that drove this U.S. expansion of interests and further, promoted it. (Emery, 1984, pp. 288-289) A few weeks after the hyped-up coverage of the sinking of the *Maine*, the *New York Tribune* sarcastically criticized the actions of its jingoistic

competitors: "If, as now seems probable, its ravages can be confined to Printing House Square and Spain is "licked" right here with blood-red extras without resorting to shot and shell, it will be the greatest triumph ever achieved by large type and a liberty-loving press." (Mott, 1962, p. 533)

Moreover "the newspapers fought the war as determinedly as they had fostered it" as some 500 reporters, artists, and photographers flocked to Florida and the Cuban and Puerto Rican fronts to both make and record the news—for few if any sought to maintain a non-combatant status. (Emery, 1984, p. 292) (Mott, 1962, p. 536) The Associated Press went so far as to charter a flotilla of boats which cruised at will during naval engagements, ignoring fire from both sides as they scurried back and forth to the nearest cable lines. (Knightley, 1989 p. 56) The A.P. also prevailed upon President McKinley to permit their reporters on Navy flagships. William Randolph Hearst, owner of the sensationalist *New York Journal* made similar overtures, and although McKinley refused his offer to organize and equip a regiment, the President did accept the use of the Hearst yacht, the *Buccaneer*, during the war. Hearst went on to commandeer a small fleet of purchased and hired steamers and tugs and led a force of some twenty writers, artists and photographers to the scene of the war and to the capture of twenty-six stranded Spanish sailors. (Mott, 1962, p. 335-336)

Correspondents covered every battle and skirmish in Cuba (Emery, 1984, p. 282) and despite the journalistic enterprize and competitive endeavor by which the coverage of this war is renown, military leaders were on the whole patient and cooperative. For the most part newspapers freely reported the movements of the Army and Navy, although there were occasional

attempts by military and naval officers to control the press—such as General Shafter's banishment of all Hearst reporters from the capture of Santiago. Also, a few months into the war, a former *New York Tribune* reporter, Grant Squires, was appointed military censor at New York, but this too proved only moderately effective, and the leniency of military censorship remained extraordinary. (Mott, 1962, pp. 536-537) According to Mott:

The war with Spain was, as wars go, almost ideal for newspaper treatment. It was near at hand. American commanders allowed unusual freedom to correspondents. It was a small war, and thus not too difficult to cover. American arms on land and sea met with a series of successes that could be reported brilliantly [and] it was a short war, so that the public interest could be fully maintained until its end. (Mott, 1962, p. 533)

The press presented a thrilling adventure story that boosted newspaper circulation and garnished public support. Furthermore the Golden Age style of reporting—"where guns flash, cannons thunder, the struggle rages, the general is brave, the soldiers are gallant, and their bayonets make short work of the enemy"—only added to this illusion. (Knightley, 1989, p. 62) The public demand for these stories was great, provided they remained narratives of adventure, without too much political comment, or moralizing, or even blood, to interrupt the narrative. (Knightley, 189, p. 42) However, with the coming of War War I "the cynically irresponsible Civil War journalism and the comic-opera journalism that fanned the flames of the war with Spain were left behind." (Brucker, 1949, p. 175)

## B. CENSORSHIP COMES OF AGE

### 1. World War I

Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.

—President Woodrow Wilson, April 1, 1917  
(Knightly, 1989, p. 113)

The first casualty when war comes is truth.

—Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917  
(Knightley, 1989, p. xi)

In 1914, when war erupted in Europe after the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the rapid succession of events which made Europe one great battlefield shocked the American people. Both the Allied and the Central Powers recognized the importance of enlisting the aid of the United States and a "press agents war" emerged, again pitting Germany and Great Britain against each other as they fought over American neutrality. (Mott, 1962, p. 615) Revisionist literature based on partial evidence presents a convincing case whereby "British propagandists, American munitions makers and cynical politicians led gullible Americans to an unnecessary slaughter." However, this ignores important factors such as the impact of official and public opinion on German caused events like the sinking of the Lusitania; the effects of Allied censorship and the control of overseas communications in shaping news from Europe (as distinct from direct

propaganda efforts); strong Anglo-Saxon ties both politically and culturally; and the belief that German militarism was not in the American national interests. (Emery, 1984, p. 355) The U.S. government sought to build on all pro-Allied sentiments, regardless of their origins, in order to restore world order.

Control of the press was a factor of concern at the highest levels of government from the outset of U.S. involvement in World War I. On April 14, 1917, little more than a week after the U.S. declaration of war against Germany, President Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) which served the dual purpose of coordinating government propaganda efforts and acting as governmental liaison with the newspapers. (Emery, 1984, p. 356) The Secretaries of State, War and Navy Departments had hoped that these functions would be addressed under the War Department's Bureau of information—a public relations service under the young Major Douglas MacArthur, but President Wilson disagreed. He appointed a civilian journalist named George Creel as head of the CPI and assigned MacArthur as his aide. (Howell, 1990, p. 135) Although the propaganda and censorship efforts were taken from the direct control of the military, few could have asked for a better P.R. agent. So strong was Creels' imprint, the CPI became known as the Creel Committee. According to Creel "it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising." (Emery, 1984, p. 356.)

The Creel Committee sponsored some 75,000 speakers who gave some 750,000 speeches in 5000 cities and towns throughout the United States in order to arouse the "righteous wrath" of the American public against the

German Huns. (Knightley, 1989, p. 123) But despite these blatant propaganda efforts, the news releases issued from the CPI, although colored with patriot fervor, were on the whole accurate and full of news value, and most newspapers published them. (Mott, 1962, p. 626) One historian, who later studied the accuracy of CPI news releases, noted, "One of the most remarkable things about the charges against the CPI is that, of the more than 6,000 news stories it issued, so few were called into question at all. It may be doubted that the CPI's record for honesty will never be equalled in the official war news of a major power." (Emery, 1984, p. 358)

Although the CPI News Division founded its own release sheet, the Official Bulletin, on May 10, 1917 with a circulation of 118,000, the thrust of Creel's work lay in maintaining a strong relationship with the newspapers. Theory was, in effect, "if newspapers were given enough worthwhile material to fill their columns, there would be little need to issue detailed and stringent orders restricting the publication of other information." (Daniels, 1985, p. 38) The slack was to be taken up by the voluntary censorship code whereby the newspaper editors agreed to suppress news which might give aid to the enemy. In return Creel insisted that only information concerning troop movements, ship sailings, and other events of a strictly military nature would be withheld. (Emery, 1984, pp. 356-357)

Most newspapers complied with the "voluntary" censorship provisions set by the Creel Committee, however, it is important to remember, as covered in the previous chapter, that several laws had been enacted empowering the government to ensure that no violations of security would go unpunished. Still, as the *Nation* observed in 1918, "During the past two



years, we have seen what is practically an official control of the press, not merely by Messrs. Burleson and Gregory [the Post Office Department and the Department of Justice] but by the logic of events and the patriotic desire of the press to support the government." (Mott, 1962, p. 625)

At the front, European control of the press was equally pervasive, although American correspondents in France were freer to observe the actions of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) than were those of other armies. General Pershing allowed correspondents to go to the front lines unescorted. (Emery, 1984, p. 361). This was not typical of the British, French and German armies, although prior to U.S. entry into the war, the Germans allowed several "neutral" U.S. correspondents the opportunity to preview the German war machine in an attempt to gain some propagandic value. The British realized that same value, and had been particularly obsequious in their treatment of American correspondents during this time. Nonetheless, it was a risky proposition as a neutral correspondent being accredited to either army, for if a British accredited correspondent later reported from the German side and was subsequently captured by the British, he would be executed as a spy. The Germans eventually adopted the same procedure. (Knightley, 1989, pp. 114-122) Accreditation later played an important role in U.S. field press control, too, and was the first wicket through which an American reporter passed before joining the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

The rules for accreditation were quite stringent. The correspondent had to personally appear before the Secretary of War and swear he would "convey the truth to the United States," without disclosing information that might aid the enemy. An autobiographical sketch had to be submitted along

with a detailed account of his proposed itinerary. He or his paper had to post \$1,000 to the Army to cover equipment and maintenance, as well as a \$10,000 bond which could be forfeited for any infraction of the rules. (Knightley, 1989, p. 124)

While there were some 500 American correspondents covering the war for various newspapers, magazines, press associations and syndicates by 1915, a number that increased with the U.S. entry into the war, only about forty actually covered the actions of the AEF. Their stories all went through the press section of Military Intelligence Service headed by Major Frederick Palmer, formerly of the Associated Press. Military engagements, casualties, and troop identification could only be reported if first released in official communiqué. (Emery, 1984, p. 361). Palmer, who increasingly affiliated himself with the military, released only the sparsest of information, generally laudatory in nature. "Censorship," complained one reporter during the war, "is developing more in the news interests of the military than in the American reader." (Knightley, 1989, pp. 128-130) However, despite the censorship imposed on the correspondents by both the American and European military authorities, the American public was better informed as to the progress of the war than any other nation, and like it or not, the press controls of World War I set the standard for the press coverage of the next major U.S. conflict, World War II. (Mott, 1962, p. 623)

## 2. World War II

All Americans abhor censorship, just as they abhor war. But the experience of this and all other nations has demonstrated that some degree of censorship is essential in wartime, and we are at war.

– President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1941  
(Mott, 1962, p. 761)

I wouldn't tell them anything until the war is over and then I'd tell them who won.

—Military censor  
(Knightley, 1989, p. 269)

President Roosevelt, acting under the First War Powers Act, created the Office of Censorship on December 19, 1941. Byron Price, then executive news editor of the Associated Press, was named director and instructed to censor all international communications "at his discretion" (Mott, 1962, p. 761). This task included communications entering or leaving the United States by mail, cable, or radio. Furthermore, by a separate directive, the agency was charged with setting up a system of voluntary press censorship. According to Price, there were three cardinal principles guiding this "system of self-discipline under the leadership of government": "that censorship was an instrument of war, that censorship must be so administered as to be effective, that this was to be an American censorship, in harmony 'with the best interests of our free institutions.'" (Mott, 1962, p. 762)

From this philosophy, a rather elaborate *Code of Wartime Practices for the American Press* was developed outlining what news was considered improper for publication—namely, any news "which might directly or indirectly bring aid or comfort to the enemy, or which might interfere with

the national effort, or disparage the foreign relations of, the United States or any Anti-Axis nations." (Linfield, 1990, p. 71). Under this code, censorship was not only limited to information pertaining to troop movements and ship sailings, but also included information relating to war production, morale, and weather. A similar code was devised for the radio. According to historian Frank Luther Mott:

The voluntary censorship was an extraordinary performance, outstanding in the entire history of our democratic processes. It kept war production efforts secret until they had reached safe levels, kept Germany uninformed of the near-success of her submarine blockade of 1942, suppressed all kinds of preparations for the invasion landings in North Africa and Normandy, kept silence about Presidential tours even when such precautions seemed a little ridiculous, preserved as top secrets the early development of radar and the preparation of the atomic bomb. (Mott, 1962, p. 763)

Although *safeguarding* the war effort was the prime objective behind the creation and subsequent compliance with the codes issued from the Office of Censorship, this as only half the equation. *Mobilizing* the war effort was the other essential ingredient to Roosevelt's wartime strategy. Unlike the Creel Commission of World War I, a separate agency was established for this purpose. The Office of War Information (OWI) was administered by Elmer Davis, a CBS news analyst and former *New York Times* editor. "It was the job of the OWI," said Davis,

not only to tell the American people how the war is going, but where it is going and where it came from—its nature and origins, how our government is conducting it, and what (besides national survival) our government hopes to get out of victory. (Emery, 1984, p. 478)

Elmer Davis unabashedly defended the OWI as the propaganda arm of the government, describing propaganda as "an instrument"—but an

instrument in the employment of truth. (Mott, 1962, p. 766) The OWI worked very closely with the War Advertising Council and the nation's publishers to facilitate recruitment and other war-related advertising. Furthermore, the OWI cooperated with the military in the development of psychological-warfare techniques; in fact, the "Voice of America" originated from OWI overseas radio broadcasts. (Emery, 1984, p. 479) From the perspective of Director Davis, "at home and abroad we are telling the same story—telling the truth." (Mott, 1962, p. 767)

Although the chief task of the OWI was not propagandistic, it did influence the perception of the war from the government to the press. Its main function was to "keep the news flowing," and in fact, the OWI did much to prevent bottlenecks and to discourage unwarranted censorship at the source. (Mott, 1962, p. 767) The worst offenders were the Navy and War [Army] Departments. Although both were required to consult with Davis over the withholding of specific military information, the services retained the final authority in these matters; consequently, the OWI often received undue criticism as an information agency. (Emery, 1984, p. 778)

While the OWI News Bureau handled most of the news releases relating significantly to the war effort or which dealt with more than one government agency, nearly 40% of government publicity stories emanated from the governmental departments and agencies themselves without reference to the OWI. (Emery, 1984, p. 478) Here, the free flow of information depended upon the willingness of official sources to talk. The Department of the Navy, headed by newsman Frank Knox, was criticized more frequently than any other top news source because of late news releases concerning

certain such naval losses as those at Pearl Harbor (1941) and the Battle of Savo Island (1942). Navy officials believed that the enemy lacked the intelligence capabilities to discern the amount of damage inflicted during these engagements. The Navy claimed that official announcements would have had the effect of providing "aid and comfort" to the enemy by confirming enemy reconnaissance. (Mott, 1962, pp. 763-764) Furthermore, because the Navy did not want Japan to know they had broken the Japanese communication codes, even news of enemy losses was subject to intense censorship. (Knightley, 1989, p. 284) Both the Army and Navy effectively controlled the dissemination of such information by applying "censorship at the source." Correspondents were not allowed in theater without being accredited, and one of the conditions for accreditation was to agree to submit all copy to military censorship. (Knightley, 1989, p. 275)

Field press censorship varied greatly in reasonableness and efficiency depending on the theater or the command. Moreover, host nation policies and combined operations often resulted in double censorship. Censors were judged not on what they got into the newspapers but on what they managed to keep out. The criterion was: "Is it a good thing for the Army (or the Navy) to have this information made public?" (Knightly, 1989, p. 275) Correspondent Fletcher Pratt remarked, "The official censors pretty well succeeded in putting over the legend that the war was won without a single mistake by a command consisting exclusively of geniuses." (Knightley, 1989, p. 276) Of course by 1965, the American people would no longer believe such assertions.

Not all correspondents were as harsh in their assessment. In retrospect, correspondent Drew Middleton believed that censorship enabled correspondents to be better informed about the war. He wrote: "As long as all copy was submitted to censors before transmission, people in the field, from the generals on down felt free to discuss top secret material with reporters." (Knightley, 1989, p. 316) Little more than ten days before the invasion of Sicily, General Eisenhower confided to some 30 American reporters his plans for the assault, including the names of the specific divisions to hit the beaches. (Andrews, 1991, p. 81)

There were many such examples of military candor, although it would be difficult to assess whether or not this trend was attributable to censorship alone or on the overall strength of military-press relations at the time. On the whole, war correspondents went along with the official scheme for reporting the war because they believed it was in the national interests to do so. Writer and correspondent John Steinbeck later reflected:

We were all part of the war effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it. Gradually, it became part of us so that the truth about anything was automatically secret and that to trifle with it was to trifle with the war effort .... Yes we wrote only a part of the war but at that time we believed, we fervently believed, that it was the best thing to do. (Knightley, 1989, p. 276)

The military also considered war correspondents as part of the war effort. "Public opinion wins war," exclaimed General Eisenhower in a Clausewitzian insight to a group of newsmen in 1944. "I have always considered as quasi staff officers, correspondents accredited to my headquarters." (Knightley, 1989, p. 315) No doubt this sentiment would strike many today as odd, but at the time it was a somewhat apt appraisal of the

perceived role of correspondents during war. To facilitate this part of the war effort of the U.S. War Department accredited 1186 American correspondents and news officials representing all media, and the Navy accredited 460 more, with approximately 500 reporting from the war fronts or foreign news centers at any one time. (Mott, 1962, p. 742) Moreover, for the first time in military-press relations, the military began to acknowledge radio and press coverage as an operational requirement. According to Kenneth Knightley,

beginning with the invasion of North Africa, the Allied system for controlling war correspondents grew steadily through the Italian campaigns, and by D-Day and the Normandy battles it was as much part of military planning as, say, logistics was." (Knightley, 1989, p. 315)

The magnitude of on-scene coverage produced several new developments affecting war correspondence, most notably the establishment of media pools. The pooling of pictures was common in all combat areas, while the pooling of news reports was generally limited to large-scale operations where the number of correspondents had to be limited for reasons of security and safety. Pools were implemented for the Dieppe commando raid, the beginning of the North African campaign, the invasion of Sicily and the first few days of the Normandy invasion as well as numerous Pacific engagements. (Mott, 1962, p. 744) (Knightley, 1989, p. 295)

The radio was first pooled in the Normandy invasions, and with its "dramatic effect," "sense of immediacy," and "involvement of the listener" took the lead in D-Day reporting. (Knightley, 1989, p. 323) The development of mobile units and the employment of international pickups greatly increased radio coverage throughout the war. Direct reports came from battlefields, from bombers engaged in air raids, and from vessels at sea.



(Emery, 1984, p. 481) Through the cooperation of the Army's Signal Corps, the wire recorder allowed for close-up stories of actual conflict, and when Italy surrendered in September 1943, General Eisenhower himself broadcast the news to the world. (Mott, 1962, p. 745) The military was well aware of the importance of projecting a good public image, knew what was needed, and was prepared to devote considerable resources in obtaining it.

The public relations systems of the services grew tremendously during this time and were much more fully organized than in any previous war. Public relations officers not only provided liaison with top officers, but facilitated the living, transportation, and communication arrangements for the correspondents attached to their area. Moreover, extensive public relations units developed—like the Combat Correspondents of the Marine Corps which utilized the technique of training fighter-writers to provide eyewitness accounts of dangerous amphibious assaults. (Mott, 1962, p. 793) Commands encouraged the publication of soldier papers ranging from camp papers to the large circulation *Stars and Stripes*, a reborn weekly of WWI, AEF fame. (Emery, 1984, p. 482) The strong emphasis on public relations during the war eventually led to the elevation of public information programs to a separate staff status. (Howell, 1990, p. 136) The success of the public relations effort may be measured by the fact that, by most accounts, "the years between 1941 and 1945 represented the high-water mark of cooperation between the military and the media." (Andrews, 1991, p. 81) Within half a decade this course began to change.

### 3. The Korean War

All I remember of the war was an incredible number of dead human beings and a vast amount of misery. All for what? The answer was certainly not going to be found by running around with a green flash on my shoulder filing urgent press collect.

—War Correspondent George Johnston  
(Knightley, 1989, p. 338)

If World War II represents the high tide of military press relations, the Korean War marks its ebb, and in many ways anticipated the difficulties encountered in the Vietnam War. World War II was fought in the “heat of passion”—in Europe, against Hitler, one of the greatest villains of the 20th century, and in the Pacific—against an enemy that attacked United States soil. There was one clear goal—victory. The Korean War was a United Nations effort, “committed to a policy of prolonged war with no intent of winning a victory.” (Summers, 1982, pp. 37-38) Like the Vietnam War, the Korean War was unpopular, and undeclared war, and plagued by issues that had military and political underpinnings. According to historian Hubert Brucker, the military wanted to “overprotect” information for national security purposes and the press wanted to publish it for its political implications. This trend resulted in a growing tension between the government and the press in which “... much was published that were the better left quiet, and much (was) suppressed that were better published.” (Brucker, 1949, p. 171)

At first General Douglas MacArthur, as the United Nations commander in Korea dismissed the concept of field press censorship and relied on self-censorship. MacArthur explained his position in a letter to the *Chicago Sun Times* on July 15, 1950: “In the Korean operations it has been

my purpose to leave (censorship) responsibility where it rightfully belongs—in the hands of the correspondents, editors and publishers concerned. (Daniels, 1985, p. 57). However the guidelines for voluntary censorship were vague, and proved unsatisfactory to both the military and the press.

There were many security breaches during this period of self-censorship and a corresponding lack of organized press coverage on the part of military planners as a whole. The amphibious assault at Inchon in 1950 provides an apt example:

There was little secrecy in allied circles about plans for the landing—it was known in the Tokyo Press Club as “Operation Common Knowledge”—but the army declined to consult the correspondents about the requirements for covering it. As a result, the first assault waves included barges loaded with magazine writers and columnists, while many daily newspaper correspondents did not get ashore until two or three days later. (Knightley, 1989, p. 370)

Even the traditional-minded “team member” reporters found themselves on their own in the thick of battle. (Emery, 1984, p. 494) It is not surprising that veteran correspondents considered the Korean War the most dangerous war covered—with six American news and cameramen killed in the month of July, 1950 alone—more than any killed in a single month of any other war. (Mott, 1962, p. 851) Moreover, the early reporting, even by those with patriotic motives, was critical by customary military standards. Correspondent Marguerite Higgins wrote:

So long as our government requires the backing of an aroused and informed public opinion ... it is necessary to tell the hard bruising truth .... It is best to tell graphically the moments of desperation and horror endured by an unprepared army, so that the American public will demand that it does not happen again. (Knightley, 1989, p. 337)

During this time, two correspondents, Lambert of the AP and Kalischer of the UP temporarily lost their accreditation for, in the words of one public information officer, failing to observe "discretion and cooperation in the dispatch of their file" and disclosing information that would have "a bad moral and psychological effect" on the troops. (Knightley, 1989, p. 337) By July 1950, the voluntary code of censorship, which had been initially aimed at preserving military secrecy, was expanded to include "criticism of Command decisions or of the conduct of Allied soldiers on the battlefield. (Mott, 1962, p. 853)

The successful September 1950 landing at Inchon, and subsequent victories by MacArthur until Thanksgiving 1950 brought about some easing of military-press relations, but with the entry into the war by the Chinese Communists in November 1950 and the second fall of Seoul, outspoken criticism of the "high brass" by front line correspondents renewed the tension between the military and the press. After it had reached crisis proportions, Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall met with twelve top media representatives in the Pentagon on December 18, 1950 and adopted a resolution which concluded that "the security of information from the combat area is the responsibility of the military." (Mott, 1962, p. 854) Taking this step as press approval, on December 21, 1950, General MacArthur ended voluntary censorship and imposed full military censorship.

This move was not unfounded, of the more than 230 American and foreign correspondents in theater at the time, an estimated 90% favored censorship as the only means to insure military security. (Braestrup, 1985, pp. 50-54) Rather than continue with a voluntary censorship, described by one

correspondent as "you-write-what-you-like-and-we'll-shoot-you-if-we-don't-like-it," the correspondents found themselves in the unusual position of requesting "full, official, compulsory" censorship. (Knightley, 1989, p. 337) However, stringent regulations may have gone further than most reporters would have desired.

Censorship initially consisted of "clearance before transmission" of all press reports, radio broadcasts, magazine articles and photographs "pertaining to military operations," but the formal code which emanated from Tokyo a few weeks later, expanded on this statement quite a bit. The new censorship provisions barred "any discussion of allied air power" or "the effect of enemy fire, unless authorized," and included unprecedented restrictions concerning criticism of allied operations or "derogatory comments" about United Nations troops and commanders. (Knightley, 1989, p. 346) Additionally, it was forbidden to write "the result of enemy action which, if published, would tend ... to cause despondency in our own forces or people." (Mott, 1962, p. 854) Furthermore, the penalties for violation of the censorship code could be quite severe, beginning with suspension of privileges and extending, in extreme cases, to deportation or to court-martial. (Knightley, 1989, p. 345)

Censorship was handled both in Tokyo at the Far East Command (FEC) and at Eighth Army Headquarters in Korea. Although policy was uniform, its application varied. Some correspondents evaded censorship rules through the use of long-distance telephone calls to expand on cleared text. These inconsistencies led to several shifts in policy and the censorship responsibilities were eventually redistributed to insure better accountability

and efficiency (Braestrup, 1985, pp. 54-56) By June 1951, censorship took place at only one point—Korean headquarters. (Mott, 1962, p. 854) Furthermore, the Defense Department revised the censorship system in December 1952, transferring censorship duties from intelligence to public-relations officers and bringing the Army, Navy and Air Force under a uniform plan. Censorship was again limited to matters of concerning military security—although the practical definition of “security” remained to be resolved. (Emery, 1984, p. 496)

Interestingly enough, once full military censorship had been imposed by the U.N. commander, military media relations improved and there were few complaints over the strictness of the censorship provisions—in fact as previously noted, some correspondents viewed it as more an aid than a hindrance. (Braestrup, 1985, p. 60) According to Knightley, “... there is evidence that even without the new censorship a backlash had begun against the early critical reporting of the war, a feeling that it was time to ‘get on side’ and stop helping the Reds.” (Knightley, 1985, p. 346) So, under pressure to prove their patriotism, they did get *on side* and went along with the military’s view of how the war should be reported for the remainder of the war. (Knightley, 1989, pp. 355-356)

Even if relations in the field recalled the team reporting of World War II days, there was still one important element missing: corresponding popular support in the United States. Unlike World Wars I and II, there was no censorship at the outlet. This development allowed for a vast array of opinions about the war and its prosecution to appear in the print and broadcast media regardless of the reports emanating from Korea. News

analysis was often critical and may have contributed to the growing unpopularity of the war. MacArthur declared that "the entire effort to distort and misrepresent the causes leading to the existing situation represents one of the most scandalous propaganda efforts to pervert the truth in modern times." (Mott, 1962, p. 856) His words serve as a remarkable precursor to the frustrating state of military-press relations found in the most controversial war in U.S. military history, the Vietnam War (1959-1975). Vietnam propelled a traditionally adversarial relationship into one of open confrontation and changed the way in which the military and the press would view each other for many decades after.

### III THE VIETNAM WAR: AS WATERSHED

"You know you never defeated us on the battlefield," said the American colonel. The North Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark a moment, "That may be so," he replied, "but it is also irrelevant."

—Conversation in Hanoi, April 1975  
(Summers 1982, p. 1)

#### A. PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS

##### 1. Press Policy

Critics have said that "the American government became a victim of its own propaganda" during the Vietnam War. As early as 1962, the American embassy in Saigon had told the military advisors and others that under no circumstances were reverses to be discussed with the press, and additionally, official reports were to reflect a positive assessment. (Warner, 1977, p. 177). During the quieter days from 1956 to 1960 this injunction posed no real problem as the economic and social modernizations under the Vietnam government received very little attention from the American press. However, as hostilities in rural areas began heating up and tension rose in political circles in Saigon, the resident press corp began to grow—and so did the controversy surrounding U.S. involvement. (Colby, 1989, p. 113)

Even before the air campaign Rolling Thunder and the ground war began in 1964/65, the press, assuming its role as "the fourth estate," was critical of the glowing reports emanating from not only Saigon, but also the Pentagon. Press reports on the shortcomings of the Vietnamese



counterinsurgency efforts contrasted sharply with the optimism expressed by officials and these early seeds of controversy only grew with the escalation of the war. (MacDonald, 1985, p. 234) Furthermore, this disparity created the political chasm known as the "credibility gap"--"the situation in which the American public [was] not given full credence to government pronouncements on the war situation." (Blanchard, 1969, p. 55) This also gave rise to allegations of "managed news." Paradoxically, from a historical perspective, the press had never been less managed. The Vietnam War represented the first major conflict since the nation's beginning that did not incorporate some form of formal press censorship.

Although omission of formal censorship in Vietnam did little to operational security—of which military censorship is designed to protect—it had an overtly detrimental impact on strategic security. In a low intensity conflict the enemy could not easily exploit the few breaches of operational security; but as later illustrated by the Tet offensive, indiscriminate reporting, no matter how factual, did not always present the whole story, nor was it conducive to military success. When the American press corps attempted to send their first stories of the panic they witnessed during the German counter attack in the Ardennes in 1944, "What could have been an unholy mess," cabled Wes Gallagher of the A.P., "was saved by the good sense of the field press censors." (Knightley, 1989, p. 324) Discretion, seeing through the fog of war, is the purview of the military at such times. During Vietnam it was left to the press. Moreover, the lack of military press controls set a precedent for laissez-faire press coverage and fostered the journalistic belief that this should and would always be the case.

The move toward eliminating most military and governmental controls in Vietnam came about for several reasons. According to Major General Winant Sidle, who conducted a 1966 study on the feasibility of imposing field press censorship, and who later served as Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Chief of Information, cited four major considerations in changing censorship policy:

1. Censorship would need to include the South Vietnamese government (which already had a rather questionable record on press relations).
2. The technical difficulties in censoring T.V. film.
3. The lack of censorship back in the States (which could not be imposed short of a formal declaration of war).
4. The impracticality of applying censorship to reports in Saigon when this could easily be circumvented by leaving the combat theater to file the story (or as in the case of Korea, expand on cleared text when filing the story by phone). (Grossman, 1989, p. 12)

There were, however, accreditation policies and certain ground rules by which correspondents were subject, but these were not meant to act as any real restraint. Just two letters from any news agencies or newspapers prepared to buy his material made it possible for anyone calling himself a free-lance journalist to obtain a MACV card under the accreditation system in Vietnam. (Knightley, 1989, p. 419) Visas were just as easily granted. So after the correspondent signed an agreement agreeing to abide by a set of fifteen ground rules dealing in the main with military security, he was on his way. (Knightley, 1989, p. 402) General Sidle later remarked that the news media were very cooperative regarding the ground rules and regularly sought guidance from the MACV and other public affairs representatives to verify that certain information could be used in their reports without violating the rules. (Grossman, 1989, p. 13) Self-censorship had always provided the

foundation of previous military press relations, during the Vietnam War it was the only form of press control.

One veteran World War II correspondent actually lamented the loss of censors; Drew Middleton wrote:

On three trips to Vietnam, I found generals and everyone else far more wary of talking to reporters precisely because there was no censorship. Their usual line with a difficult or sensitive question was "you must ask the public relations people about that." The latter usually of low rank, clammed up and the reporter and the public got less. (Knightley, 1989, p. 423)

That at times the correspondents were frustrated by the public affairs officers lack of information or tardiness in disseminating it, had less to do with the quality of those officers and more to do with the nature of the war and the hesitancy of knowledgeable military officials to keep their public affairs officers fully informed. (Grossman, 1989, p. 15) In terms of progress, counterinsurgency operations were difficult to describe; there were no territorial gains to graphically display, only statistical tables of body counts and gross tonnage of bombs dropped. (Rigg, 1969, pp. 15-19) Although the official daily briefings in Saigon, dubbed the "five o'clock follies," were viewed with skepticism, several noted members of the media defended the military information officers involved. Eric Severeid, a leading correspondent at CBS News, observed that normal and inevitable tensions existed between the press and military in Saigon, but the mutual trust there was higher than it was inside the Pentagon. (Metzner, 1972, p. 35)

## **2. Divergent Images**

The Pentagon was very sensitive to the increasingly divergent images of the war that were being presented through official sources and media

coverage. In response, the Defense Department began a temporary program in 1964 in which the government paid for the transportation of news correspondents from across the country (especially from hometown news agencies) to Vietnam. There were three stated reasons for this program: (1) to give U.S.-based newsmen a better understanding of the military involvement in Vietnam; (2) to help assure a balanced output of the scene coverage and (3) to stimulate the media to send more experienced reporters to Vietnam under their own sponsorship. (*Managed News*, 1966, p. 104). "Operations Candor" became "Operation Backfire," for although the number of newsmen increased from 40 to 450 by the termination of the program in mid-August 1965, many newsmen labeled such efforts as this "managed news" and claimed that it only served to confuse the people back home with "out of focus" report. (Metzner, 1972, p. 33). Numerous such complaints led to Senate hearings in late August 1966 headed by Senator J. William Fulbright, a well-known opponent of the war, on the news coverage emanating from Vietnam.

Allegation of mismanagement ran both ways. The Pentagon was equally critical of journalistic practices. During the Senate hearings, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Mr. Sylvester, had this to say:

The interesting thing to me, Mr. Chairman, is that on the one hand, we have complaints from our people—meaning the citizens of the United States—directly to our office, much of it coming through congressional offices, that we are permitting too much coverage—television, radio—too much detail, too much horrible material, too much telling the enemy. On the other hand, we are being charged with not having enough coverage. I believe these are mutually exclusive. (Metzner, 1972, p. 34)

Furthermore, Mr. Sylvester denied that his office managed the news, placing the burden of such practices in the news offices. He offered this observation,

"You as a reader do not get everything that comes into the newspaper; you get what the editor under our system of a free press and a free decision decides that he can sell." (Metzner, 1972, p. 34) Unfortunately these "choices" were not always complimentary to the U.S. military.

The most renowned instance of T.V. coverage upsetting to the Pentagon was a report filed by Morley Safer on "The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite" on August 5, 1965. The visual image of several old South Vietnamese running away from the village of Cam Ne as U.S. Marines torched their thatched roofs with cigarette lighters, was considered a poor representation of the military operations in Vietnam by government officials. It was horribly reminiscent of the German antipartisan warfare in Russia 1941-44, of all that Americans have seen themselves as fighting against. Accompanying this dramatic scene was a disparaging commentary claiming "Today's operation is the frustration of Vietnam in miniature." (MacDonald, 1985, p. 235)

Television found a happy union with to the crisis reporting that came to symbolize press coverage during the war in the 1960s. This fact had as much to do with the nature of the medium as any malicious intent by reporters to distort the facts. Television was just starting to make a major impact on the American political culture; its treatment of the Vietnam War was a milestone in its development as a dominant force in American society. "More than mere information transmission, it consists of shaping information along explicit temporal and spatial lines"—sometimes unintentionally. (Altheide, 1987, p. 165) An unidentified network staff member explained television's treatment thus, "Why should I miss the big

news stories by explaining too much? We hit hard with the visuals and leave the broader explanation to the press." (Blanchard, 1968, p. 36) Consequently events were chosen for their visual impact. This choice resulted in a series of dramatic, yet often isolated and unrelated, news items. Moreover, the brutality of war was presented as it had never been presented before. In 1968, then Vice President Hubert Humphrey observed:

This is the first war in the nation's history that's been fought on television, where the actors are real, where, in the quiet of your living room, of your home, or your dormitory, wherever you may be; this cruel, ugly, dirty fact of life and death and war and pain and suffering comes right to you, and it isn't a Hollywood actor. (*Living-Room War*, 1968, p. 28)

According to a 1968 nationwide sampling of opinion conducted by *U.S. News and World Report*, few people believed that their attitudes toward the war had actually changed because of television coverage. Television viewing did, however, affect what they believed were the "facts of the situation." (*Living-Room War*, 1968, p. 28) Essentially this was the problem—the kaleidoscope of images provided to the public were rarely accompanied with contextual or background information. The "big picture" was to provide it all. This phenomenon was never more apparent than during the Tet Offensive of 1968.

### **3. The Tet Offensive: Tactical Failure, Strategic Victory**

The Tet Offensive began on January 30, 1968 with surprise attacks by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong against most of South Vietnam's major cities and towns, including a terrorist strike on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Major offensive action took place at Hue and Khe Sanh in the following

weeks and months. It was the most ambitious effort on the part of the North Vietnamese to date, and the U.S. press corps was there to report the "facts."

The misinformation that emanated from Vietnam after January 30 came about as the news reporters, under competitive pressures, threw caution aside in order to cover the unfolding drama as quickly as possible, without waiting for the "fog" to lift in order to present a more accurate picture. This was especially true of the wire services and their account of the attack against the American Embassy. According to Peter Braestrup in *The Big Story*, the U.S. Embassy loomed large because (1) it was American, (2) it was nearby and (3) it was dramatic. (Braestrup, 1983, p. 118) Although both UPI and AP originally reported that the Embassy had been occupied, the less than dramatic truth was the raid had failed "apparently through Vietcong confusion and the quick thinking of a Marine guard, who closed the big front door." (Braestrup, 1983, p. 91) Such exaggerations and half truths plagued the initial coverage, and no amount of recounting or clarification took away the shock felt by the American public.

The Tet Offensive was a tactical failure for the North Vietnamese, for they were unable to exploit the surprise they achieved, nor were they able to elicit local uprisings against the South Vietnamese government. Within a few days most of the attack had been defeated and by February 25, with the recapture of Hue, the city fighting was finally over. It was believed that the smaller disturbances were distractions to the more conventional interactions that took place—especially at Khe Sahn where the fighting continued through March. However these facts became obscured in light of what the reporters actually saw. Braestrup recounts:

Standing on the blood-spattered lawn of the embassy compound as dead Vietcong snipers were being carried away, he [General Westmoreland] repeated his assurances to newsmen: "The enemy exposed himself ... and he suffered great casualties ... American troops went on the offensive and pursued the enemy aggressively.

To which one reporter later remarked "The reporters could hardly believe their ears. Westmoreland was standing in the ruins and saying everything was great." (Braestrup, 1983, pp. 120-121)

When the American public was presented the "facts"—the gunfire, destruction, and casualties—the result was also disbelief—disbelief in the optimistic reports of progress that had been given by the administration for months prior. Against the backdrop of the "urban devastation and despair" presented by the press, any claims after the events of 1968 of "victory" had lost their credibility. "The Americans, by their heavy use of firepower in a few cities were implicitly depicted as callously destroying all Vietnam in order—in the phrase that became common—to save it." (Braestrup, 1983, p. 216)

When Water Cronkite, affected by, as much as part of, the media coverage of Tet, concluded on February 27, 1968, that the "bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in a stalemate," Presidential Press Secretary George Christian remarked "the shock waves rolled through the government." (Schandler, 1977, pp. 197-198) The wave of news and commentary surrounding the Tet Offensive inevitably generated controversy and debate. Issues were raised concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam, especially considering 1968 was an election year. Antiwar sentiment gained momentum. It became politically unfeasible to grant the troop increases General Westmoreland requested, for this only heightened the disparity between the official



pronouncements of success over the Tet Offensive, and the persuasive written and visual account of failure presented by the press.

By observing the impact of Tet, one can assert that the press took a tactical defeat and turned it into a strategic victory for the North Vietnamese. Barry Morthian of the Joint United States Public Affairs Office in Vietnam aptly described the situation when he remarked, "Sometimes I think the press has overcovered the war, almost to the point of obfuscation ... we are too close to the trees and we forget about the forest." Colonel Robert Rigg paralleled his statement with this observation, "The press has overcovered continental United States at the same time, giving hope and misleading information to our enemy by publicizing the 'trees of minority attitudes' as against the forest of majority opinion effort and sacrifice," (Rigg, 1969, p. 24) In light of these observations, it would be remiss, however, not to point out the administration had not provided a better vantage.

#### 4. The Legacy

Walt Rostow, National Security Advisor under President Johnson, claimed, "The massive uninhibited reporting of the complex war was generally undistinguished and often biased," but he also admitted that the Administration failed to present a "clear and persuasive" picture of our involvement in Vietnam. (Schandler, 1977, p. 198) Without communicating clear objectives and comprehensible measures of progress, there was bound to be confusion on the part of public perceptions, and consequently, a lack of support. The fact that there was no formal declaration of war, only compounded the difficulties in presenting a balanced view of counterinsurgency operations.

There was no statistical or graphic manner to portray villages "protected" by military pacification efforts by day, but subject to Vietcong terrorism by night. (Rigg, 1969, p. 24) It was, however, easy graphically to display the discord and strife of the war torn nation in the media. President Johnson had a difficult, but not impossible, task in providing a balanced, yet candid, appraisal of U.S. military operations. In this endeavor he failed. The "credibility gap" that emerged became a bane to future administrations, effecting not only the conduct of U.S. military operations, but the manner in which potential conflicts would be presented to the American public. Furthermore, this legacy was to have a profound impact on an already strained military-press relationship. According to Knightley:

In Vietnam, the United States military had accepted war correspondents, called on all ranks to give them full cooperation and assistance, fed them on a reimbursable basis, briefed them, armed them when necessary, defended them, drank with them, and in general, treated them like members of the team. The military was not happy with what it got in return. (Knightley, 1989, p. 427)

The military came away from the Vietnam War with the vague yet discernible feeling that the press had somehow lost them the war. This post-war conclusion was best summed up by Robert Elegant, an Asian expert and a former Vietnam correspondent as well:

For the first time in modern history the outcome of war was determined not on the battlefield but on the printed page and, above all, on the television screen ... never before Vietnam had the collective policy of the media—no less stringent a term will serve—sought by graphic and unrelenting distortion, the victory of the enemies of the correspondents' own side. (Knightley, 1989, p. 428)

This appraisal is not without detractors. According to Colonel Harry G. Summers in his treatise, *On Strategy*, the collapse of national will arose from a lack of moral consensus, not from a media conspiracy. He wrote:

Certainly there were some like Salisbury who reported enemy propaganda, but the majority of on-the-scene reporting from Vietnam was factual—that is the reporters honestly reported what they had seen firsthand. Much of what they saw was horrible, for that is the true nature of war. It was the horror, not the reporting, that so influenced the American people. (Summers, 1980, p. 39)

Regardless of this debate, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s strong antipathy emerged between the press and the military as a result of the Vietnam War. In the aftermath, the DOD and its supporters accused the press of continuing to provide a distorted and negative image of the military, while the press viewed anything and everything that dealt with the armed forces with skepticism.

Given this hostile military-media environment, it is little wonder that when an Atlantic Command Public Affairs Officer (PAO) advised Vice Admiral Metcalf, Commander of the Joint Task Force during the Grenada Operation in 1983, "There will be no press. Do you have any problem with this?", without thinking twice the admiral replied, "No." (Metcalf, 1991, p. 45). This decision temporarily to exclude the press during the invasion of Grenada in 1983 signaled a new debate on the rightful wartime role of news media in the post-Vietnam era. (Daniels, 1985. p. 97)

## B. POST-VIETNAM PRESS POLICIES

### 1. Grenada

The wailing of the press because it was denied advance briefing and immediate access to the Grenada operation is like that of a child denied a stick of candy, unaware it has a stick of dynamite.

Surprise, celerity and concentration of forces are the quintessence of military success. A commander has a hole in his head and (a) hole in his plan if he sacrifices secrecy. Might as well sacrifice lives. Engaging the press while engaging the enemy is taking on one adversary too many.

—Major General John E. Murray  
(Ret.), 1983  
(Daniels, 1985, p. 98)

The decision to invade the tiny island nation of Grenada occurred after a bloody military coup on October 19, 1983 left the fate of many American medical students in very uncertain hands. Also of concern was the possibility that the new Marxist leader, General Hudson Austin, might make further moves toward allowing the 9000-foot Cuban-built runway to become a prestaging base for the Soviets. By October 29, a "clear and hold" operation had been planned and congressional leaders were briefed of the impending invasion, but it wasn't until four hours after the invasion that President Reagan notified the public *and the press*. (Daniels, 1985, p. 100)

Lingering military hostility towards the news media was raised by the press as a significant factor in how the media coverage of the Grenada invasion was handled, but there is no documentation to prove or disprove this allegation. (Grossman, 1989, p. 15) The temporary exclusion of the press seems to have stemmed more from the short trip-wire preparation of the operation, and the need for surprise to ensure its success, than any other

consideration. (Denniston, 1984, p. 11) In fact from the time that the joint task force commander (CJTTF-120) was first notified of the Grenada Operation until the first troops landed, only 39 hours had elapsed. (Metcalf, 1991, p. 56)

By mid-morning of the first day, the first on-scene media event occurred when a reporter from the *Washington Post* appeared on board the flagship demanding that his copy be relayed. Confirming a "no press policy" up the chain of command, the reporter, along with those who followed on the second day, was denied access by the commander of the operation, Vice Admiral Metcalf. Shortly thereafter the tables were again turned and it was the Pentagon posing the question into the first hours of combat, "When can you take the media?" According to Admiral Metcalf:

This transferred, from the Pentagon to me the responsibility and authority for media policy. Lacking guidance or precedents, I established the rules for a media presence during the combat phase of the operation. They were:

- Safety of personnel and security of combat operations were the primary considerations. Media must not interfere with either.
- Troops in a combat area should not be burdened with responsibility for the safety of the media.
- The media should not be exposed to hostile fire
- If in the vicinity of troops in combat, media should be escorted by a PAO.
- Accommodations for the media must be available, either ashore or on board one of the ships.

(Metcalf, 1991, pp. 56-58)

When the ban on press coverage was lifted, press pools were employed, just as in WWII and the Inchon landings in the Korean War. Furthermore a Joint Information Bureau was established to handle the some

400 news media representatives who were accredited to cover the Grenada operation by the time the last official news briefing was given the press corps on November 23, 1983. (Braestrup, 1985, pp. 100-101) There was no field press censorship during this time; the defining aspect of the operation was the lack of immediate access to the press.

Then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger justifies the lack of media access on the basis that the short notice given the military in effect overshadowed any consideration given to news coverage. During the planning sessions it was the issues of security and safety that reigned supreme. He went on to defend the press policy that followed the initial ban:

As soon as the evacuation was in its final stages, less than 48 hours after the operation began, members of the press were flown into Grenada, although sporadic fighting continued, they were given complete freedom and the run of the island, and our total cooperation arranging interviews (sic). We also arranged to fly press representatives back to Barbados every day so they could file their stories, because there was no transmission facilities on the island. (Daniels, 1985, pp. 102-103)

The press, however, was not convinced. Although a *Los Angeles Times* poll conducted in November 1983 showed that 52% of the American people approved of the news blackout, the press engaged in a journalistic furor. (Braestrup, 1985, p. 119) A *Washington Post* editorial expounded:

If the ... media can be excluded by their own government from direct coverage of events of great importance to the American people, the whole character of the relationship between governors and governed is affected ... This is an administration already well known for its tendency to use the national security label to limit the flow of information to the public in various ways. So it is perhaps not so surprising that the convenience of the military—or its insistence on the primacy of its convenience—triumphed over good sense, healthy democratic practice and the strong standing tradition of press-government cooperation in coverage of unfolding military events. (Daniels, 1985, p. 115)

The story that emerged out of Grenada, and indeed, by what Grenada is remembered most, is the story of the press. In retrospect, Vice Admiral Metcalf had this to say:

In the actual reporting of Grenada to the U.S. public, the media expended more column inches and time talking about their prerogatives than in reporting the story.

... The story that was not told by the media was the one of an operation put together in hours by forces that had never operated together and yet were successfully controlled by a command structure that was initiated on the spot. Most Americans are proud of what happened in Grenada, but they do not understand why. (Metcalf, 1991, p. 58)

Was the military responsible for the inadequacy of reporting in Grenada, or did the press fail to inform the public by elevating "Freedom of the Press" to a cause célèbre? The answer is "Yes" to both. The Vietnam experience had altered the way in which the military and press regarded each other. Furthermore, this experience, along with the publicity of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate story had created a much bolder press—insistent on access to cover all forms of government activity. (Denniston, 1984, p. 11). In the face of continuing media outcry, the government sought to address those fundamental issues through the establishment of a Military-Media Relations Panel—known as the Sidle Commission.

## **2. The Sidle Commission**

The Military-Media Relations Panel convened for February 6, 1984 at the National War College in Washington, DC. Then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General John W. Vessey Jr., chose retired Major General Winant Sidle, formerly the Army's chief spokesman in Vietnam and widely respected by the media. (Daniels, 1985, p. 128) The question posed by the CJCS

was "How do we conduct military operations in a manner that safeguards the lives of our military and protects the security of a military operation while keeping the American public informed through the news media?" (CJCS Report, 1984, p. 1)

Panel membership included four former newsmen with both print and broadcast wartime experience, military PAOs from each of the services and the defense department, operations spokesman from the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS), and a former dean of journalism school. At the outset a statement of principle was made: "... the panel believes it is essential that the U.S. news media cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree consistent with mission security and the safety of the U.S. forces." (Grossman, 1989, p. 16)

Testimony was heard from a variety of groups including news media representatives, educators and the military establishment. Although working journalists, representatives of major news agencies and major media groups such as the American Society of Newspaper Publishers and the National Association of Broadcasters declined to participate as part of the five-day panel, they provided oral and written presentations. (Grossman, 189, p. 17) Ten of these media groups presented the panel with their own statement of principle. They called on top level civilian and military officials to "reaffirm the historic principle that American journalism, print and broadcast ... should be present at U.S. military operations" in order for the public, through a free press, to "be independently informed about actions of its government." (Daniels, 1985, p. 130) Through the criticism and comments found in the various testimony eight recommendations were made.



The first recommendation dealt with institutionalizing public affairs planning as part of and concurrent with operational planning. Orders would be sent to Commanders in Chief (CINCs) directing the consideration of public affairs aspects as soon as possible during the course of an operation. Furthermore, the Assistant-Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) would be informed of any impending military operations and a public affairs planning cell in OJCS would help insure adequate public affairs review of CINC plans. (CJCS Report, 1984, p. 7)

The second and third recommendations concerned the establishment of a media pool should operational requirements dictate such use for early access to an operation. It was decided that the largest practical press pool should be utilized at the minimum length of time necessary; unilateral coverage would follow. To facilitate this a preestablished system of accrediting pool members with provisions for constant updating would also need to be established. This issue, however, was left to further study. (CJCS Report, 1984, pp. 8-12)

The next four recommendations dealt specifically with military-media planning. Using the criteria of shared responsibility, the military would draft security guidelines during the planning process, preferably few in number, and the basic tenet governing media access would be voluntary compliance with the knowledge that violation would mean expulsion from the area of coverage. Public affairs planning for military operations would include sufficient equipment and qualified personnel (military escorts) to assist correspondents in adequately covering the operation, and planners and plans, if necessary and feasible, would consider media communications requirements. Furthermore, planning would include inter and intra theater transportation support of the media, if possible. (CJCS Report, 1984, pp. 12-14)

The last recommendation called for various measures to improve the military-press relationship. Measures included the establishment of an ongoing program for top military public affairs representatives to meet with media representatives to discuss mutual problems; an enlargement of current media awareness programs in service schools and colleges; enhanced media understanding through mid-level military interaction with news organization; and the hosting by the Secretary of Defense, of a working meeting with broadcast news representatives to explore the special requirements and security problems of this medium, especially as concerns possible real-time news media audiovisual coverage. (CJCS Report, 1984, p. 16)

General Sidle concluded that an adversarial relationship between the media and the government, including the military, was healthy and helped guarantee that both institutions would do a good job. "However" he went on to say:

This relationship must not become antagonistic—an "us versus them" relationship. The appropriate media role in relation to the government has been summarized aptly as being neither that of a lap dog nor an attack dog but, rather, a watch dog. Mutual antagonism and distrust are not in the best interests of the media, the military, or the American people. (CJCS Report, 1984)

Implementation of the Sidle Commission recommendations was swift. Pentagon spokesman Michael I. Burch soon revealed that changes in the planning procedures had already begun that would require the JCS to input public affairs guidance in military operational plans. Along with this, the JCS Public Affairs planning cell was soon created to review all CINCPAC plans to ensure these publications provisions are included. (Daniels, 1985, p. 136) The Defense Department went on to emphasize media awareness as part of

officer training and by August 1984 the Secretary of Defense Media Advisory Committee was established as part of the program for improved media relations through regular meetings between the military and the press. However, the best known and most controversial initiative emanating from the Sidle Commission was that of the DOD media pool and its provisions wherein.

### **3. The DOD National Media Pool**

It is important to note that the media testimony during the Sidle Commission was almost unanimous in opposition to pools, although the report concluded that the press "would cooperate in pooling agreements if that were necessary for them to obtain early access to an operation." (Daniels, 1985, p. 132) So it was not without some reservations that the press first agreed to participate in the DOD National Media Pool, and not without some reservations that they continued to participate given its precarious success since its establishment in 1985.

The program consists of more than 40 Washington based media organizations accredited for membership, including 26 newspapers, three national news magazines, the three major wire services, the four major television networks, and eight radio organizations. Pool membership rotates on a quarterly basis and, although operational situations may dictate different composition, it generally consists of 11 media representatives: a wire service reporter and photographer, a television reporter and two person crew, a magazine reporter and photographer, a radio representative and three newspaper reporters. Two military public affairs escorts accompany the pool until they are joined by the unified/specified command public affairs officer

at the scene of the operation, and then members must observe whatever groundrules had been established to support operational security considerations. Furthermore it is the responsibility of the military to ensure that transportation is available to quickly get the pool to the theater of operation. Communications and logistic arrangements, as well as pool operations in-theater are the responsibility of the unified/specified command concerned. (Grossman, 1989, pp. 18-19)

At the outset of the DOD media pool program Burch said the pool system would be tested in:

... mock operations in order to learn how well the system works, whether reporters honored the security requirements and to prevent reporters from assuming that a call from the Pentagon meant that an actual operation is about to start. (Daniels, 189, p. 137)

There have been more than a half dozen of these media pool tests since that time—the first, covering a 1985 exercise in Honduras. Operational deployments include the Persian Gulf in 1987, Honduras in 1988 and Panama in 1989. With the exception of Panama, progressive improvements were made through all these operations since 1985 (Grossman, 1989, p. 19)

Fearing security breaches, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney delayed the pool's departure for the US. invasion of Panama. During the first crucial hours of the Panama invasion, pool reporters were confined to Fort Clayton and subjected to extensive Army briefings. (Linfield, 1990, p. 159) Complaints from reporters who were shut out of covering the operation prodded the Defense Department's public affairs staff to admit it had botched its handling of the press pool. In a memo to the CINCs on this subject, General Colin Powell, CJSC, wrote that "otherwise successful operations are not total

successes unless the media aspects are properly handled.” (Woodward, 1991, p. 194) An Army captain during Vietnam, military assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense during Grenada, General Colin Powell had learned his media lessons from the ground up and believed that the entire military’s success relied on a mature understanding of public relations. (Woodward, 1991, p. 155) This belief, and that of the entire Bush administration, was to guide the military-press relations during the largest U.S. military operation since Vietnam—the Persian Gulf War—when finally, the legacy of Vietnam was lifted from the shoulders of the military both on the battlefield and at home.

#### IV. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

##### A. PAST AS PRELUDE

The press needs to expunge Vietnam from its soul as much as the nation does. It should not be a cheerleader for the military, but neither should it reflexively oppose every use of force. Each case deserves to be reputed on its own merit.

—(Gergen, "Why America Hates the Press," 1991, p. 57)

Not long after television correspondents reported live on January 16, 1991, the air raids on Baghdad, President Bush addressed the nation from the White House. The President reiterated U.S. objectives in the Gulf; moreover, "in an effort to exorcise the demons from the past," President Bush declared "this will not be another Vietnam... our troops... will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back." ("The Home Front," 1991, p. 25) However, even before the actual start of war, the Bush administration sought to avoid the political and military shortfalls of the Vietnam War. This trend was particularly true as concerned press policy, which the President and his advisors believed was handled poorly in Vietnam. (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

Both the administration and the military in particular were haunted by the experience of the Vietnam War and what they believed were the lessons learned from that war. They knew that with the coming of war, it would be on television instantly "bringing home the action, death, consequences and emotions even more graphically than during Vietnam," "recording every step," "complicating all military tasks." (Woodward, 1991, p. 315) With this

troubling historical memory "that the press lost them the war in Vietnam," the U.S. military made a concerted effort to "limit the damage" the press could inflict in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Similarly, the U.S. press corps "still buoyed up by the fact that the press told the story that the Vietnam War was being lost a couple of years before most senior officers could bring themselves to face this conclusion," were determined to uncover the same story in the Gulf. ("Good News Only," 1991, p. 24) In typical military fashion, both the U.S. military and U.S. press corps prepared themselves to fight the last war, moreover the war that had to be waged was with each other.

## **B. PREPARING FOR WAR**

One thing Vietnam did to us is nobody says "Oh don't worry about public affairs."

—Major General Winant Sidle (Ret.)  
(De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

### **1. Organization**

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. After nearly a week of deliberations and consultations with other Western and Arab leaders, as well as key members of his own administration, President Bush appeared on national television to inform America of his decision to deploy U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia. On August 8, he said: "The mission of our troops is not wholly defensive. Hopefully, they will not be needed long. They will not initiate hostilities, but they will defend themselves, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and other friends of the Persian Gulf." (Woodward, 1991, p. 277)

The next day, public affairs guidance (PAG) from United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) whose area of operation includes Southwest Asia (SWA) advised responsible commands of appropriate media responses and informed them of public affairs activities soon to be implemented, i.e., the activation of the DoD News Media Pool and the establishment of a Joint Information Bureau (JIB). The message also encouraged internal news releases, especially audio-visual releases and authorized direct liaison with the press between public affairs officers (PAO's) at all levels of command with the reminder that all statements to the news media would be on the record. (USCENTCOM, PAGSWA military operation, 090930, Aug 90) And so an offensive public affairs oriented press policy began.

Initially the host nation, Saudi Arabia, was reluctant to allow the Western media to enter their country. The U.S. government urged the granting of visas to U.S. reporters in order to cover the arrival of the U.S. military. After a phone conversation with Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney on 10 August, the Saudi Arabian government agreed to accept the DoD News Media Pool while deciding the issue. That same day the pool was notified, and by August 13 the initial pool members consisting of 17 national news media representatives and six U.S. military escort officers arrived in Dhahran Saudi Arabia. (DOD, *An Interim Report to Congress, Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict*, 1991, p. 19-1)

The original pool members represented the AP, UPI, Reuters, CNN, the Los Angeles Times, Time magazine, Scripps Howard News Service, and the Milwaukee Journal. The military was represented by all four branches of service. The presence of the DOD News Media Pool assured that news would



flow as quickly as possible from the area of operations—of special concern if hostilities broke out prior to the logistical and troop buildup. “The DoD pool spent the first week establishing lines of communications for the media to fill their print, voice, still photography, and video reports.” They assembled and tested the CNN fly away dish and after 24 hours of military negotiations with the Saudi government, permission was granted to uplink. Through the pool’s initial efforts, the groundwork was laid for the many journalists that would follow. (Sherman, 1991 pp. 60-61)

Like many areas of operation the U.S. military has been involved in over the past half century, Saudi Arabia lacked a strong communications infrastructure. Moreover prior to the Gulf War, the Saudi Arabian government had never issued more than 22 journalist visas a year. However, within a week of the DOD pool’s arrival, 150 news organizations were represented in the area of operations and by December the number exceeded 800. To accommodate this growth, the military’s public affairs people worked very closely with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Information. The Joint Information Bureau (JIB) in Dhahran, and later, one in Riyadh, were soon established to quickly coordinate a system for accreditation and media assistance, and the Saudi Ministry was co-located with the JIB in Dhahran to enable the news media to register with both the Saudi government and the JIB at once. Both the JIB and the Ministry worked in concert with each other to provide access to Saudi Arabian bases and military units on the ground and at sea throughout the area of operations. (Sherman, 1991, p. 60) (Interim Report, 1991, p. 19-1-2)

The JIB functioned both as news media coordinator and release agency for not only the U.S. military but the British military and the Saudi Ministry of Information. The bureau processed hundreds of inquiries for routine media visits, responded to human interest and issue oriented stories, and issued military press releases. Furthermore its personnel acted as spokespersons for the military on talk shows and in news briefings, and escorted the media into the field." (Sherman, 1991, p. 59) "The Saudi government required that reporters visiting Saudi bases be escorted by a U.S. official." (Interim Report, 1991, p. 19-2) As later discussed, military escorts were an important organizational factor in the coverage of Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

The JIB tried to ensure prompt and impartial responses to correspondents' queries, but given the magnitude of the unilateral coverage that dominated after the DOD media pool was disbanded on 26 August, this was a difficult task. The JIB worked round the clock to accommodate the more than 1600 news media representatives that eventually amassed to cover the war. Still, according to the Secretary of the Navy's Special Assistant for Public Affairs, Captain Mike Sherman:

One essential principle remained intact:

No one got unilateral coverage of a major "first" that meant no scoops. Information flow to the American public was deemed more important than competition in the marketplace. (Sherman, 1991, pp. 56-61)

This principle no doubt weighed heavily in the decision to organize battle coverage under officially sanctioned pools.

"There's a huge gaggle of reporters out there, and the press has absolutely no capacity to police itself," remarked Secretary of Defense Dick

Cheney. "There was no way we were ever going to put 100 percent of the reporters who wanted to go cover the war out with the troops." (DeParle, 1991, p. 8(A) This became apparent as early as October when the Pentagon sent a joint public affairs team on 6 October to evaluate the public affairs aspects of the war. The team concluded,

that given the time and distances involved, the probable speed of the advance of U.S. forces, the potential for the enemy to use chemical weapons, and the sheer violence of a large-scale armor battle would make open coverage of a ground combat operation impractical, at least during the initial phase. (Interim Report, 1991, p. 19-2)

Although "the strain on communications and logistics was considerable, a plan for combat pool coverage was conceived by both the military and the press that would place "130 journalists in pools to units in the field. (Braestrup, 1991, p. xii) The pool concept as it was "hammered out" by Pentagon officials and Washington Bureau chiefs, allowed reporters "to be assigned to different units where they would be accompanied by a military escort charged with assuring their personal safety and making sure that their copy got back to the rear." (Fialka, 1991, p. 14) The bureau chiefs in Washington helped establish many of the pool rules and "backed up by the Pentagon," were able to raise the final number of reporters in the field to 192 in the final hours before the ground war started. (Fialka, 1991, pp. 9, 15)

The JIB in the Dhahran International relayed what slots were available and then the news organizations themselves coordinated the matter of who went out in the field. The news media had organized themselves into four media pools to facilitate the selection process. Reporters registered with the print, radio, TV or picture pools," and once they worked up to the top of

the lists maintained by pool coordinators, were eligible to go out in the field to serve in the combat pools set up and managed by U.S. forces." At that point the JIB issued equipment and an escort officer to jet them out of the division. (Fialka, 1991, pp. 34-36)

The escorts played an important role in both Desert Shield and Desert Storm. They acted as liaison between the reporters and the troops and were instrumental in maintaining operational security. One of General Schwarzkopf's aides, Captain Widermuth, explained: "You needed an escort to provide a liaison with the units. That military guy speaks military. It's just smart." (DeParle, 1991, p. 8(A)) Moreover the escorts were there to prevent inadvertent violations of operational security—especially during the war when copy was subject to security review. They, like the press policies that guided them, had to balance the needs of operational security with the public's right to know.

This perpetual dilemma had been aptly described by General Eisenhower in 1944:

The first essential in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first essential in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide open publicity. It is your job and mine to try to reconcile those sometimes diverse considerations. (Interim Report, 1991, 19-1)

It was to this endeavor that the press policy of the Persian Gulf War was created.

## **2. Press Policy**

Military press policy in the Persian Gulf War was a carefully thought out, thorough process. One government official observed: "The sense was,

'set it up over there, pay attention to it—don't have things happen by accident, take control of it.'" (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A)) By August 14 the chief blueprint for Desert Shield's public information policy had been created—a ten-page classified document known as Annex Foxtrot. Observed reporter Jason De Parle of the *New York Times*: "The drafting of Annex Foxtrot was one step in a long step of decisions that, by the war's end, left the government with a dramatically changed policy on press coverage of military operations." (De Parle, 1991, p. 1)

Annex Foxtrot provided specific public affairs guidance and tasking, as well as a conceptual understanding of the importance and the purpose of military public affairs activities conducted in support of Operation Desert Shield. Although much of the message was administrative, it contained several key principles central to military press strategy. It stated: "DoD policy in this operation requires taking an *active approach* to informing the American and international publics. Every effort will be made to *disseminate accurate, complete and timely information* to the public through the news media to the maximum extent possible *consistent with operational security*." [author's italics] Furthermore, this active public affairs program was "*to convey*" to its audience "the resolve of the United States government to protect its regional interests ... [and] *to illustrate* U.S. forces abilities to deter and defend and if necessary fight and defeat enemy forces." [italics mine] (USCENTCOM ANNEX F, 140800Z AUG 90, p. 3)

The press policy explicitly delineated what was expected of participating units and from news media representatives. Media representatives were to receive, at a minimum "daily, comprehensive and

unclassified" operational briefs and reasonable access to key personnel. Although the message specifically stated that pool access extended to combat areas and that news media representatives were to be treated as members of the unit, commanders were also told to ensure that the "unarmed, untrained reporters are not recklessly put in exposed situations." Most important, media representatives were to be "escorted at all times, repeat at all times" by public affairs escorts and would be granted no access to classified materials or secure areas. Cooperation from all participating forces would be given on a not to interfere basis. (USCENTCOM, ANNEX F, 140800Z AUG 90, p. 4-5)

Nonetheless military planning did authorized media representatives military travel inter and intra theater if commercial means were not available. Moreover, the "high priority" of this DoD requirement was only to be compromised by "critically needed operational transportation." Messing and billeting were to be made available in the same manner—except on a reimbursable basis. Barring interference with critical operational communications, the media was also authorized use of military facilities, including courier service. Medical care and appropriate equipment, i.e. helmets, chemical protection gear were also authorized as part of military press support. Of course, to gain this support news media representatives first had to be accredited. (USCENTCOM ANNEX F, 140800Z AUG 90, p. 7)

The accreditation policy outlined on Annex Foxtrot was relatively simple and followed the same premises as previous wars. News media representatives were required to demonstrate association with a recognized media organization in order to facilitate access to the area of operations and releasable information. Military support was also contingent upon media

members' agreement to general guidelines and specific ground rules as laid out by DoD. Media representatives were advised that although restrictions would be kept to a minimum, commanding officers could dictate such actions consistent with the security of an operation. (USCENTCOM ANNEX F, 140800Z AUG 90, p. 6-8)

The ground rules themselves were based on the principle of maximum information flow to the public at minimum risk to the safety or security of the armed forces. There were seven general categories of information not releasable and eight specifically dealing with air, ground, or sea operations in the event of hostilities. General information regarding "military plans, activities or operations (actual or hypothetical)" was restricted, detailed information on "command, control, personnel, operational or support vulnerabilities." Specific information on targeting and aircraft points of origin was also forbidden. In all categories security at the source was the guideline. (USCENTCOM ANNEX F, 140800Z AUG 90, p. 9)

These ground rules were modified by the Pentagon before the actual commencement of hostilities in January after many meetings with the news media. (Woodward, 1991, p. 368) The twelve new rules, listed on a single page, also dealt with matters of operational security; however, further delineations were made concerning the descriptive terms that were or were not acceptable for media coverage. Unit size could only be described in general terms such as "multibattalion" or "multidivision." To prevent tactical advantage to the enemy, details of battle damage or losses to U.S. or coalition forces could not be reported until released by CENTCOM; until then,

damage and casualties would be described as "light," "moderate" or "heavy."

According to Pete Williams, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

The ground rules were not intended to prevent journalists from reporting on incidents that might embarrass the military or to make military operations look sanitized. Instead they were simply and solely to prevent publication of details that could jeopardize a military operation or endanger the lives of U.S. troops. (Williams, *the Persian Gulf, the Pentagon, the Press*, 1991, pp. 11-12)

Additional guidelines for the media were constructed to encompass the change in operations from a peaceful buildup to actual hostilities. The press were reminded about military casualty policies, light discipline restrictions for night operations, and that they would be responsible for their own professional gear. Specific guidelines relating to the operation of the combat pool system were also delineated. Pool products were subject to security review before release to insure "its conformance to the attached ground rules, not for its potential to express criticism or cause embarrassment." There was no field press censorship:

The public affairs escort officer on scene will review pool reports, discuss ground rule problems with the reporter, and in the limited circumstances when no agreement can be with a reporter about disputed materials, immediately send the disputed materials to JIB Dhahran for review by the JIB director and the appropriate news media representative. If no agreement can be reached the issue will be immediately forwarded to OASD (PA) for review with the appropriate bureau chief. The ultimate decision in publication will be made by the originating reporter's news organization. (USCENTCOM "Ground Rules and Guidelines, 160800Z JAN 91)

According to Pete Williams these ground rules and guidelines were based upon those developed in 1942 during World War II, "at those handed down by General Eisenhower's chief of staff for the reporters who covered the



D-Day landings, and at the ground rules established by General MacArthur for covering the Korean War." He also was quick to add reporters in those wars were subject to a military censor whose decision was final. In the Persian Gulf it was the military who had to appeal to the journalists, "the final decision to publish or broadcast was in the hands of the journalists not the military." (Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," 1991, pp. 5-6)

Nonetheless accusations of censorship were made in the Gulf War even before the war and this system of security review began. The creation of media pools, hampering their independent movement, "Seemed to many reporters to have been designed to withhold information, rather than provide access to good information." (Smith, 1991, p. 135) This view that the military was hiding something was further exacerbated by the escort policy of both Desert Shield and Desert Storm and, in fact, in the early stages of coverage, most of the complaints centered around the use of military escorts. Critics said this decision fundamentally affected the coverage of military operations by "transforming the escort into a permanent part of the news gathering process." (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A)) In the *Wall Street Journal* on 30 August 1990, Michael Gartner, president of NBC news editorialized:

Here's something you should know about the Gulf: much of the news that you read or hear or see is being censored ... There is no excuse for this kind of censorship [which] exceeds the most stringent censorship of World War II.

He went on to remark that the Press was shut out of Grenada, "cooped up in Panama, and put on the plane late into Saudi Arabia," and concluded that once again the Pentagon had no use for the "facts." (Braestrup, 1991, p. 20) Nothing could have been further from the mark.

Secretary of Defense Cheney said he was guided by two overarching principles in the development of Persian Gulf press policy. One was that military needs would come before journalistic rights—thus disregarding the “lore” of past practice. The other concerned the protection of government credibility. He explained: “There was ample precedent that one of the really great ways to screw up an operation—certainly was the lesson learned in Southeast Asia—is don’t get out there making claims you can’t back up,” (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

The Bush administration desperately wanted to avoid falling into the credibility gap left as the legacy of the Johnson administration. Instead of withholding information, the Bush administration did its best to bring the facts about national security and defense strategy to the foreground. President Bush’s demeanor—his “stable manner” and “calm sincerity” helped persuade the country to support his stated goals in the Gulf. (Zuckerman, 1991, p. 72) Nonetheless, much to his consternation, support for Operation Desert Shield began waning by early November.

### 3. National Will

In a press conference on November 8, 1990, President Bush informed the American public of his plans to increase the size of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. He said this commitment was made “to ensure that the coalition has an adequate offensive military option should that to be necessary to achieve our goals.” Shortly thereafter a poll published in *USA Today* headlined “Bush Support Slim” stated that only 51% of the American public approved of his handling of the Gulf crisis, down from 82% approval three months prior. (Woodward, 1991, p. 325) The chasm of President

Johnson's Credibility Gap loomed large once more. President Johnson had for a long time sought to hide the extent of American military build up in Vietnam, and although President Bush and his chief advisors had forewarned of possible troop increases, the speed at which support for the Gulf seemed to be unraveling warranted further measures to prevent falling into the same pit.

The President began to focus again on the fundamental issues that had brought the nation to the brink of war—most notably the hostage issue and the more than 100 Americans being used as “human shields” at Iraqi military and industrial installations. (Woodward, 1991, p. 315-316) Moreover, recalling that President Johnson had made the grave error of not formally or officially obtaining a Congressional mandate during Vietnam, beyond the highly controversial Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, President Bush began to lobby Congress for approval. On January 12, 1991, three days before the United Nations deadline for the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait expired, Congress granted Bush the authority to go to war, referencing the “all necessary means” language of the original U.N. resolution but also specifically authorizing “use of military force.” (Woodward, 1991, p. 362)

According to Colonel Summers in *On Strategy*:

A declaration of war is a clear statement of *initial* public support which focuses the nation's attention to the enemy. (Continuation of this initial public support is, of course, contingent on the successful prosecution of war aims.) (Summers, 1982, p. 21)

President Bush had seen to the initial support. “He called up the reserves, secured the assent of Congress and the support of the United Nations, defined the objective, fixed a decisive strategy, and was prepared to use maximum

force." (Braestrup, 1991, p. xi) The war had thus become a "shared responsibility of both the government and the people." (Summers, 1982, p. 22) It was now up to the military to carry forward this support in pursuit of the administration's foreign policy objectives. This goal was accomplished by performing quickly and brilliantly on the battlefield and in front of the camera. Vietnam had taught the military it must do both. (Gergen, "Why America Hates the Press, 1991, p. 57)

## C COVERING THE WAR

### 1. Taking the Offensive

It was important to both the Administration and the military that the military should run the war. Having internalized many lessons from Vietnam, this last lesson—"send enough force to do the job and don't tie the hands of the commanders"—reigned up until the very end of the war. (Woodward, 1991, p. 307) With some 250,000 troops at his disposal, the largest military deployment since Vietnam, the Commanding General Norman Schwarzkopf would not be second-guessed by anxious civilians in Washington unlike his counterparts in Vietnam. "General Schwarzkopf, facing a host of imponderables, wanted maximum feasible control over all aspects of Desert Shield/Desert Storm, including media coverage." (Braestrup, 1991, p. xi) His wishes were granted.

Although Captain Wildermuth, who drafted Annex Foxtrot, had not directly consulted with General Schwarzkopf, he said the rules reflected General Schwarzkopf's general philosophy. Early on when the press complained that the escorted visits to commands were infrequent, public

affairs officials maintained that the presence of reporters would distract from war preparations. Yet under the military's own Hometown News Program about 960 journalists were flown in, on military aircraft, for up to four nights in the field with their hometown units. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Cox, who ran the program, explained "If they know that they're getting a free ride and they know they can't afford the \$2000 ticket, there's probably going to be a tendency to say, 'We'll do good stuff here.'" In contrast, when the Pentagon suggested giving the major news organizations more time in the field, General Schwarzkopf vetoed it. (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A)) It appeared as though General Schwarzkopf's sensitivities from Vietnam were showing though. He shared the views of many senior military officials: "the press could not be trusted; biased journalism had turned the public against the Vietnam effort; and, if given half a chance, newspeople, especially ratings-hungry television people, would portray the military in a bad light." (Braestrup, 1991, p. xi)

For fifteen years prior to the outbreak of the war, the Department of Defense endured articles and commentaries criticizing the Pentagon bureaucracy: "the slowness of the decision making process, interservice and intraservice rivalries, weakness in the procurement system and 'gold plating' of the research and development programs." The press was "convinced that the American military weapons systems were much more expensive than they needed to be, and would not work well under the stress of combat." (Smith, 1991, p. 24) However, what the American people heard and saw during the Gulf were well trained warriors and high tech systems that worked rather well. Public confidence soared. Observed one journalist:

The U.S. military roared into the Gulf ready to overwhelm not only the enemy but the press ... In recent years, the War Colleges have trained officers to become so media-savvy that when commanders like Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf took on reporters, it was no contest. The military also knew that pictures dominate words on TV, and was ready to win on that front, too, releasing a series of videos that captivated the public and made the accompanying press reports seem negative and nitpicking. It was the smartest PR offensive the Pentagon has ever mounted. (Gergen, "Why American Hates the Press," 1991, p. 57)

The press should not have been surprized by the military's retaliation. It was "a picture perfect demonstration of how those who bear the sword may also perish by it." This adage was especially true of the Gulf briefings. (Andrews, 1991, p. 83) Henry Allen, writing in the *Washington Press* provided a comical illustration of the conduct of journalists in the Gulf briefings. He wrote:

The Persian Gulf press briefings are making reporters look like fools, nit-pickers, and egomaniacs; like dilettantes who have spent exactly none of their lives on the end of a gun or even a shovel; dinner party commandoes, slouching inquisitors, collegiate spitball artists; people who have never been in a fist-fight much less combat; a whining, self-righteous, upper-middle-class mob jostling for whatever tiny flakes of fame may settle on their shoulders like some sort of Pulitzer Prize dandruff." (Andrews, 1991, p. 84)

When a *Saturday Night Live* sketch lampooned the press for badgering the military with often intrusive and sometimes inane questions, even wavering White House officials were won over by the press policies in the Gulf, and the President was that much more certain the public was on their side. (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

## **2. Taking the Defensive**

According to Major General Perry Smith, a CNN military analyst during the war "One of the interesting aspects of the press coverage of this

war was the slowness some journalists displayed in understanding what was going on." He went on to note that "critical comments continued to appear long after it had been proven to the average citizen that high technology was in fact a routine achievement." (Smith, 1991, pp. 23-24) And there was still skepticism over President Bush's prediction that the war would be over in a matter of days and that U.S. casualties would be low, maybe only 500 dead—if this was so, "why then did the Pentagon order 16,099 body bags?", asked members of the press. (Gergen, "Instant TV War," 1991, p. 63)

Basically, the splendid performance of the U.S. military caught the American media "flat footed." Peter Andrews, a National Defense Correspondent, asserted "With few exceptions military beats had been poorly covered for years. There was always room for a five hundred dollar hammer story but very little about the people who were going to be responsible for any future military action." (Andrews, 1991, p. 85) Photographer Brian Wolfe blamed it on poor research: "It took the media too long to learn how all the military equipment works. And there's no reason why they couldn't have done this before the war." (Wolfe, 1991, p. 67) Bill Kovach, curator of the Neiman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University simply stated: "We covered the politics of the military, but not its mission." (Andrews, 1991, p. 85)

According to Peter Braestrup,

with the end of the draft in 1972 and the influx of women into journalism, the culture gap between journalists and the U.S. military had widened greatly since Vietnam. Increasingly, tactics, logistics, weaponry, and military language had become as foreign to most American reporters—and the lower-echelon bosses—as the basics of American football were to say, Kuwaitis.... If as some critics were later to

claim, journalists were bamboozled by the military, many were as much victims of ignorance and their own short attention spans as of manipulations. (Braestrup, 1991, pp. vii-xiii)

Indeed, the journalist felt as though the military had somehow tricked them into relinquishing some of their editorial purview, and some hid behind the First Amendment, accusing the military of "controlling the words and images of the battlefield" to the detriment of the "truth." (Galloway, 1991, p. 49) "Discounting the self importance and self interests of such claims," it is important to remember that

the citizens of a democracy do have a right to know what war is like, and whether its horrors are worse than the alternative. A dutiful press that merely regurgitates what it is told is useless, in the field and at home.... [nonetheless] war is an aberration. While it lasts the practice of democracy is obscured, just as the view of battle is restricted from any one part of the field." ("The War on Screen," 1991, p. 18)

It was to this "obscured," "restricted." view that some members of the press focused; they complained that the U.S. military was intentionally obstructing the full view of the war. Pool reports were criticized for failing to provide the pieces of the big picture on the battlefield, and the system was blamed for the failure. Nicholas Horrock, Washington bureau chief for the *Chicago Tribune* and pool coordinator for most of the air and ground war, remarked, "The pool reports that did come in were absolute mumbo jumbo." (Fialka, 1991, p. 40)

The press did not seem to realize that such is the nature of a fast-paced desert tank war. Desert warfare coverage during World War II did not fare much better, unilaterally or otherwise. World War II correspondent Alan Morehead wrote:



From the first to the last we never "saw" a battle in the desert, "we were simply conscious of a great deal of dust, noise and confusion. The only way we could gather a coherent picture was by driving hard from one headquarters and by picking up the reports from the most forward units as they came through over the radio telephone. Then, when the worst was over, we went forward ourselves to observe the prisoners and the booty and to hear the individual experiences of the soldiers." (Knightley, 1989, p. 308)

Not pressed by the capability to instantaneously transmit their story, World War II reporters could afford to wait until the dust had settled so to speak, to learn the story, to file their copy. Not so in the Gulf. There were numerous complaints about the slow and haphazard military courier system during the ground war, and although some of these allegations were true, it must be remembered that this phase of the War only lasted 100 hours--not very much time to work through logistical and communication problems.

Correspondent John Fialka remarked, "worst of all we faced a jury-rigged system to get our copy, film, audio, and videotape back. Civil War reporters, using the new high technology of the telegraph, were able to send reports of the Battle of Bull Run to New York in 27 hours." (Fialka, 1991, p. 5) Interesting he chose the Civil War analogy: "Early indications of Northern superiority had sent the Northern war correspondents hurrying back to Washington to write accounts of a great victory. Back on the battlefield, the Southern troops turned the Union Army and a rout followed." (Knightley, 1989, p. 26) Battlefields are confusing, speculative places. Rapid information dissemination is not always the most accurate or even pertinent--as events take place so quickly the importance of one event may be displaced by another.

The media in the Gulf claimed that they were there to record history, yet history has no deadlines to make. Seasoned newsman Walter Cronkite saw no need for news to come instantaneous from the battlefield: "I don't see what this rush to print or this rush to transmit is all about. It doesn't really matter in a wartime situation, if we learn something this minute ... or the next." (Keene, 1991, p. 67) Moreover the American public didn't mind a little wait either.

#### D. PUBLIC OPINION

For more than six months, the American press has knocked itself out to cover the Persian Gulf crisis, eager to meet a ravenous public appetite for every picture, every briefing, every morsel from the front ... and what does the press have to show for it? Mostly a big black eye.

—David Gergen, *U.S. News and World Report*, "(Gergen, "Why America Hates the Press," 1991, p. 57)

David Gergen expressed the sentiment of many reporters during the Gulf War, mainly because, as Pete Williams observed, "Some of the critics of the press view the relationship between the military and the press as a zero-sum game: if military credibility is up, then press credibility is down." (Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," 1991, p. 2) Yet a *Times-Mirror* poll taken January 25, 27, 1991 found that eight out of ten Americans gave the press high marks for its war coverage. It also concluded that 78% of the American public felt that the military was as candid as it could be about it at that time. (Fialka, 1991, p. 69)

If the public disliked anything about the press, it was their seeming inability to appreciate the same candor that the public saw. Letters poured into the Pentagon expressing concern over this matter: "Would you please ask reporters to give their names when they ask questions? Then we can write to their employers and tell them to buzz off." (Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," 1991, p. 3) While the military viewed the probing questions as fair game, again, expressing the sentiments of David Gergen, "no public forum about the war seems to end without a denunciation of whining reporters badgering the military with goofy questions." (Gergen, "Why the Military Hate the Press," 1991, p. 57)

According to CCN military analyst during the war, MAJ GEN Perry Smith, "Clearly, leaders of various television and radio networks, of newspapers and magazines, and professors of journalism need to address a fundamental question: How are they going to deal with paradigm shifts?" Smith asserts that the media has been a "captive of their own culture," that it was their beliefs that the military and government could not be trusted and would try to "manipulate the news in their favor," that created disfavor among the public. (Smith, 1991, pp. 151-152) Moreover, if it had been a contest of credibility, the military would have won, as shown by overwhelming majorities backing the military over the press in public opinion polls at the time. (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

In a *Washington Post*-ABC poll taken shortly after the war, 88% of those surveyed thought the military had gained respect during the war, up from only half that amount of public confidence a decade prior. This rise in credibility was partly attributed to the policies of government leaders to wait

for confirmed reports, saying only what was known to be true, and not getting ahead of its successes. (Williams, "The Persian Gulf, the Pentagon, the Press," 1991, p. 10) The other part came through a genuine affection for the American military and their mission.

In the Gulf War, the U.S. military consisted of an all-volunteer force, with reservists from throughout the United States; the American public wanted to be proud of their fighting force, wanted the high tech weapons to work, wanted to punish the aggressor, wanted, perhaps, as much as the military, to erase Vietnam from the American psyche. The coverage of the Gulf War allowed the American public to do just that.

## V. CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE PERSIAN GULF

Facts must be convincing, demonstrated, living salesmen of practical benefits. These are the only kind of facts that mold public opinion and channel the vibrant tensions of public thinking always deciding issues in the end, altering military policy as surely as defeat in war--they make public opinion the most powerful tool of all, more powerful even than the war itself.

—an anonymous Air Force officer  
(Cater, 1959, p.66)

### A. A FORCE MULTIPLIER

The importance of words as weapons is well demonstrated throughout the history of military-press relations. President Roosevelt knew this during World War II, as well as President Johnson realized it only too late in Vietnam. The press continues to play an all too important role as either a force multiplier or a force divider and it is the responsibility of the government during times of war to ensure that it is the former. (Howell, 1991, p. 149) President Bush and those military and government officials beneath him sought to fulfill the premise that once committed to war, its success is foremost. "The circumstances of the Gulf make this premise easy to accept":

The democracies with troops in the region had had a full five months to weigh the risk of horrors ahead. The issues were widely debated. National parliaments voted. The operation had been blessed by the United Nations. Jaw-jaw was open and thorough; war-war, as an option was never concealed. [That its time came] "oppositions, against all their instincts, rightly suspend the normal play of democratic argument." ("War on Screen," 1991, p. 18)

The media, too, must suppress their instincts during war, and if the past is any indicator, it sometimes needs a little help. After all "the press tends to go to extremes, and the responsible press exhibits extremism in pursuit of truth--which is a virtue. It wants to know everything. It wants to know now." (Goulding, 1970, p. xii) The press policy that emanated from the Gulf War was not meant to change the nature of a free press, just curb its natural tendencies in pursuit of another goal--the war effort. War may be an aberration, but it can also be a legitimate foreign policy tool in support of national security objectives. The Gulf War demonstrated it, the American public acknowledge it and the press, begrudgingly, learned to respect it. However, judging by the mixed reaction to the media coverage of the Gulf War on the part of the press and the military, next time may be different.

## **B. CONTINUING CONTROVERSY**

In early May 1991, editors from 15 major news organizations complained to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney about the coverage of the Gulf War. In a letter, they asserted that "virtually all major news organizations agree that the flow of information was blocked, impeded, or diminished by the policies and practices of the Department of Defense." Furthermore the letter stated, "These conditions meant we could not tell the public the full story of those who fought the nation's battle." They berated the system of military escorts and copy review and claimed that "the pool system was used in the Persian Gulf not to facilitate news coverage but to control it." ("15 Top Journalists see Cheney and Object to Gulf War Curbs," 1991, p. 1(A))

Even as the newsmen feared that the coverage in the Gulf would serve as a model for the future, in separate interviews with Dick Cheney and White House Chief of Staff, John Sununu, that is proudly what they called it. "There was never an effort not to give information out," said John Sununu. "There was never an effort not to focus on things." And Mr. Cheney, "The policies chief architect" added: "There was better coverage, more extensive coverage, more elaborate coverage, greater knowledge on the part of the American public about this war as it unfolded, than any other war in history." (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A)) President Bush agreed: "I think the American people stand behind us. I think they felt they got a lot of information about the war." (De Parle, 1991, p. 8(A))

Presenting two dissimilar views, the press and military/government officials began a series of talks over the following year in order to come to a better understanding regarding future press policies. During this time there was a lot of self-evaluation on both sides of the issue. The Secretary of Defense agreed to receive a joint report by the news organizations and the Pentagon public affairs people in early 1992, with recommendations for the type of ground rules that might be necessary for the press in future U.S. military conflicts. (Willis, 1991, p. 22)

Reporters and military officials were basically divided into two camps: "Those who believed the problems encountered during the Gulf War were mainly technical and could be resolved by negotiation, and those who saw the Gulf experience as a symptom of a deeper mistrust and national tension between the press and the military. (Willis, 1991, p. 221) Even Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Pete Williams, admitted "We could have done a

better job of helping reporters in the field." However, Mr. Williams, and other military/government officials, are a far cry from admitting that the coverage of the war was a failure. He feels "We must improve on the system." (Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf, 1991, p. 8)

It has been made easier for the military to hold its position by virtue of the strong public opinion on their side. By the press' own admission, they know this to be true also:

Americans felt, correctly that they were receiving more information than in any other military engagement in our history and were comfortable with the notion that military briefings had to be sketchy to avoid helping the enemy. They understood that in an air war, direct physical access by the media-network TV in the cockpit of a single Stealth fighter?--is virtually impossible as information is difficult to acquire and more difficult to obtain. (Zuckerman, 1991, p. 72)

### C. THE FUTURE

Media complaints over the Gulf coverage continue to focus on the fundamental issue always affecting military-press relations: security vs. access, and as adjunct in this war, security vs. speed. Afterall, "this was the first U.S. war to be covered by news media who were capable of broadcasting instantaneously to the world, included the enemy, and its not likely to be the last. (Interim Report, 1991, p. 19-1)

This in mind, the "Statement of Principles" that were recently agreed to by the Pentagon and the news media concerning future news coverage of combat contained a fundamental disagreement that could not be bridged. The military would not abrogate the option for security review, both as a process of identifying security violations and of slowing the dissemination of such



information, while the news media representatives felt that their integrity made prior security review "unnecessary and unwarranted." (American Security for Newspaper Editors (ASNE) "Statement of Principles," 1992)

The remaining principles were not much changed from those of the Sidle Commission, or even the guidelines of the Operation Desert Storm. "Open and independent reporting" was reaffirmed as the primary principle, followed by agreement that pool coverage might sometimes be necessary. (ASNE "Statement of Principles," 1992) In the Gulf, the sheer numbers of correspondents and the type of warfare--possibly chemical--rendered unilateral coverage implausible. According to Pete Williams,

In this sense, it was like something from a previous war--D-Day. It is useful to remember that 461 reporters were signed up at the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, to cover D-Day. Of that number, only 27 U.S. reporters actually came ashore with the first wave of forces. (Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," 1991, p. 7)

Military escorts, too, were given their place in the new set of principles, stating, "military public affairs officers should act as liaisons, but should not interfere with the reporting process." In general, the list of statements appeared to reaffirm present policy, with the possible exception of the military allowing communications systems operated by news organizations on to the battlefield. But even this was subject to some restrictions. (ASNE, "Statement of Principles," 1992) No doubt this military concession had a great deal to do with the military's continued assertion that military review should remain as an option. Given the record of the past, the prospects for future technological breakthroughs in communications, and the inherent aggressive

nature of the press, security review may and probably should play a role in future media coverage of war.

The new "Statement of Principles" adhered to the adage "everything old is new again" and reflected only incremental changes to the Persian Gulf policies--which by most accounts worked not only to inform the American public, but to safeguard operational and strategic security. Current press policies, as a product of historical evolution, incorporated the lessons of the past, particularly those of Vietnam, and now those from the Gulf War, in order to best balance press freedoms against the legitimate governmental function of providing national security. Moreover, if "Freedom of the Press" is guaranteed "not for the benefit of reporters," as news correspondent Dan Rather asserts, but "for the benefit of listeners, and viewers, and readers, the cause is America," then in support of this cause, freedom of the press may at times have to give deference to national security concerns. (Powe, 1990, p. 285) This is especially important on the battlefield, when operational and strategic security dictate the greatest consideration. This was true in Vietnam, true in the Persian Gulf, and will remain an important element in the success of future military operations.

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