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THE MILITARY-NEWS MEDIA RELATIONSHIP: THINKING FORWARD

Charles W. Ricks

December 1, 1993

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FOREWORD

One of the realities of modern military operations has been that they are often subjected to intense scrutiny by the international news media. Under most circumstances, the deployment of U.S. forces attracts large numbers of print and broadcast journalists dedicated to providing their audiences with near real-time information of varying accuracy and completeness. This extraordinary availability of information may well affect the agenda of the executive and legislative branches of government and have important impacts on military decisionmakers in operational theaters.

Over the course of the next six months, the Strategic Studies Institute will examine the impact of the media's technological advances on strategic and operational level planning and policymaking, first in an overseas theater, and subsequently on decisions made at the national level. The first of these two studies recognizes the complexity of executing military operations under the scrutiny of a very responsive, high technology world news media. Given the volatile, unstable, and ambiguous environment in which armed forces can find themselves, the actions of field forces have a greater chance than ever before of affecting subsequent strategic decisions made at higher levels. The pressure on field commanders to "get it right the first time" is demonstrably greater than ever.

The author intends that these thoughts provide commanders with an understanding of the high technology and competitive news media environment they can expect to experience and offers specific suggestions for successfully communicating with reporters. To that end, and as a departure from its normal focus on strategic issues, the Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this monograph to assist operational commanders and their staffs and to contribute to improving the efficiency of the relationship between the military and the news media.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

CHARLES W. RICKS is a retired Army officer who now works as a researcher and advisor on news media relations. He has lectured and conducted training on the subject throughout Europe and the United States to include meeting with officials of former members of the Warsaw Pact and other nations. In addition to his service with armor and cavalry units, his public affairs experience includes assignments in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Allied Command Europe at SHAPE, Belgium. He specializes in crisis management issues and has developed policies, plans and procedures for communicating with reporters covering a variety of national and international military activities including working with journalists in the former Soviet Union during airlift operations. He holds a BBA in Marketing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MA from the University of Kentucky; he taught at the U.S. Military Academy and at the Armor School at Fort Knox and was Director of the Broadcasting Department of the Defense Information School.

SUMMARY

Some of the more enduring images of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm involved soldiers in observation posts with forests of television cameras and still photographers packed tightly around their positions. In such situations, those troops couldn't even have seen the enemy, let alone report about him. There were also the news conferences with questions often shouted so loudly and randomly that they couldn't be distinguished, let alone answered. More recently, Marines landing in the darkness on the beaches near Mogadishu, Somalia, found themselves surrounded and illuminated by scores of journalists. And through it all have been the descriptions of conflict and bitterness, and journalists' charges of deliberate deception by the military.

Much work has been done to trace the origins of the persistent tension between the military and the news media. Often the research strives to outline the history of the relationship and seeks to identify similarities in institutional culture and purpose on which to base agreements to guide future contacts. Yet it seems inevitable that such schemes collapse in the first stressful stages of a crisis or conflict as they are inevitably artificial. This is because the military and the news media pursue very different objectives and often hold very different values.

This study seeks to move the discussion forward by acknowledging the diversity and examining those news media issues which will most affect commanders as they execute their assigned missions. It makes no pretense at providing a template for conducting successful media relations operations. However, it does identify various planning factors which should be considered as commanders prepare their public affairs' concepts of operation.

At the very least, commanders' concerns focus on their annoyance at the numbers of reporters, wariness over the news media's advanced technology and frustration at the lack of knowledge so many journalists display while covering the military. These reactions often cause commanders to distance themselves from reporters or attempt to control them while gathering the news in the hope that such supervision will reduce the risks of security violations and confusing news reports. The American experiences in Grenada (1983) and Desert Shield/Storm (1990-91) and the British actions in the Falkland Islands (1982) are often cited as models for learning coping strategies for dealing with the news media.

Yet those are not reliable precedents. In each case the journalists had to be imported because there was no significant news media presence indigenous to the areas of operation. It would seem that the experiences in Panama (1989) and, especially, Somalia (1992-93) are more useful models for understanding the

evolving environment of news media coverage of military operations. History records that there were nine civilian war correspondents on the island of Tarawa in the South Pacific in 1943 and fewer than 30 on the invasion beaches of Normandy in 1944, but those figures are now only of passing interest. The 600 reporters in the entire Pacific Theater in World War II were nearly matched by the 500 journalists who quickly appeared on tiny Grenada and in Panama City, and clearly surpassed by the more than 1,500 who covered the Persian Gulf War and the disaster relief operations in Florida (1992).

There is no longer a question of whether the news media will cover military operations. Regardless of mission, they will inevitably be interested in the drama, uncertainty and emotion. As in Somalia, journalists will likely precede the force into the area of operation; and they will transmit images of events as they happen, perhaps from both sides of any conflict. Thus the commander's operational task is to develop a well resourced and responsive infrastructure to conduct news media relations. Failure to do so will not affect the scale of news media coverage; it will, however, limit the command's ability to communicate effectively and risk distorting the public's perception of the military's effectiveness. In the face of such challenges, efforts at control are meaningless.

Whereas once the military trained to fight outnumbered to win, today's news media environment has generated a new imperative: For every operation, commanders must also communicate outnumbered to succeed. While difficult to measure, that success is defined in terms of credibility with the news media and with the various American and international publics. Thus, mutual understanding and accommodation are more useful than evasion or angry confrontation.

Commanders can best prepare for their encounters with the news media by understanding the roles and capabilities of the journalists who cover military operations; accepting the inevitability and desirability of their access to the force; appreciating the importance of technology and its impact on operations security; identifying and providing the resources necessary for timely support for the media relations mission; and recognizing the necessity for appropriate education and training. If ignored, each of these represents a potential flashpoint for future disagreements. If addressed comprehensively, they can form the basis for cooperation in the midst of what will inevitably be complex and confusing situations.

THE MILITARY-NEWS MEDIA RELATIONSHIP: THINKING FORWARD

The Operational Environment.

There is a popular view that the often tense relationship between the military and the news media is a recent product of hard feelings and misunderstandings generated during the Viet Nam War. In contrast, this perspective claims, the contacts between the two institutions during World War II were usually amicable and cooperative. This view of history appears to be overly simplistic and not entirely accurate. Shelley Smith Mydans, a *Life* magazine war correspondent in the Pacific Theater 50 years ago, suggests that a sense of common purpose at that time (the defeat of America's enemies) should not be misinterpreted as unquestioning news media support of the political decisions and military actions taken in pursuit of that goal.¹

It is interesting that a survey of the writings of various war correspondents and discussions with others of that era reveal that the issues of concern today were just as important to the journalists covering the military in those earlier years. In addressing this phenomenon, Hodding Carter has said in the case of military-news media relations, "the wheel often gets reinvented, but it travels over very different terrain."² Then, as now, the central news media concern involved the fear of censorship. But issues such as access to the forces, communications, operations security, transportation and logistics support also were of interest. In recent years, deficiencies in any of these have been interpreted by many in the news media as attempts by the Department of Defense to impose censorship indirectly. For instance, using news media pools to cover combat units during the Persian Gulf War or relying on slow ground transportation to deliver news media products were seen as deliberate efforts to restrict journalists from covering stories or to delay their reports once produced.

The important realization is that the issues really haven't changed nor, by extension, have the commanders' responsibilities to ensure that their organizations are in the best position to conduct professional news media relations programs appropriately tailored to their assigned missions. Quite simply, the commanders most likely to succeed will be those who have accurately assessed the level of news media interest in their operation and have anticipated and provided the assets necessary to accomplish the news media relations mission.

The instinctive military need for control is irrelevant in the face of an institution which can field, depending on the size of the operation, thousands of reporters who are equipped with instantaneous communications capabilities and who often understand alarmingly little about the stories they are covering. Once again, the challenge and the failure to adapt aren't new. In speaking about his experiences at Pearl Harbor on December 7,

1941, Frank Tremaine (United Press) reported that "the military was no more prepared to handle news coverage than for handling the Japanese."³ Yet it is always important to be selective in reviewing earlier experiences.

Lessons derived from anecdotal discussions about the circumstances surrounding Operation Urgent Fury (Grenada) and Operations Desert Shield/Storm are limited by the fact that they were unique situations not likely to be replicated. Like the British efforts in the Falkland Islands, geographical and political circumstances dictated that the news media had to be imported and matched up with the forces. The challenges presented by reporters during Operations Just Cause (Panama) and Restore Hope (Somalia) are far more relevant for study because of the presence of significant numbers of journalists in place before operations began and their open access to most areas of operation.

Similarly, news coverage of the fighting in the former Yugoslavia has been conducted for several years by numerous independent, well-equipped journalists who move about freely and flood the international news media with their often compelling reports.

Media relations in any operation cannot be left to chance or to a particularly clever public affairs staff. While language like "handling journalists" and "coping with reporter demands" sounds defensive and may appear to revert to attempts at control of the news media, it is useful for understanding the requirements facing field commanders. A carefully-planned, well-resourced and decisively-positioned infrastructure is necessary for communicating through the news media to the American and, increasingly, international publics. This means that organizations need to be "proactively-reactive": reactive to the extent they must be responsive to news media interest; proactive in that knowledgeable assessments, comprehensive planning and advanced preparation will inevitably determine how effectively they will be able to respond.

Unity in the media relations effort is achieved through the development of public affairs guidance which assists the entire chain of command in communicating consistent and credible information. Although the public affairs plans are approved by the Office of the Secretary of Defense,⁴ commanders at each level have a role in formulating the policy, news statements, information packages, and media support arrangements which make up the plan. This effort ensures that those most knowledgeable about the operation play a major role in developing the messages to be communicated. Effective command information programs are also important to ensuring that everyone likely to encounter journalists will understand the mission and their role in it, aspects which are always of interest to reporters covering the military.

To succeed, commanders must "think forward" historically, operationally, and geographically. The perpetuation of confrontation and debate over events past is not useful. Attempts to look back and justify specific decisions or actions do help in gaining understanding, but they also serve to reinforce the sense of conflict between the institutions. Continuing to focus on historical events can cause both the military and the news media to appear to be preparing themselves to conduct media relations as they did in the last conflict or deployment. As with any operational task, the only relevant lessons of the past are those which can be applied to improve readiness and performance in the future.

Additionally, the success of the media relations program rests on the ability of the commander and staff to assess the intensity of news media interest in the mission at hand and to anticipate the personnel, communications, transportation, and deployment requirements necessary to communicate through the news media during every stage of the operation. In the complexity of today's international security environment, this will often require rather creative applications of judgment. This is especially true since the news media will inevitably appear before commanders are fully prepared to accommodate them. Therefore, regardless of mission, commanders should immediately designate an official source of information (normally the public affairs officer) and activate an information center. Taking the early initiative in these efforts will usually serve to channel reporters to those trained to communicate with them, thus reducing their random movement throughout the area of operation and their unplanned, sometimes disruptive visits to units. These outcomes are also desirable for journalists in their efforts to cover the story and will assist in establishing a constructive dialogue.

Finally, the true challenge for the Department of Defense and its military commanders does not reside in the formal briefing room where well-trained spokespersons are prepared to answer news media questions. It lies, instead, in the forward-deployed units where young leaders, inexperienced with the news media and facing a kaleidoscope of important tasks, are confronted by reporters competing with their colleagues for a unique angle on the operation. Guidance and training for the tactical commander should become a regular part of operational preparations. The education process should begin with a simple orientation to the military-news media relationship in the officer basic course and continue with increasing complexity through the advanced courses and the Combined Arms and Services Staff School to the senior military schools. A similar pattern should become part of the education system for NCOs.

Since news media contacts with the tactical leadership are inevitable, commanders and their public affairs staffs must concentrate on thinking forward in their planning for the media relations mission. From a commander's perspective, the thoughts

generated by the discussion of the issues identified in this study should become planning factors for the development of a responsive news media relations infrastructure.

The Military-News Media Environment.

It is ironic that much of the disagreement between the military and the news media is based on an element of essential agreement. Both institutions view the information available in operational units to be very important and vitally interesting. But their reactions to this common judgment vary significantly: The military's response has often been to prevent the release of such information because of various concerns ranging from potential embarrassment to operations security, while the news media's response is typically to seek immediate release because of the "public's right to know."

Shortly before the invasion of Normandy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed this tension with reporters: "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."⁵ In these words lie the basis for cooperation through the development of ground rules and procedures which seek to define "information of value" and outline parameters for its reporting.

History records that the effort was generally successful. At the entrance to the American Cemetery at St Laurent, France, overlooking Omaha Beach, rests the following plaque: "In memory of General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the forces under his command this sealed capsule containing news reports of the June 6, 1944 Normandy Landings is placed here by the newsmen who were there."⁶ This simple remembrance represents a sincere expression of mutual respect and shared experience often seen in the genre of the war correspondent from all conflicts; it is not a reflection of unquestioning support or "cheerleading" for the attack.

General Walter E. Boomer, the commander of Marine Forces during the Persian Gulf War, has said that among commanders there is a "mythology" of mistrust despite the fact that relatively few have ever had sustained contact with the news media.⁷ Often this is because the two institutions generally have very little dealings with each other except during crises or war. Aside from reporters who cover the Pentagon, there are very few journalists who specialize in military and national security issues; and their numbers are decreasing as the trend continues toward reporters with "general" expertise. Further, most reporters don't have the time or support to visit and learn about the military, even during exercises.

Interestingly, given this history of unfamiliarity, both the

military and the news media expect the other to perform with understanding and efficiency when events bring them together. Further, while reporters on the ground focus immense effort on covering the military unit, their presence is only one of the many variables competing for the attention of the responsible commander. When things don't go well, minor irritants grow into major issues, and, unfortunately, the two institutions often tend to focus on their mutual competition rather than on their shared responsibility to communicate information to the public. Once again, the fact that both institutions speak to a common audience should lead to cooperation based on mutual interest instead of confrontation often based on stereotypes or past disagreements and misunderstandings.

Yet the differences in institutional perspective are important to understand. Increasingly, reporters see themselves as participants in the events they cover, not merely as chroniclers of those experiences. In the post-cold war world, national leaders and agenda setters regularly appear on international television networks like CNN and the BBC to communicate diplomatic messages and warnings. This practice is also true, although perhaps less dramatically, for radio and print media. Additionally, during the Persian Gulf War, one of the "status symbols" among reporters was the number of prisoners of war each was able to "capture." The increasing role of the news media in outlining the public agenda has led to debate over the apparent linkage between news media coverage of events, especially in television and still pictures, and the decision of nations to act in response. Recent examples include international efforts during Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq, humanitarian assistance to the former Soviet Union, Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, and various actions in the former Yugoslavia, as well as the pace of the domestic response to the Hurricane Andrew disaster in Florida.

An unexpected military consequence of this new role involves providing security for reporters covering an operation. While journalists say that their security is not a military concern and DoD policy calls for working with journalists without regard for their safety, events have proven otherwise.⁸ Participants in conflicts are becoming increasingly sensitive to the perception that news coverage often leads to unwanted external intervention. Thus what can be interpreted as retaliatory actions have been taken against reporters to include bounties for those covering U.N. operations in the former Yugoslavia. More than 30 journalists have been killed in fighting there since 1991, and four reporters died in Somalia on July 12, 1993 in what has been characterized as an act of revenge by an angry mob. News media demands for assistance when reporters were trapped in hotels in Panama City (1989) and Mogadishu (1993) and after the capture of Bob Simon of CBS Television by Iraqi forces (1991) clearly indicate that the security of journalists will remain a persistent, high visibility issue confronting commanders.

While absolute security cannot be guaranteed, those reporters who accept the protection afforded by military units are probably in the best position to cover the story comprehensively and survive. Yet the situations above, especially that of Simon, involved conscious decisions by reporters to function outside of the established news media relations procedures and to conduct reporting entirely on their own. In response to such behavior, commanders who understand that sustained contacts between military forces and the news media result in the most complete and accurate stories about their units should seek to convince reporters that the acceptance of reasonable military ground rules and the integration of journalists into operational units are in the best interests of both institutions. However, it is inevitable that some reporters will choose not to cooperate. In those cases, commanders have no special responsibilities for such individuals and should, instead, focus their attention on the reporters who desire to abide by the procedures outlined for the operation.

Any discussion of contacts between the military and the news media must address the expectations of reporters covering the operation. Logically, journalists are limited by the same factors of terrain, visibility and information flow that affect the forces with which they travel. Yet reporters don't always understand this. In his book on the Persian Gulf War, John MacArthur, the publisher of *Harper's Magazine*, quotes Molly Moore of *The Washington Post* as saying, "I had no idea what was going on, and I was right in the middle of the war" (traveling with Marine commander LTG Boomer).⁹ Precisely so! A critical step in developing cooperation between the military and the news media is the explanation of the reality that the mere presence of journalists, regardless of background, will not grant special insight not available to the military personnel they are with. Once again, dialogue and explanation improve the quality of the reporters' experience and, inevitably, of their news products.

News Media Access.

Major General Paul E. Funk has written that, on returning from the desert, "I was upset to find that people did not know that the 3d Armored Division (his command) and VII Corps had been in a very heavy fight under great contact with some of the enemy's first-rate units. The story was not told well enough about the people who did the fighting—the companies, platoons and task forces. . . . Invariably, if you allow the media to look at what you are doing and put them with the soldiers, it comes out fine."¹⁰

Both the military and the news media share an interest in providing a more complete picture of military operations than is available at a news briefing. This can best be accomplished by ensuring personal contact between the members of the force and reporters covering the story. Such access is important from the

news media's perspective because the information available at news conferences communicates only part of the total story. Similarly, for commanders, there is no more effective way to meet their obligations to communicate with the public than through the perspectives and the experiences of the members of their commands. Yet while commanders have a responsibility to assist journalists in gaining access to military forces, the large number of reporters who inevitably appear in an operational area make it impossible to accommodate them all simultaneously.

After the Persian Gulf War, Pete Williams, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and his staff met with various news media representatives and developed guidelines for the coverage of DoD operations. The first of these directly addresses the issue of access. In contrast to the news media pools which were necessary in the environment of Operation Desert Storm, the first guideline states that "open and independent reporting will be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations."¹¹ Essentially, this recognizes the practice of individual journalists moving about an area of operations and reporting for their own news organizations without sharing their information with their colleagues, a central feature of pool operations.

In fact, this principle is an acknowledgement of reality, not an operational objective. As the events on the beach at Mogadishu, Somalia, clearly revealed, the news media have essentially solved the primary issue of access. In most cases, commanders can assume that reporters will be in position to cover any military activity from the earliest stages. In recent history, this has resulted in images of military personnel performing their tasks while surrounded by reporters who often seem to be regarding them as objects of curiosity. These situations can be as harmless as organized visits to forward positions where tactically deployed combat units become overwhelmed by reporters taking advantage of a photo opportunity; or they can be as potentially dangerous as on the beach in Somalia where the cultures of the military and the news media converged in their most dramatic collision.

The more relevant challenge for commanders is to decide how to include reporters within their organizations. This is particularly true for the Army and the Marine Corps because the story resides with those who execute the mission, and reporters will find their way to the widely-dispersed units who are performing various tasks far from the "influence" of the public affairs staff. Air fields and ships are far less accessible without military assistance. Once again, it is clearly not possible to accommodate simultaneously every journalist desiring to cover the operation. During Operation Desert Storm, one assessment called for the inclusion of 13 reporters in an Army division.¹² In future operations, circumstances may allow for more or dictate fewer.

While inclusion represents the most volatile flashpoint in the relationship between the military and the news media, it also offers the best opportunity for the dialogue necessary for the most effective reporting and understanding. Journalists who are assigned to operational units bring to life the dry facts of the news conference by providing the texture, explanation, and context of what is going on. Further, they communicate a human face by telling the stories of those directly involved with the mission. It has become increasingly true that such reporting is often the only contact most Americans have with the men and women who make up their military establishment.

In every case, commanders must address two related questions: How many reporters can I include in my unit without degrading its operational effectiveness? and, How do I accommodate those journalists who merely appear in a unit area with the desire to report on its activities? A credible answer to the first question reduces the complexity of the second.¹³ Reporters working outside a unit possess limited utility as they are only able to gather images of what is happening and provide their own interpretations. Those included in the units are valuable to both the news media and the military as they tend to produce more accurate, complete, and informative stories because of their access to those who are performing the mission.

The first hours of Operation Restore Hope (December 1992) provide a useful example. In the wake of the controversy about the landing at Mogadishu, it is important to remember that those reporters on the beach, squinting into the darkness and transmitting shadows, had not coordinated with the joint task force and were essentially outside of the story. In fact, it is probable that the careless use of lights resulted from a basic misunderstanding of military requirements. In contrast, the public affairs plan included more than 20 journalists who spent several days with the Marines in preparation for the operation and actually participated in the amphibious assault.

Once ashore, efforts began to include the "outsiders," such as by arranging interviews with network anchors perched on the roof of the local airport. This action answered the second question by accommodating those who waited for the force to come to them. Thus the complete media relations plan was flexible enough to include, when events permitted, those journalists who were unable or unwilling to join the Marines before coming ashore. For the commander and the public affairs staff, the task is to achieve inclusiveness, not to grant preference.

Thus it would seem that, once an operation begins, the priority effort for the public affairs staff should involve establishing an identifiable information center, appropriate to the situation, to sustain the efforts of those journalists accompanying the units and to communicate with those journalists outside of the operation. Initially, the facility may consist of no more than an officer and NCO with a satellite telephone around

which to build a larger structure. That is sufficient as long as reinforcing personnel and resources arrive at a pace to prevent them from being overwhelmed by the information demand. Such a step ensures that a credible media relations infrastructure is in place which increases the efficiency of the reporting process and reduces the chances of having uninformed and uncooperative journalists disrupting the operation.

In any case, commanders should remain sensitive to the fact that all journalists are increasingly capable of employing sophisticated technology to provide real time coverage of military activities. Therefore, it is important to have public affairs and operational personnel available to furnish brief, but effective, explanations to provide context to the transmitted images and reports. Without such command assistance, there is a chance that misperceptions and misunderstandings can result and that efforts to clarify them can seriously detract from the communications objectives for the mission.

For example, a simple survey of TV network newscasts and daily newspapers reveals that most regularly present identical video and still images of the events in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁴ What sets off specific stories as particularly interesting or compelling are those from journalists on the scene. "Raw" video of operational events, without explanation, doesn't inform very effectively. Once again, today's technology often moves images faster than journalists can provide context, possibly distorting the perceptions of those who view them. A commander's deliberate plan to include journalists reduces the chances for misunderstanding and assists in raising the quality of the reporting and the level of public understanding.

The most effective news media relations programs will be those which provide the widest variety of experiences. While the efforts of "frontline" units may appear to be the most dramatic, the news media and, ultimately, the public are best served by gaining an appreciation for the complexity of all the tasks performed by the force. Additionally, the operational story is best told by shedding the "zero defects" mentality and by exposing reporters to every aspect of the mission and letting them appreciate that military operations are tough challenges where the shape of the final outcome is seldom clear. Making it look easy raises news media and public expectations for future successes and establishes standards which may not be possible to meet. Sounding a theme similar to MG Funk's, Molly Moore provides perspective by writing, "to the men and women who fought it and the commanders who directed it, there was nothing easy about the ground war."¹⁵ Arguably, that story about the "doers" is the most important of any operation and the one which commanders can most affect positively.

Another aspect of the discussion of inclusion concerns escorts. The expectation that all journalists will be accompanied by trained public affairs personnel is unrealistic. In the first

place, there are not enough to match up with the large numbers of journalists who will cover military operations. This was especially true during the large scale efforts of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm; and it was certainly the case in Somalia where the public affairs staff would have had to land before the assault force to ensure a public affairs presence (not a reasonable course of action). Further, public affairs personnel are probably not the most qualified to act as escorts because it is unlikely that they will have the expertise to explain the activities of the diverse units participating in the operation.

The sixth guideline for combat coverage addresses this issue: "Military public affairs officers should act as liaisons but should not interfere with the reporting process."¹⁶ The thrust of this principle is that the responsibility of the public affairs staff is to assist the news media by arranging for their inclusion in operational units and to prepare those units for their arrival. The requirements for navigation, security and logistical support establish the need for escort assistance, but both institutions are best served by having members of the unit serve those functions. These arrangements need not necessarily place special demands on the commander. Reporters can move forward with supply columns or with any transport which inevitably shuttles among organizations in an area of operation. Journalists are there to cover the functioning of the unit, not to impose upon it as visitors or inspectors.

Technology and Support For The News Media Relations Mission.

What is more remarkable about reporters than their numbers is their range of technological capabilities, and commanders have become properly wary about the implications of the live reporting of military activities. In early December 1992, Pete Williams and Dave Bartlett, the president of the Radio and Television News Directors Association, discussed the likelihood of live battlefield or operational coverage before a group of military public affairs officers. While each proposed different timelines (Williams predicted 4-5 years; Bartlett 2-3), they agreed that such an event was not imminent. Yet it was only one week and one hour later that the lights went on at Mogadishu beach as the Marine Reconnaissance Force came ashore, demonstrating the fast pace and unpredictability of advances in technology.

It seems that technology has always been central to the relationship of the military and the news media. The Civil War brought the telegraph which raised serious concerns about the security of troop movements and operations. Carrier pigeons later added a different dimension to news coverage as reporters sent dispatches tied to pigeons' legs. Today, experience teaches that the news media bring with them sophisticated communications equipment, computers, and television and radio resources. Especially in the earliest stages of an operation, they appear

with equipment demonstrating superior capabilities which they can deploy faster and sustain longer than those available to military public affairs staffs. This results in situations in which commanders lag behind the news media in telling the story of their operational efforts.

Legitimate concerns over today's technology recall those expressed about the telegraph 130 years ago. During Operation Desert Storm, controversy arose over the movement of news products, both print and broadcast, from forward deployed reporters to transmission sites in the rear. Current and emerging technologies are no longer tied to arrangements which depend on ground or air transportation. Radio and television signals can be sent over satellite equipment which is increasingly easy to move about the operational area and set up to provide real time coverage. Continuous broadcast transmission capabilities exist using available satellites, and commanders can expect to confront such sophistication today. Emerging technology is resulting in smaller cameras, editing equipment and uplink facilities which will be even easier to deploy, employ and sustain. Cumbersome television satellite equipment which had to be transported on aircraft pallets to Panama and in pickup trucks in the desert soon will be carried in a few small cases by a reporter and photographer. In areas where the infrastructure exists, television images can already be sent over cellular telephones; similar radio capabilities have existed for several years using satellite and cellular telephones.

Immediate reporting capabilities also exist for print reporters who are capable of transmitting news products from their portable computers through satellite telephones to their newsrooms in the United States. Kirk Spitzer of *USA Today* demonstrated this capability on July 20, 1993, using the satellite telephone assigned to the Department of Defense National Media Pool. Major national and international wire news services also possess and deploy this technology. While print reports may appear to lack the immediate drama of still pictures or video, they are regularly picked up and broadcast by radio and television networks. In fact, a print report, transmitted through a 60 pound satellite telephone uplink, may become the trigger for broader news media coverage. Recall also that CNN's dramatic reports from Baghdad, Iraq, on the first night of Operation Desert Storm were sent by telephone; the pictures were added days later.

Of particular concern at the operational and strategic levels is the interest the television networks have expressed in acquiring and broadcasting images obtained from satellite overflights. This capability, demonstrated during coverage of the Persian Gulf War, could be a significant factor during sensitive military operations. As with any technological capability, seeking control over the employment of satellite imagery is largely a futile effort. What is necessary is continuous, candid dialogue with individual reporters and news organizations so that

they clearly understand the consequences of reporting information which violates operational coverage ground rules and which could jeopardize the outcome of the mission or the safety of the force.

The technological capabilities of the news media are an operational fact of life for the commander and public affairs staff as they prepare for the media relations mission. While it is not always necessary to understand fully the functioning of such technology, it is important to recognize that, even in the most austere conditions, information moves from journalist to medium (wire service bulletin, television report, newspaper story, radio broadcast) at incredible speeds. Therefore, it is often true that the most pressing task of communicating through the news media is to be able to provide timely detail and context so that the ultimate audiences can understand, as nearly as possible, the facts and implications of any story. This means that the military must also field a credible technological capability.¹⁷

Those responsible for communicating with the news media must possess the freshest public affairs guidance and unclassified operational information to respond effectively. To do so, public affairs staffs should be equipped with satellite and, as appropriate, cellular telephones; facsimile machines; data transmission devices; and secure transmission means. Currently they are not. Without these capabilities, those designated to communicate with reporters could find themselves the least informed about current situations, and commanders could find their operational efforts characterized as uncoordinated and their spokespersons portrayed as confused. Resulting doubts about the effectiveness of military activities can severely limit the commander's ability to communicate effectively and result in intense efforts to regain credibility rather than disciplined programs to sustain it.

The cost of purchasing current technology is severe for both the military and the news media and often prevents commanders from obtaining the necessary equipment. The acquisition process begins with a complete assessment of necessary capabilities and a survey of the technology available to support the news media relations mission. It may be found that the leasing of technology is more practical than the actual purchase. There are several advantages to this approach. First, leasing will generally be less expensive, resulting in lower fixed costs. Additionally, leasing offers flexibility as mixes of necessary technology can be developed to support specific missions. Finally, this approach assures that the most current technology is available. Purchased equipment becomes obsolescent rather quickly; establishing and updating leases for capabilities will ensure that commanders are best able to communicate through the news media.

But technology is merely an aspect of the larger issue of support. Like the other operational functions, those performing news media relations tasks must be able to deploy, concentrate

essential resources and communicate in those areas most central to the public's understanding of the military mission. Once the point(s) of maximum news media interest has been identified, the commander should assign a high priority to respond to that interest. To borrow a sports analogy, the effort to engage the news media using a man-to-man, matchup "defense" is futile; there are simply too many of them. By establishing responsive resource "zones," commanders can accommodate reporters who enter their areas of responsibility and then pass them on to other commanders. This approach also provides the flexibility to manage surges of journalists at particular points of interest by shifting assets from less committed areas. This can only be done if commanders are thinking forward and preparing in advance to establish an infrastructure which provides trained public affairs personnel with appropriate communications, transportation, and logistics assets.

This requirement is particularly challenging as no organization, regardless of size, can accomplish this task without reinforcement. Most importantly, all support should be provided on a dedicated basis since it is impractical to rely on those assets deployed for other operational tasks which are often given higher priorities. Thus the planning process must specify the public affairs support requirements, identify the sources (components, supporting CINCs, the Military Departments), and deploy the resources at a pace to meet the information requirements of the journalists on the ground.

To enhance their news media relations plans, commanders, especially those at the operational level, must also have access to timely summaries of print and broadcast reports prepared by the news media. In the earliest stages of an operation, the daily transmission of the *Early Bird* news summary product from the Pentagon should meet this requirement. As the operation matures, providing this capability will be a major challenge as it requires current technology such as facsimile machines, wire service printers, television and radio sets, and downlink facilities to obtain the necessary reports.

Commanders at every level should be interested in what is being said about their efforts. Those at the tactical level will often learn of these from the reporters integrated with their units or from news summaries several days old. They don't have to like or agree with what is being said about them, but they do have to understand what is being reported. After all, the public obtains its information about the operation from the news media, and those reports help to shape public perceptions and opinion about the command's effectiveness. An efficient media relations program is aware of any differences between what the command knows to be true and what the news media are reporting. Relying on technology, their own assessments, and their news media relations plans, commanders and their public affairs staffs have to work continuously to ensure that the inevitable gap is as narrow as possible.

In an exercise environment, commanders and their public affairs staffs are usually able to establish and operate such complete infrastructures, but that is often after several years of preparation. The track record is not as successful when the planning and deployment time frames are compressed to a few days as in a crisis. To date, for instance, there has never been a consistent solution for establishing communications with public affairs personnel in the earliest stages of an operation.¹⁸ Public affairs staffs have had to rely on borrowing satellite phones from reporters (Somalia) or struggling with undependable indigenous communications systems as in Macedonia where only 12 commercial international telephone lines exist (July 1993). Thus it is necessary that all contingency planning specifically identifies the necessary assets and builds their movement into all deployment schedules. Timeliness is particularly important because, as discussed, reporters will probably be in the area of operations when the forces arrive. Failure to anticipate and respond to this presence will shift the initiative to the news media and distract the commander who then must expend considerable effort to catch up rather than to communicate as an equal partner in the process.

By maximizing their technology, creating their own logistics support, and renting their own vehicles (as witnessed in the desert, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and elsewhere), it appears that the news media have met most of their own resource requirements. Yet commanders can always assume that journalists will call upon them to provide specific assistance such as medical care or potable water. Commanders should anticipate these situations and develop response strategies. Such planning will also be a factor when unique requirements evolve such as during those contingencies which call for chemical protection equipment.

Furthermore, while commanders should focus their primary support efforts on their own public affairs infrastructure, a review of the guidelines for the coverage of DoD operations reveals some responsibility for supporting the news media. In those situations in which "open and independent reporting" is the norm, military communications, transportation, and logistical support should be provided on a space-available basis.¹⁹ There are, however, other factors which affect such support. For instance, when transmission security is a factor, commanders may establish a ground rule that reporters will use available military communications to file their stories. If discussed in advance, this arrangement would probably work, but increased priority must be given to those stories to ensure timeliness and reduce suspicion. Similarly, commanders may find it desirable to provide journalists with transportation to avoid having brightly-colored, light-reflective rental vehicles accompany ground forces. Each of these is situationally dependent and will require individual judgments. In those cases when it is necessary to form news media pools, commanders assume full responsibility for news media support.²⁰ This reality and the demands it would

place on limited resources should guide commanders as they assess the need for such pools.

News Media Relations Support Structure.

Organizing for the media relations mission requires the same disciplined planning as any other operational task. As noted earlier, failure to do so limits the response capabilities of the command and can result in underinformed news reports which can misrepresent the direction and effectiveness of the military effort. This lack of preparation serves neither the military forces nor the reporters sent to cover them. Thus it is not unusual to find that reporters are equally interested in ensuring that procedures and facilities exist to facilitate effective news coverage.

Support efforts for both the public affairs staff and the news media merge at the information bureau established by the commander and subordinate to the command's public affairs officer. This will generally be a Joint Information Bureau (JIB) which supports the Joint Task Force commander; component commanders should also set up service-unique facilities to represent their own roles in the larger effort and to assist journalists seeking to visit forward units. In those operations conducted with international coalition or alliance partners, commanders will operate Combined or Allied Press Information Centers (CIB/APIC). Regardless of type, these facilities serve as the primary source of information, transportation, communications, and logistical support for all aspects of the media relations mission.

Reporters entering an area of operations will normally seek out a JIB, CIB, or APIC to obtain information about the developing situation and to request assistance in gaining access to the deployed forces. Contingency planning should set the establishment of the information bureau as a priority mission with the deployment pace of necessary resources tied to the assessed level of news media interest. The size of the public affairs effort should be linked to the anticipated news media presence, not to the size of the military force. Thus in June and July of 1993, the public affairs challenge was to develop a public affairs presence appropriate to the news media coverage of the initial deployment of U.S. forces into Macedonia; the fact that the force of 300 ground troops would not normally require public affairs support was not a factor. The arrival of 20 members of the Berlin Brigade on July 5, 1993 triggered considerable international news coverage, with video images appearing very quickly on CNN. Additionally, each course of action should allow for surges of news media interest at various locations within the area of operation and at specific times in the movement of the force (recall that the coverage from Macedonia faded soon after the arrival of the main body of troops).

Such situations could be addressed with the efficient deployment and employment of whatever support resources are available. For instance, the British media plan for Operation Desert Storm called for the placement of a Forward Transmission Unit (FTU) in the vicinity of their division headquarters. It consisted of processing and uplink capabilities for both still and video products which greatly reduced the transmission time between the FTU and permanent facilities located outside the area of operations. Though often subjected to a system of security review more restrictive than that imposed by U.S. forces, British journalists were able to provide timely and dramatic reports without venturing very far from the units to which they were assigned.

Operations Security (OPSEC).

Logically, technology which allows for the real time reporting of military activities has enormous implications for OPSEC. The December 9, 1992 beach scene in Somalia represented the essence of every commander's fears over the violation of operations security. The news media have since accused the military of overreaction because there were no negative consequences. In fact, one television producer claimed that the use of lights was an act of deterrence because any hostile gunmen could clearly see the imposing nature of the forces coming ashore.²¹ This "no harm, no foul" justification is of no solace. That no one was attacked or injured was because of variables beyond the control of both the military and the news media. Quite simply, the event was benign only because no gunman decided to take advantage of the illuminated target area containing both the U.S. Marines and the news media whose coverage had helped to bring them there.

Yet there are other troublesome, though less obvious, examples of OPSEC violations. At 2:30 PM on January 13, 1993, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater announced that Allied aircraft had attacked a variety of air defense facilities in Southern Iraq 75 minutes earlier. Little of his information about this classified operation was new. That was because two hours earlier, the Reuters News Service had broken the story that the attack had been launched; this report originated in Washington, DC, not on the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* or from some unidentified airbase. For the next two hours, CNN and others competed to provide details about the attack by calling on their various military experts. They were able to provide disturbingly accurate reports of the numbers of aircraft and the types and locations of targets. After Fitzwater's announcement, the only fresh information about the attack and, most specifically, those who conducted it flowed from journalists embarked on the aircraft carrier. Much of that reporting was quite good, reinforcing the importance of including reporters with the force.

During the "CBS Evening News" on June 16, 1993, National Security Correspondent David Martin, drawing on his well-placed sources, presented a remarkably complete outline of the U.N. operation against a warlord in Mogadishu, Somalia. This action differed from the earlier example because Martin's report aired after the operation began. Under similar conditions several days earlier, Jamie McIntyre, CNN's Military Affairs Correspondent, and the CNN staff delayed the reporting of operational information they had obtained because of concern that to do so could directly warn the target of the U.N. effort. Although perhaps not up to military OPSEC standards, each demonstrates sensitivity to military security concerns.

While most journalists would not compromise OPSEC intentionally, there is always the chance for an inadvertent release of information by inexperienced or careless journalists. It seems inevitable that information will leak, and journalists understandably believe that they are being given information so that it can be reported. It simply makes no sense to provide classified information to journalists and expect that they will secure it for you. There will be cases, especially at the strategic and operational levels, where "senior officials" will provide sensitive information to assist reporters in telling the complete story, but only after they have agreed to withhold its release until after a time specified in the ground rules or provided the reporters will remain with the unit until OPSEC concerns are no longer relevant to the specific situation (operational and tactical levels).

Because of the pervasiveness of news media presence, the speed of technology, and the apparent inevitability of information leaks at the strategic level, traditional efforts at ensuring OPSEC are being overtaken by events beyond the control of commanders. This is especially true at the operational and tactical levels where intelligence and sensitive information are the most perishable. The solution to much of the concern over security of information lies in a comprehensive plan for the inclusion of news media, reinforced by ground rules and supported by procedures for providing explanation and context about the sensitivity and complexity of the military actions. Penalties for OPSEC violations are also important.

In establishing OPSEC parameters and outlining the consequences of reporting sensitive information, both the military and the news media should consider the following questions: Would the release or reporting of specific information assist the enemy in being more prepared than he would have been otherwise? Would it compromise a deception plan? Identify the main effort? Are the facts the military is providing or the news media are gathering merely helpful in understanding the complete story, or are they central to the success of the operation? In other words, would the disclosure of this information affect the course of events?

Applying these standards to the earlier examples, it would appear that the intense coverage before the airstrike in January posed a significant threat to OPSEC, while the release of details once the U.N. operations began was less likely to influence the outcome. That none of the reports apparently affected the course of events is not relevant; a benign result does not justify the reporting of information whose knowledge could have changed the outcome. Prior notification could increase enemy preparedness and should be a matter of common concern for both the news media and the military.

Journalists often argue that some events, such as the launching of aircraft, are clearly visible to any observer and that their reporting could probably be matched by a phone call by an enemy agent. Perhaps, but it is also very likely that the "real time" reporting by radio and television could reach the enemy's decision makers much faster and more efficiently than a phone call, once again confirming the importance of technology.

It is clear that the mere presence of a reporter in an operational area exposes that person to important information. Further, it is apparent that a journalist can only report the complete story if provided background information to understand the full context. Personal acquaintance and trust may often ensure that sensitive information is not revealed. When such credibility does not exist, it may well be that certain reporters can be told little or nothing in advance. To preclude doubt or the possibility of confusion, specific ground rules should be developed in each situation to identify that information of concern and specify the parameters for its release.

The fourth Guideline For The Coverage of DoD Operations addresses both the establishment of ground rules and the need for sanctions should they be violated.²² The facts that both institutions have acknowledged that security concerns are important enough to establish reasonable limits on reporting and that suspension and expulsion can be legitimate remedies if these are ignored encourage commanders and their staffs to outline a set of ground rules appropriate to the mission and to make them central to the inclusion arrangements with the news media.

There has been considerable discussion about the need for the "Security Review" of news products to ensure that ground rules are not violated. No mention of this issue is made in the guidelines because the DoD and news media representatives could not agree on wording that was acceptable. Thus there will always be the potential for controversy. In the wake of the Persian Gulf War, to date, there have been no instances of security review. However, commanders have periodically mandated that news stories be embargoed (delayed) as part of the ground rules until an operation has passed its most critical moment. The exceptional reports from those journalists deployed on the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* on January 13, 1993, embargoed until after the White House announcement, represent a classic success story.

There are new standards for OPSEC emerging. For example, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff conducted a detailed operational briefing several days *before* the Marines arrived in Somalia. That session reflected an awareness that openness or transparency of action were more appropriate than steps to conceal information. Logically, each situation will require commanders to tailor specific ground rules to their assigned mission. Those for a combat operation (Desert Storm) probably won't resemble those for humanitarian assistance (Somalia), and certainly won't look anything like those for disaster relief (Florida).

Education and Training.

Both the military and the news media are woefully deficient in their knowledge of the other institution and in their training for those tasks necessary to make and report news during a military operation. What is particularly alarming about this situation is that the personalities of those involved in the relationship have a huge impact on the success of the media relations mission. While the military can only directly affect its own behavior, it has a stake in improving the level of news media understanding and including them in realistic exercise scenarios. With fewer opportunities to serve in the military and the continuing trend in the news media to generalists, the cultural gap between the military and the news media can only widen. It is important to understand, however, that the news media are concerned about their own deficiencies.²³

Because they want to retain their most experienced reporters at the Pentagon and at the theater headquarters, news media decision makers will send their best qualified nonmilitary experts to cover the troops in the field.²⁴ Thus commanders and their public affairs staffs must prepare to accommodate reporters with limited expertise in situations of great stress and uncertainty. At other times, such as in educational settings and during exercises, it is in the best interest of both institutions to increase contact, mutual understanding and trust and to decrease suspicion. At the tactical and operational levels, the most likely venues for those least experienced, reporters should understand military organizations and basic military doctrine. As often as possible they should train with military forces to develop their own field skills, determine their personal equipment needs, and come to understand how individuals function together to form effective units which work to achieve assigned objectives.

Of greatest importance to the success of the military's news media relations program is the commander's commitment to be as accepting of close news media scrutiny during an operation as of the favorable publicity available during an exercise. They are dramatically different environments. During an exercise,

reporters tend to focus on the efforts of units to perfect their operational skills, and there is more time to explain, educate and inform journalists about what they are experiencing. Further, most stories are features which tend to be favorable in tone. By contrast, the tension and pace associated with operational deployments do not always allow for the cordial relationships typically associated with exercises. Questions and requests for information, normally welcomed by the military during exercises as opportunities to explain, are often legitimately regarded as unwelcome distractions during an operation and can create friction among those involved. Additionally, the uncertainty of operational situations not governed by structured exercise scenarios can result in stories which are not as comfortable or as forgiving as those from exercises.

In an adaptation of a familiar principle, commanders should ensure that exercise scenarios cause their organizations to train as they would communicate in an actual contingency. More specifically, it is imperative that commanders prepare themselves and their units to communicate operationally by exercising those specific tasks most related to the media relations mission. This begins by ensuring that public affairs personnel have roles to play in both command post exercises, which hone assessment, planning, and response skills, and live field training exercises where the logistical support of the news media is a central feature.

Even in the absence of a dedicated public affairs scenario, media relations training is an integral part of any command post exercise. Since virtually every event, issue, plan, and decision contains some public affairs aspects, commanders and their staffs should derive exercise news media "play" from the rest of the exercise flow. Without the need to actually communicate with reporters, commanders and their public affairs staffs can increase their proficiency in assessing the public affairs implications of evolving courses of action, develop and coordinate appropriate guidance, issue exercise news releases, and "establish" and equip information bureaus. A CPX can also assist commanders in becoming comfortable with reviewing and, as appropriate, responding to events and perceptions reported through the news media (an aspect which should be built into every exercise scenario). Additionally, the kind of precise staffing necessary for the development and deployment of public affairs resources can best take place in the CPX environment. The staging of an exercise news conference, to include preparation and rehearsal, would also be useful because, after all, such sessions have become standard features of every operational deployment.

If well-conceived, many of the irritants which appear during actual deployments should reveal themselves during exercises. That they often do not is evidence of the artificiality often seen in public affairs exercise efforts. It is understandable that live exercise planning generally focuses on a few

highly-visible and interesting events to attract reporters who may not otherwise have the inclination or the time to attend. Yet the support for journalists who participate should go beyond rehearsed exercise briefings and the observation of those events from areas marked off by white engineer tape. The exercise reliance on elaborate information facilities; numerous telephones, facsimile machines and photocopiers; vans, buses, and on-call helicopters; and full public affairs staffs is often artificial and can create expectations that such support is always appropriate and, more naively, always available. Generally, this is not relevant training because of its artificiality. As with any operational task, exercise organizations, equipment and procedures for news media relations should be adapted to resemble as closely as possible those required for an actual mission. The administrative treatment of reporters should not be confused with the demands of news media relations during an actual deployment.

Journalists attending exercises should be treated as they would when they arrive to cover military forces conducting any mission along the continuum of operations. They should be informed of the activities of all units involved in the exercise; included in the normal functioning of those units to the extent that they actually live with them for several days; transported in organic tactical vehicles; and encouraged to conduct interviews and file stories. To the extent possible, such an approach can yield a sense of common effort which echoes the shared experience of those war correspondents who came ashore at Normandy. Like military forces, those journalists who have experienced rigorous training deployments, such as to the National Training Center, speak coherently and enthusiastically of their new understanding and increased skill proficiency. Such positive response should be reinforced through sustained contacts between the military and journalists.

Various initiatives have sought to assist journalists in understanding the complexities of military life and of military operations. The annual "Media Days" at the various war colleges and the periodic appearance of journalists before military audiences generally result in brief epiphanies of understanding, but they seldom survive the pressures of an actual deployment. Thus a broader agenda of training opportunities like those outlined earlier and detailed background briefings during actual operations will always be needed to ensure that journalists are prepared to the extent possible to cover the story. More accurate, complete and interesting stories will result as reporters learn about and understand the military culture and how it functions.

Additionally, the military can only benefit from increased exposure to journalists. It is vitally important that these experiences are balanced in their presentation and not geared to reinforce stereotypes. An Associated Press story, in May 1993, reported that training in Germany to prepare U.S. troops to

deploy to the former Yugoslavia included "`reporters and cameramen' who pop up and try to make the soldiers say something outrageous."²⁵ The training technique is sound, but its tone could be unnecessarily threatening. While meetings with journalists can be stressful and risky, the vast majority of such encounters will be simple conversations, constrained by OPSEC concerns, designed to obtain information to produce news stories. Efforts to reduce the fear and distrust of journalists are far more useful than those that reinforce the myth that the role of the news media is to undermine the military effort and to discredit the members of the force.

Media relations training, most often emphasizing the principle of "Security at the Source," is necessary for those operating at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, and should be provided in both service schools and exercise environments. The dialogue between the military and the news media is not simply the concern of the public affairs staff. In fact, such dialogue is less important to reporters who are increasingly interested in speaking directly with those making the decisions and performing the tasks of the operation. The early realization and acceptance of that fact argue strongly for a broad-based orientation to the news media and energetic scenarios which develop and exercise skills necessary to sustain the dialogue.

Any training agenda must consider the increasingly international character of security missions and news media coverage. In the wake of the controversy over the beach scene in Mogadishu, one explanation offered by the news media was that it was only the foreign journalists who were using lights. Such explanations are nonsense, and such distinctions are no longer relevant. Commanders and their public affairs staffs must be sensitive to the reality of full international coverage as represented by CNN, the BBC World Service (radio and, now, television), SkyNews (British), and Reuters television. Of course, various wire services (notably Reuters and the Associated Press) have long had international impact, but never to the degree generated by contemporary broadcast news media. Yet Americans in several cities awoke on July 6, 1993 to front page pictures (some in color) of U.S. troops arriving in Macedonia. The source of those photographs emphasized the international nature of news: they were provided by Agence France-Presse.

Recent experience has also taught much about the challenges of working with public information officials (the international term) from other nations. In addition to Coalition efforts in Desert Shield/Storm and Somalia (before and during the U.N. mission), American public affairs personnel have participated with their NATO allies during Operation Southern Guard (the NATO response during the Persian Gulf War), the naval blockade of Serbia and Montenegro, and Operation Deny Flight over Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the past, only the United States and Canada have fielded trained public affairs/public information

personnel; that is no longer true. Several NATO nations have developed strong cadres of public information specialists with experience in NATO, U.N., WEU (Western European Union), and other combined operations. This relationship is further complicated by new information initiatives from the Russian Federation and other nations with whom the United States has not maintained traditional contacts. Training programs and exercise scenarios must be developed to ensure the most efficient possible coverage of those international military operations in which the United States will play important roles.

Missions and Messages.

Once again, virtually every military activity will have public affairs implications because of news media and public interest; this is true even if OPSEC and other factors dictate that no public discussion is possible other than a standard disclaimer about not discussing security measures or future operations. Regardless of mission, commanders can expect the predeployment and deployment phases to attract considerable news media attention. This fact offers commanders and their public affairs staffs excellent opportunities to take the initiative in the media relations mission. Even if there is no public acknowledgement that specific units have been alerted,²⁶ there will be enough visible signatures to lead to speculation. During the deployment to Southwest Asia, the presence of large numbers of soldiers in civilian stores purchasing sunscreen and bottled water clearly indicated an alert status.²⁷ To retain credibility, some explanation should be available when the reporters call.

Most importantly, efforts in these initial stages can allow commanders to achieve some early objectives at a time when commanders can expect reporters to be functioning at full tempo.²⁸ As appropriate, deployment plans should allocate seats for local and regional journalists to travel with the force into the operational area. First, this step ensures that news media are included with the force, an important initial goal; there is no reason to wait until arrival to accomplish this task. Additionally, those journalists who have covered the organization regularly and perhaps have participated in various exercises are more likely to be familiar with the military in general and with the deploying units in particular; are immediately available for inclusion because they live close to the deployment base; and are particularly helpful to the total public affairs effort because their stories are sent back to the towns and regions in which the force lives and assist in informing those who remain behind, including the families.

In our uncertain international security environment, the military is facing a variety of unfamiliar challenges. Preparations for news media relations will vary significantly depending on the mission, OPSEC concerns, and the tone of the

message to be communicated. In addition to familiar combat contingencies, commanders could also find themselves as participants in complex crisis management efforts, humanitarian aid and disaster relief missions, and peacekeeping/peacemaking/peace-enforcement operations. Strict limits on OPSEC which are familiar in combat contingencies give way to transparency in humanitarian aid, disaster relief and peacekeeping operations.

All military missions provide the types of activities and information on which journalists inevitably focus. Regardless of circumstances, the first rule of communicating with the news media is to speak within the limits of one's own expertise and responsibility. A very inefficient approach is to prepare a list of subjects that anyone speaking with a reporter may discuss. In fact, it is usually easier to focus on those issues respondents should *not* talk about. In general, the relationship between the reporter and the soldier is simple: That which is said is reported. Thus it is important that military personnel understand the concept of "security at the source" which establishes the standard that information known to be classified or sensitive should not be provided to a reporter.

Since every mission will have different OPSEC concerns, operational planning should establish and update subjects which should be candidly acknowledged as sensitive and, thus, not subject to discussion. Within the context of "security at the source," the following provides general guidance for response:

- Who: Which units? What equipment? Weapons systems?
- What: Performed what missions?
- Where: Self-explanatory.
- When: Could be sensitive. Discuss in advance? Announce as it happens? Wait?
- Why: Emphasize the general mission statement. Provide context.
- How: Discuss doctrine, operational art, and tactics (a good opportunity to educate).

To the extent possible, this information should be disseminated through the public affairs guidance (PAG) prepared for each mission; equally essential is the need to update the guidance regularly. Once again, an intelligent assessment of what is truly sensitive opens up opportunities for the open discussion of all other issues, emphasizing the full range and complexity of the military effort.²⁹ Commanders and their public affairs staffs "possess" the story and can most efficiently communicate by facilitating inclusion of the reporters and assisting in their understanding of what they are experiencing and reporting.

The Way Ahead.

Traditionally, one of the functions of the news media has been to provide the first draft of history through the reporting of the events, issues and personalities of their times. While the emerging trend is for journalists to become participants in those events, definers of the issues and some of the most influential personalities, their basic role remains unchanged. In response to the pace and complexity of events and issues and the speed of the reporting process, it will be increasingly important for the military to become active, visible participants in the dialogue leading to the production of news reports. It is no longer sufficient to remain passive in the face of news media scrutiny, reluctantly accept the visit of a reporter, and then complain about the results. The facts are that the age of activist journalism places special demands on the time and resources of the commander and often results in confrontations with the military.

There is a view that the tension between the military and the news media will diminish with the evolution of younger officers, NCOs, and enlisted personnel who have matured, not just watching television, but by having their growth and development recorded on home video cameras. While it is perhaps inevitable that the comfort level of the military with the news media will thus improve, this trend will be matched by ever decreasing levels of familiarity and understanding which young reporters will have for their contemporaries in the military. Further, budget constraints on news coverage have led to the practice of "parachuting" in which reporters are "dropped" into a story with little preparation and are left there only long enough to shoot some video, take a few pictures, and record a variety of observations before being extracted and assigned to another story. Such superficial reporting could have a significant impact on public perceptions about the operation. Thus the need for regular contact through educational opportunities, training visits and exercises will remain at least as important as now.

This is especially true as the news media's impact on the public agenda and public discussion continues to grow, but in new ways unfamiliar today. While traditional television and radio networks, newspapers and magazines may become less relevant, emerging computer technology which will enable citizens to select their own print and broadcast stories from an extensive menu of news services will open fresh opportunities to reach the public, but only if the message and the messenger communicate credibility and retain the public's trust. Obviously it is not possible for military leaders to speak personally with each member of the public, domestic or international. Thus the bond of interdependence strengthens between the military as the source of the message and the news media as the messenger.

Traditional concerns about technology will also remain central to the relationship between the military and the news media as will its increasing impact on OPSEC and public understanding. Additionally, because of new capabilities, the public forum for the military will no longer be limited to those local journalists who live around bases or even to the national reporters who cover security issues at the Pentagon. News media coverage has come to rely on a vast international system of electronic images, text and data which ensures that stories about events in the most remote areas can be made quickly available to any interested news organization. The historic arrival of the first NATO aircraft in Baku, Azerbaijan, on February 5, 1992, was covered by a young radio reporter who was employed as a "stringer" for an American radio network. She then produced two sets of reports and interviews: one for her local audience and one for transmission to the United States.³⁰

Ultimately, however, technology only affects the speed of the reporting process and not the quality of the stories themselves. Both institutions will continue to share a common interest in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of every report *before* it is transmitted over a satellite telephone, video uplink or data line. For the military commander, this will involve the development of a comprehensive news media plan and the commitment of knowledgeable personnel and dedicated resources at the earliest stages of the dialogue with journalists, whoever they are and whatever news organization they represent. Chasing a story once it is produced is far less efficient because it requires the correction of misperceptions and the repeated restatement of the military position, distracting commanders from the events and stories which continue to move forward. Typically, a delayed response which focuses on a published news media report sacrifices the initiative to the reporters, confuses the public and contributes to the persistent tension with the news media, thus making the next story more difficult to tell.

In thinking forward about the news media relations mission, commanders should not fear the inevitable news report. What they should be concerned about are those stories which contain factual errors, misrepresent the goals of an operation, or create false expectations for performance. Fortunately, commanders can affect the quality of reporting by preparing a tailored package of public affairs policies, plans and support packages appropriate to each assigned operation. Normally, commanders will find that most journalists are interested in improving the quality of their own reporting even if it means adapting to reasonable ground rules and procedures outlined by the military. Yet commanders, operational staffs and public affairs practitioners can only directly affect their own assessments, policy judgements, planning and news media relations decisions. They cannot control the news media's reactions or behavior and should not waste effort, time and resources to do so.

Thinking forward takes the initiative by seeking confident

engagement with the news media rather than uncertain avoidance or defensive conflict. This includes holding reporters to standards of accuracy and completeness and developing strategies to "correct the record" if events or comments are misrepresented. The relationship between the military and the news media can allow for both institutions to act as equal partners in the communications process. From the military's perspective, the effort should be directed toward assessing the levels of news media interest to be expected in any assigned mission; determining how many reporters can be accommodated in the operational units and what procedures are necessary to assist in their inclusion; and identifying what technology is required, and, like all support packages, ensuring that it is available early enough to affect positively the news media relations environment. Central to the entire effort is the need to make certain that the public affairs plan efficiently supports the commander's scheme of maneuver to include the requirements of OPSEC.

Ultimately, of course, the goal is that the next time the lights come on, either literally or metaphorically, the situation will be interpreted as an opportunity to tell the military story, and that the soldiers, regardless of position, will be trained well enough to respond candidly, explain effectively, and continue the mission.

ENDNOTES

1. Comments made at The Admiral Nimitz Foundation Symposium, "The Role of the War Correspondent," San Antonio, Texas, May 5, 1993.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Department of Defense Directive 5122.5, *Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)*, August 4, 1983, paragraph F4. Expanded on in (Draft) Department of Defense Directive, *Joint Public Affairs Operations* and Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), *Doctrine For Public Affairs in Joint Operations*.

5. General Eisenhower quotation extracted from regulations for war correspondents accompanying Allied Expeditionary Forces in World War II, 1944.

6. Plaque located during a personal trip to Normandy, France, in May 1990.

7. LTG Boomer's response to a question after a presentation he and his U.S. Marine Corps briefing team made at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) at Casteau, Belgium, June 1992.

8. Department of Defense Directive 5400.XX (Draft), *Joint Public Affairs Operations*, paragraph D.4.(b).

9. John R. MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1992, p. 159.

10. Major General Paul E. Funk, U.S. Army, "Accommodating the Wartime Media: A Commander's Task," *Military Review*, April 1993, p. 79.

11. Department of Defense Directive 5122.5, Enclosure 3 (May 19, 1992) and new DoD Directive and Doctrine. I have included them here for ease in reference:

Guidelines For Coverage of DoD Operations

1. Open and independent reporting will be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations.

2. Pools are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. operations. But pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of early access to a military operation. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity—within 24 to 36 hours when possible. The arrival of early-access pools will not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists in the area.

3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for specific events, such as those at extremely remote locations or where space is limited.

4. Journalists in a combat zone will be credentialed by the U.S. military and will be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect U.S. Forces and their operations. Violation of the ground rules can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion from the combat zone of the journalist involved. News organizations will make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operation and to make them familiar with U.S. military operations.

5. Journalists will be provided access to military units. Special operations restrictions may limit access in some cases.

6. Military public affairs officers should act as liaisons but should not interfere with the reporting process.

7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders will permit journalists to ride on military vehicles

and aircraft whenever feasible. The military will be responsible for the transportation of pools.

8. Consistent with its capabilities, the military will supply PAOs with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and will make these facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage. In cases when government facilities are unavailable, journalists will, as always, file by any other means available. The military will not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.

9. These principles will apply as well to the operations of the standing DoD National Media Pool System.

12. Various conversations with Mr. Robert W. Taylor, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) and Colonel William I. Mulvey, U.S. Army, Director of the Joint Information Bureau in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, during the latter stages of Operation Desert Shield and all of Operation Desert Storm; I have worked for both. The number was arrived at by assuming three reporters per ground maneuver brigade and three for other divisional units and the headquarters.

13. In a February 8, 1993 discussion with reporters from the Reuters News Service and CNN, both agreed that commanders who have included journalists within their organizations should not be expected to exceed a reasonable number by accepting more. They also promised that they would continue to seek access to other units which had not included journalists. Thus a responsible assessment of the number of reporters who can be accommodated increases a commander's credibility when dealing with others who appear in their unit areas.

14. A simple survey of news coverage on various networks, both domestic and international, reveals that the same video images repeat themselves, apparently the result of the tape being sold to multiple news media outlets. The only difference (besides the quality of the reporting) lies in the different logos which appear as a result of the Persian Gulf War (to prevent networks from pirating video) and are usually placed in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

15. Molly Moore, *A Woman At War: Storming Kuwait With the U.S. Marines*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993, p. xiii.

16. Guidelines for Coverage of DoD Operations (Endnote 11).

17. Department of Defense Directive (Draft), *Joint Public Affairs Operations*, Enclosure 2, paragraph 3, contains a detailed

listing of necessary capabilities. Also included in Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), *Doctrine For Public Affairs in Joint Operations*, Chapter IV, paragraph 4.

18. U.S. European Command has developed a deployable resource package for the operation of a Joint Information Bureau. Popularly known as the "JIB In A Box," it should provide the bulk of the required assets, especially those for the earliest stages of an operation. The concept awaits final funding and acquisition. Such an arrangement would be useful for every combatant commander.

19. Guidelines for Coverage of DoD Operations.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Personal discussion with a network television producer (assigned to the Pentagon) some 20 minutes after the first Marines arrived on the beach at Mogadishu, Somalia.

22. Guidelines for Coverage of DoD Operations.

23. Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, Cantigny Conference Series, *Reporting the Next War*, Chicago, Illinois: Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 1992, pp.17-19. Discusses shortfalls in background and proposes various solutions for consideration.

24. Comments made by several news bureau chiefs during a discussion on alternatives for educating reporters, held at the Capitol Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC, April 27, 1993.

25. Wire service report from the Associated Press covering preparations of U.S. forces at Hohenfels, Germany, May 11, 1993.

26. During the initial stages of Operation Restore Hope in Somalia (December 1992), public affairs guidance authorized those units alerted to participate to acknowledge their status. This openness will not always be appropriate to the mission.

27. Obtained from discussions with a news director and reporters at KCEN-TV in Waco, Texas, and WTHR-TV in Indianapolis, Indiana.

28. At least one American television network has established a "response team" which can rapidly deploy within six hours to a developing story. Other than the public affairs escorts who would accompany the DoD National Media Pool, no similar capability currently exists to support deploying U.S. forces in their preparations to meet with reporters.

29. Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), Appendix B, "Guidelines For Discussion With the News Media," provides assistance for those developing response strategies for contacts with journalists.

30. I was the information officer on that NATO mission which placed American liaison teams on the ground in preparation for the humanitarian airlift to the former Soviet Union. We had a similar experience with a television crew in Ulan Ude (a Siberian city of the Russian Federation).

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