

CANTIGNY CONFERENCE SERIES

Conference Report



Narrowing the Gap

Military, Media and the Iraq War

MCCORMICK TRIBUNE FOUNDATION

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The conference series offers the opportunity for collaboration between the foundation and other institutions or associations that are addressing issues consonant with the foundation's mission.

Conferences are conducted on the grounds of Cantigny, the McCormick estate, located in Wheaton, Illinois, approximately 35 miles from Chicago.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation is dedicated to a democratic society and its quality of life.

Its mission is:

- **To improve the social and economic environment.**
- **To encourage a free and responsible discussion of issues affecting the nation.**
- **To enhance the effectiveness of American education.**
- **To stimulate responsible citizenship.**

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Narrowing the Gap
Military, Media and the Iraq War

By Alicia C. Shepard

Narrowing the Gap: Military, Media and the Iraq War

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Narrowing the Gap

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Foreword

For the seventh time since the end of the first Gulf War in 1992, the McCormick Tribune Foundation gathered senior members of the military and media to review recent developments in the military-media relationship and assess possible improvements.

The first conference, just after Desert Storm, was a contentious and fiery event. The relationship between military and media had been so rocky during that war that raw feelings and flaring tempers were on vivid display. Things were so heated that at times we were afraid fists were going to fly. But the mood of the conference only affirmed the reason for holding it: there was a wide gulf between military and media that was too important to ignore.

The most recent conference, just three months after the official end of the second Iraq war, was quite different. In fact, we worried beforehand that it might well become a love fest that would lack spark. While we needn't have worried about that, it was clear that the experience of the 2003 war was markedly more positive for both military and media than 1992. At the conference, journalists and officers spoke to each other with mutual respect. They told of fruitful cooperation and joint planning that benefited both sides. They easily discussed ways to make things better next time. Not surprisingly, they disagreed on many points. But the hostility and distrust that was so pervasive in 1992 was just not there at this conference.

There are many reasons for the change. One of the most impor-

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tant was that in the 2003 war, the administration did not follow the lion-tamer model of media management used in the first Gulf War. Instead, they designed and conducted a bold new “embedding” experiment, during which they helped hundreds of journalists live and work side-by-side with uniformed personnel. In the process, people on both sides of the military-media divide got to know, understand and even respect each other. The gap between them narrowed. And the American public got an unusually close look at the American military in action.

There was much speculation at the conference about whether this embedding program would become a template for future military-media relations. It’s far too early to tell whether any of the changes in military-media practices will endure. It’s possible none will. (In fact, already the media has backed away from widespread “embedding” and the military has tilted back toward trying to impose greater control on media access.) If history is any guide, the way the military, the administration and the media relate in the next war will be quite different; it will be influenced by political conditions, the nature of the war and a whole host of other factors.

Nonetheless, whether or not specific policies endure, positive ripples in military-media relations will be felt for years because of the 2003 experience. Why? For one simple reason: there are now hundreds of journalists and military people who have had a deep and positive experience with each other. This, in itself, corrects a major post-Vietnam problem—that with the advent of the all-volunteer force and infrequent major wars, few in the media had military experience or even knew people who had. And few military people had experience with media—and the experience they had was often negative. Military and media lived in largely separate worlds, intersecting rarely.

Our experience watching this relationship indicates there will always be tension between military and media. It’s inevitable and

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ingrained in the conflicting roles these two institutions play in wartime. But the tensions can be managed and frictions lessened when the two sides come to understand each other. Embedding and the boot camps the Pentagon conducted fostered understanding. Contact and continued dialog do make a difference.

Thanks are in order to two people who work day-in and day-out to ensure that the public understands the nation's national security choices. Harry Disch, president of the Center for Media and Security Ltd., has expertly organized every Cantigny military-media conference since 1997, and builds media understanding of national security policy issues with his Defense Writers Group and off-the-record dinner discussions for broadcast journalists. And John Hamre, president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, helped make the conference discussions very rich by so ably moderating the sessions. The Foundation greatly values the work and expertise of both Harry and John.

It is our hope that this account of the 2003 conference will enhance understanding between military and media.

Richard A. Behrenhausen
President and Chief Executive Officer
McCormick Tribune Foundation

Introduction

In the fall of 2002, a year after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime, talk of war with Iraq crept into the public dialogue. President Bush threatened to invade Iraq if its leader, Saddam Hussein, didn't prove conclusively to U.S. investigators that he was not hiding weapons of mass destruction. So the media and the military both began tacitly preparing for war.

On March 20, 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq, determined to oust its brutal dictator. No one doubted U.S. military might. What remained less clear was how well the media would cover the massive invasion of American and British troops into a desert country eight time zones away.

As it turned out, coverage of the 2003 war in Iraq was unlike any previous conflict. Because of the unusual preparations and commitments that both the military and media made before the war, a bold new "embedding" policy, and stunning new technology, the media were able to bring the war to the public in an immediate and more intimate fashion than ever before, live from the battlefield, round the clock.

This report explores how well that effort went, what was different about the military-media relationship in this war and what impact these differences had on the ultimate goal of informing the public. And it points to changes that might be made to facilitate better coverage in the future.

Narrowing the Gap

The contents are based primarily on a two-day conference August 14-15, 2003, sponsored by the McCormick Tribune Foundation, which brought together senior members of the military and the media to discuss the media's coverage of the war and the government's role in helping (or hindering) that coverage. It was the seventh such meeting since 1992. The conferences are held in suburban Chicago at Cantigny, the estate of the late Col. Robert R. McCormick, benefactor of the foundation, longtime publisher and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, and a veteran of the First Infantry Division in World War I.

Among the 42 handpicked experts who attended were generals, admirals and colonels from the four military services and seasoned bureau chiefs, correspondents, editors, anchors, and reporters from television networks, newspapers, news services, and magazines.

Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotes in this report are of comments made at the conference. Only speakers and panelists are identified by name. To encourage candor, conference ground rules stated that conferees' remarks were to be considered on the record but not for attribution.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation was established after McCormick's death in 1955. The foundation's goal in sponsoring these conferences is to foster cooperation and understanding between the press and the military so that the public may be better informed about critical national security issues.

Chapter 1

The Decision

One of the earliest conversations with the media about letting large numbers of journalists tag along with American troops in Iraq began in a bar in Washington, D.C., before the war began.

Over glasses of wine in October 2002, Victoria Clarke, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, told three television network bureau chiefs (all women) that she and her deputy, Bryan Whitman, a former Army officer, were working on a plan to enable journalists to live, or “embed,” with the troops should the U.S. invade Iraq. The idea of embedding wasn’t new but what Clarke envisioned was dramatically different in scope and numbers than anything tried before.

“She told us they were trying to sell the idea of embedding to everyone from (Defense) Secretary (Donald) Rumsfeld to Joint Chiefs Chair (Gen. Richard B.) Myers,” recalled Janet Leissner, CBS News vice president and Washington bureau chief. “Without their blessings and their buying into this, embedding didn’t have a chance.”

If they could convince Rumsfeld to include—rather than exclude—the media in strategic plans, they might bridge the tension between the military and the media. Neither wanted to treat the media like an irritant in this yet-to-be declared war.

Realizing that to pull off what she envisioned would also require the media’s support, Clarke “asked us to try to start talking to our network higher ups and to convince them it was worth their

while—that we were not going to be blasted for being co-opted by going off with the troops, that it was worthwhile investing in the manpower, time and money that it would cost to have these operations,” Leissner said.

Bad blood

Before joining the Pentagon in the spring of 2001, Clarke knew little about the military or its jargon. But she did know the public relations business. In 1992, she was press secretary for President George Bush’s re-election campaign. (“I don’t think Americans can trust people who spend more time blow-drying their hair in the morning than I do,” she quipped about then-candidate Bill Clinton.) In 1993, she played a role in revamping cable television’s dismal public image when she joined the National Cable Television Association as a strategist. As the war in Iraq drew near, Clarke was poised to handle the media.

She and Whitman knew that no matter what they did, “this was going to be newsworthy and there were going to be media on the battlefield in some form or fashion,” Whitman said. They wanted to avoid the problems that plagued press coverage of military operations in Afghanistan and in the 1991 Gulf War, when the Pentagon virtually shut out the media.

The objectives of the emerging public affairs strategy were straightforward, according to Whitman.

“We wanted to neutralize the disinformation efforts of our adversaries,” explained Whitman. “We wanted to build and maintain support for U.S. policy as well as the global war on terrorism. We wanted to take offensive action to achieve information dominance. We wanted to be able to demonstrate the professionalism of the U.S. military. And we wanted to build and maintain support, of course, for

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the war fighter out there on the ground.” They believed “robust media access” would “counter Iraqi lies” and highlight the professionalism of U.S. forces, he said.

In return, the media would get unfettered access to U.S. soldiers, Marines and sailors—as long as they agreed to and abided by U.S. ground rules. Journalists who signed the three-page agreement to hold the military harmless and not sue could integrate into the military structure. They could file uncensored reports as long as no specific details about troop location or plans were divulged. They could travel with assigned troops, eat MREs (meals ready to eat) alongside them, sleep on the ground and go days without showers—just as the soldiers would do.

Conference moderator John Hamre, president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said he believes there’s another reason why Clarke and the Defense Department approached embedding “more aggressively and more creatively than any time in my professional career.”

Today, unlike during World War II, Korea and the Vietnam War, most Americans do not have much contact with or knowledge of the military. With the shrinking, all-volunteer military services, few have served and few have uncles, brothers, sisters or cousins in the military.

Therefore, “like it or not, Americans now know their military primarily through the media,” said Hamre, a former deputy secretary of defense in the Clinton administration. “This is how Americans are connected to their military.” Whitman acknowledged as much, noting that by incorporating journalists into the troops, they knew reporters would wind up doing stories about the remarkable men and women in today’s military.

Bush is opposed

Eventually Rumsfeld signed off on embedding. But he had a tough job convincing his superiors, according to Walt Rodgers, senior international correspondent for CNN.

“Rumsfeld and Torie Clarke ran against the current,” said Rodgers. “I know personally, and won’t go into any detail, that the president of the United States thought embedding was ‘a crazy idea’ and was initially opposed to it but reluctantly went along. I know personally that the vice president of the United States did not think it was a good idea. It was Torie Clarke and Don Rumsfeld who pushed this through over the objections of their superiors.”

Once Rumsfeld gave his approval in November 2002, the military brass listened and troop leaders got ready to include journalists in their war plans, even if they hated the idea. This time, unlike past military conflicts, the Pentagon’s public affairs department was part of the operational planning from Day One—not brought in after a war game plan was written, Whitman said. In this war, military planners tried to take media needs into consideration from the start and find ways to accommodate them. The media became part of the war plan.

After the initial meeting between the bureau chiefs and Clarke, frequent meetings between Pentagon officials and Washington journalists representing different mediums—TV, print, magazines, Internet and radio—continued throughout the fall.

Initially the challenge for journalists was simply untangling and deciphering the alphabet sea and military jargon. The “Third ID” did not mean the third form of identification but rather the Third Infantry Division. Equally baffling to the military were television and print lingo. Both sides had to learn to speak a new language.

“The first meeting was followed by a crash course in military jargon,” admitted Leissner. “The network bureau chiefs and many of my colleagues do not know the Pentagon and the military... We had

to figure out the difference between the Third ID and the First MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force). We learned and then started a bunch of technical meetings—technical meetings with our technical folks and the military’s technical folks where we talked about everything from video phones to satellite dishes to how we were actually going to hook up our people with units.”

These meetings proceeded up through the invasion in March 2003. The exchanges were often very frank, and very detailed.

“We even aired our disagreements inside the building in some of those meetings on coverage of personnel casualties. I think we were very open in struggling through the ground rule process,” according to an admiral, who said frank discussions paid dividends on the battlefield because the two sides had been working together so closely.

Both had concerns

Both sides naturally had concerns about the idea of sending scores of journalists off with soldiers for a front-seat look at war. Military leaders worried that the presence of journalists might interfere with their operational plans. They worried embeds might expose their locations to the enemy. They didn’t necessarily want the additional hassle of transporting and being responsible for the safety and welfare of reporters. They feared for the journalists’ safety. They worried about spies.

Journalists worried they would be perceived as cheerleaders for the military—not independent observers. They feared getting too close to the military men and women they’d be covering. They worried the military might censor their copy or worse, forbid them from releasing stories altogether. They worried the military might try to prevent them from seeing things that could damage public per-

ception of the military. They worried their equipment might malfunction in the middle of the desert. Fiercely independent, journalists worried they might be ceding too much control over their actions to the military.

Outside critics questioned whether journalists could report freely if they were traveling in dangerous conditions and dependent on the military to protect them. They worried the media, seeing only the fighting immediately around them, would magnify the insignificant and fail to provide perspective.

The danger factor was also a real concern for editors. How far should news execs go or could they go in risking employees' lives for a story? Most insisted on sending volunteers only. Few, if any, journalists were forced to go. CBS sent only those whom managers thought were up to the grueling physical challenge of living and working with the troops.

"Journalists being killed or injured was something that I thought about 24/7," said Leissner. She wasn't sure her reporters did, though. "I had many young journalists come to me saying, 'I really feel I have to do this. This is going to make my career.'" But she would stop them, reminding them war is not a video game.

"Wait a minute, first think about the risk," Leissner said she advised. "First think about the danger. This is not something that you have to do for your career. It's not like going to the White House or something like this. This is a dangerous job.' None of us underestimated the dangers. We took every precaution we could. But it's true. We sat there every day waiting for the phone to ring" with bad news.

One veteran correspondent, who went despite being fully aware of the risks, said, "Embedding is damn dangerous. War is dangerous and these little kids march off to war and they think, 'Whoopee, man, I'm going to be the hero of the war.' They aren't going to survive. You're going to get reporters killed. Fine. We volunteered for it."

Starting to plan

As the Pentagon and press struggled over how to make embedding work, newspaper editors and network chiefs began their own cumbersome internal process of planning and parceling resources.

Peter Copeland, editor and general manager of Scripps Howard News Service, covered the first Gulf War as a pool member, embedding with the VII Corps during the 1991 ground war. Twelve years later, he directed his organizations' Iraq war coverage from Washington, D.C., dispatching 13 reporters from print, TV and online to cover the war.

He admitted that news people are usually “not very good at planning. We really respond best to events and crises. That’s what we like. That’s what gets our blood going. The military, on the other hand, you guys are great at planning. You’re much better at it than we are. I have a running battle with my reporters all the time. They say you can’t plan the news. No, you cannot plan the news but we have to plan our coverage. Especially in a time when our resources in the (news) business are shrinking, we have to plan better than ever.”

As hard as the planning was for print, it was even more complicated for television. Television doesn’t travel light. Networks typically send teams of four—a correspondent, a producer, a camera person and a sound person—into the field for a story. But that wasn’t going to happen in wartime.

“It soon became apparent to us, whether we liked it or not, that the embedding teams were going to be two people. That may not sound very onerous to my print and radio colleagues. But for us we all had to take a deep breath and figure out what we were going to do,” Leissner said.

Chapter 2

The History of Embedding

Embedding journalists with soldiers has a long history. In the Mexican-American War in 1846, civilian reporters tagged along with U.S. soldiers to report on battles and bloodshed for an anxious audience back home.

The man who earned renown as the first modern war correspondent, George Wilkins Kendall, was one of the original embedded reporters. Naturally adventurous, Kendall accompanied Gen. Zachary Taylor and his troops to Mexico to report firsthand on a war he had supported wholly in his paper, *The Picayune*, in New Orleans. As Taylor and troops fought in Monterrey, then Vera Cruz and onto victory in Mexico City, Kendall moved with them.

Kendall had to work far more arduously than today's correspondents to get news of the Mexican-American War to his readers. Without benefit of satellites, telephones or portable cameras, Kendall faced enormous challenges getting his narratives to the paper. He devised an intricate courier relay system using horsemen to run his copy to the east coast of Mexico and ships to sail it to New Orleans. On one occasion, Kendall—not unlike a modern television producer—spent \$5,000 to charter a steamer to deliver dispatches from the front. More often than not, Kendall's widely read and widely distributed accounts reached the public before official military dispatches reached President Polk.¹

In the Civil War, 500 male journalists, known as the “Bohemian Brigade,” reported, mostly for northern newspapers, as southern

newspapers tended to rely on soldiers' letters and telegrams. Much of American Civil War understanding is based on newspaper dispatches written under horrific battlefield conditions. Generals on both sides hated the war correspondents. Chief among them was Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman. Bryan Whitman of the Department of Defense (DOD) reminded the audience of a famous Sherman quote about his dislike of journalists: "I will never again command an Army for America if I must carry along spies."

By World War I, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter, Floyd Gibbons, ended up embedding with Marines, said Brig. Gen. Andrew Davis, director of Marine Corps Public Affairs during the Iraq war. As Davis tells it, to save the cost of buying recruiting ads in newspapers, the Marine Corps sent a couple of young sergeants to write stories about the war. Once overseas, the sergeants befriended Gibbons and took him along as a Marine brigade marched across a wheat field in France. After being shot in the eye and evacuated to Paris, Gibbons wrote riveting stories about how the Marines had won the Battle of Belleau Wood. That wasn't true; it was actually a U.S. Army battle, said Davis, now president of the American Press Institute. But the fact that Gibbons had been on the scene made all the difference in the way the public perceived the events.

Davis noted that one of the most famous war photographs ever taken wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for an embedded photographer, Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press, who went up Mt. Suribachi and captured the picture of the Marine patrol raising the flag at Iwo Jima during World War II. During that war, journalists wore uniforms, were accredited and subjected themselves to censorship.

During the Vietnam War, journalists had broad access to troops on the front lines. Reporters could move freely from battle to battle, hitching rides on military vehicles. They still required military accreditation and had to agree to follow ground rules, but throughout the war, only four reporters lost their accreditation, according to

Rodger Streitmatter's book, "Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History."

Network television footage brought dramatic scenes of war into living rooms for the first time. It often took two days to get their film from Vietnam back to the states but the delay didn't lessen the impact of Americans viewing U.S. soldiers burning down grass-hut villages with Zippo lighters while yelling "Run!" to terrified villagers who didn't understand English. CBS correspondent Morley Safer got that famous footage in 1967 because he was traveling with a Marine outfit.

"It was the first war where the horrors of war really reached the living rooms of America and many officer contemporaries of ours—those of us with gray hair in the room who were junior officers in Vietnam—came to hold the press responsible for our failure to prevail in Vietnam," Davis said. Although many would dispute that conclusion, there's no dispute that the Vietnam experience soured the military on the media and played a key role in limiting press access in later conflicts.

Nowhere was that more evident than in the 1991 Gulf War. The Pentagon micromanaged coverage, setting up a pool system where specially chosen "pool" reporters were taken to the front to gather material to share with other journalists. But the pool was never allowed to witness a battle as it unfolded. Other correspondents were tightly corralled, with many forced to cover the short conflict primarily from official briefings. Some reporters got to ride with troops—but not many and not with all key units.

At the time, then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney told the Freedom Forum that the Gulf War was the best-covered war ever. Reporters vehemently disagreed. The lack of access provided a kind

The Vietnam experience soured the military on the media and played a key role in limiting press access in future conflicts.

of censorship that left journalists hostile. It meant that journalists—whose mission was to get the complete story—had to try to find clever ways to circumvent military barriers.

Journalists were not the only ones who didn't like the results: members of the U.S. Army, in particular, were frustrated that their service's tight control on reporters' access to the action meant that Americans didn't get to see big victories or the tank battles fought by the 1st Armored Division. Instead, the public saw lots more of the Marines, the service that brought the most journalists with them to the battlefield.

"The initial images were Marines liberating Kuwait City," said Davis. "That was actually a supporting attack for the Army's main effort, which was the great left hook through the desert that went largely undocumented because of this standoffish approach towards access that the Army had taken."

A few journalists managed to sneak into Kuwait just before the U.S. announced it had been liberated. They could broadcast only because they had small, jeep-mounted satellite dishes. But, for the most part, attempts to explain the Gulf War were stifled by an antagonistic military that didn't want the media there. After Desert Storm ended, *Harper's* magazine publisher and author John MacArthur wrote a withering critique, saying the government and media misled the public and that pool reporting was a "crushing defeat" for freedom of the press.

After the Gulf War, the Pentagon promised more open coverage of major U.S. military operations. But it reneged in the fall of 2001, when the U.S. moved into Afghanistan searching for Osama Bin Laden and toppling the Taliban, said Knight Ridder's Jonathan Landay.

"There was a great debate in the Pentagon at the time whether or not we could actually energize the national media pool," Davis said. "It never worked, and, as hostilities escalated in Afghanistan,

there was a sometimes acrimonious debate still going between the military and the media.”

When the Pentagon denied reporters access to U.S. troops, the news media assailed Clarke and Whitman. But news execs’ anger escalated to fury when they learned Army Rangers had secretly raided Mullah Omar’s headquarters. The following Monday morning, several Washington bureau chiefs were at Clarke’s throat, Davis said.

Davis said Navy and Marine public affairs officers decided they would try embedding journalists. “We did it pretty much without (permission). This was the principle of ask for forgiveness—not permission. We wound up one afternoon just pointing a finger at a major and a captain,” recalled Davis.

The major was told to get a cell phone and go to Bahrain. The captain was sent to the amphibious flagship, *Peleliu*. “We’ll start sending you journalists,” Davis told them.

“It was done ad hoc. There was no rhyme or reason to it. But on that longest amphibious assault in the history of warfare, six journalists made the initial assault to be followed by a total of about 40 others that we cycled into the country. The Army picked up on it and they started embedding by the time (Operation) Anaconda happened. That really signaled the success of the embedding process. At that point, we had 350 stories about the Marines even though that wasn’t our principal war, just because we had the reporters with us.”

As a result, Davis asserts, “the current embedding process was actually born in Afghanistan.”

1 Johannsen, Robert W. “To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination.” Oxford University Press, p. 16-20, 1988.

Chapter 3

Ramping Up

In November 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a message to the commanders in all the uniformed services informing them they would be taking members of the American—and foreign—press into battle if America went to war with Iraq.

The overarching message of his communiqué: “Don’t be an obstructionist to letting the media tell their story,” said Maj. Tim Blair, a Pentagon press officer who handled the logistics of embedding and was interviewed at the Pentagon in May. “Let’s see how we can facilitate it. This was huge.”

Some military leaders accepted the inevitability of Rumsfeld’s decree. Others reluctantly went along. Some wanted it to work. One Navy admiral, stationed at the Pentagon during the war, said he would not have included reporters of his own volition. He didn’t care about telling the American public the story of his men and women. He cared only about accomplishing his mission. But the plan persisted.

“Once it was decided to do the embedding program, then it was a matter of how many journalists can we actually fit in with the units and still allow the units to focus on their mission and not be distracted from doing their mission,” Blair said.

Commanders were asked how many journalists their units could accommodate. The Pentagon expected maybe military requests for 200 slots for journalists. They were amazed by the

response from the field—even with military resistance to the idea of carting reporters into battle.

Blair said by mid-to-late January, the Pentagon had a working figure of between 400 to 500 slots available for the press. Seventy percent of the slots would go to the national press, 20 percent to the international press and 10 percent to press located at military bases. By the time war began, they had more slots available than the U.S. or foreign press wanted or could use.

“We had so many slots available to us,” said Blair, “that we had papers within the top 10 circulation that couldn’t handle all the slots, and turned some back.”

In the end, 775 American and international journalists embedded with the U.S. armed forces. Only 80 were female, more than half of whom were placed on Navy aircraft carriers. The Pentagon even took along reporters from Al-Jazeera, the upstart Qatar-based cable news network that is often highly critical of U.S. policies.

Early on, the Pentagon decided it would offer spaces to journalists but the individual news organizations would decide whom to send. The Pentagon told a base how many journalists to expect but base public affairs officers decided exactly where to put reporters—whether, for example, to send the reporter with an artillery unit or a reconnaissance unit or aboard a naval ship.

Every journalist begged to be at the tip of the spear, on the front lines. But only about 40 to 50 out of the 775 would see war in action.

Lots of decisions to make

Once the embedding bandwagon began to roll, the press had to decide how to deal with the opportunity. How many slots would they get? Who would they send to cover the war? How many people should they allocate to embedding and how many should be

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“unilaterals,” reporting on their own, without the protections or limitations of embedding? What was the safest way to travel? How much money should they bring? Where should they buy the biochemical suits for reporters in the event of Saddam Hussein’s threatened biochemical warfare? Did men need to shave to get on their gas masks? What kind of logo or slogan would they use for television coverage? Would newspapers run a special section? How much would this cost? What equipment would they need?

If the press wanted to embed, or tag along with the military, they had to sign an agreement to abide by strict, written ground rules written by Pentagon brass. Embedded reporters:

- Could not carry weapons, leave their assigned units, drive their own vehicles or move around independently.
- Had to provide their own flak jackets, helmets and chemical weapons suits in the event of a bio-chemical weapons attack.
- Were forbidden to report on ongoing missions.
- Could not conduct “off the record” interviews with military personnel.
- Were forbidden to report on specific completed, postponed or canceled missions or missions scheduled for the future.
- Could not break embargoes imposed on stories for “operational security” reasons.

One ground rule of particular concern was a provision saying commanders in the field could temporarily restrict sending a story if they thought the story might endanger their troops or the mission’s outcome.

Each journalist filling an embedding slot was made to understand upfront that the military couldn’t promise them they’d see the big picture. Instead, they were promised they would see a “funneled-down war,” according to Army Col. Rick Thomas, public affairs officer for the Coalition Forces Land Component Command. “They

were going to be looking at the war through a straw.” They would be getting a terrific battalion perspective, but they would not get the complete strategic or operational perspective. Only U.S. journalists would be privy to that kind of coveted information, they were told.

But for all the restrictions and limitations, journalists knew there were significant potential benefits to embedding: they would get to see things for themselves, instead of getting information through sanitized briefings, and they would get access that unilaterals wouldn’t necessarily get, he said. They would get, in some cases, access to top-secret plans.

They would get to see things for themselves and they would get access.

“What that meant,” explained Thomas, “was that we were going to take a risk. We were going to provide access—against the policy as published—to provide you access to classified information.”

“When we put together this embed program, there was a lot of discussion about if it goes bad, how committed are we to doing this,” said an admiral involved in the planning. “And from the very highest levels, we got a commitment to stay with it because, in general, I don’t think they felt that it was bad that the horrors of the war can be seen—because it helps the country come to grips with the idea that war is the best option and some of that reality might be bad.”

Hup 2-3-4

Meanwhile, Pentagon officials decided that journalists would benefit greatly from participating in a “boot camp” to help them prepare for war. So they organized one. In the end, 234 journalists ended up taking the Pentagon’s offer—an amazing number (particularly given

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repeated comments by journalists in previous Cantigny conferences that while training courses would be desirable it was doubtful that media organizations would spend the time or the money to enable journalists to participate.) Attending the Pentagon's training program wasn't an official requirement for journalists who wanted to embed but neither did officials try to refute the assumption of many journalists that participation might enhance their chances of getting a good embedding assignment.

These journalist-training camps were designed to give reporters a taste of what they'd experience in Iraq. They were taught battle-field survival skills. They slept on the ground, ate the same food soldiers ate and got shot at. They learned military policy and how to handle a weapon—even though they could not carry one. They learned about biological and chemical warfare and when (and how) to don cumbersome protective suits in the event of an attack. And many learned that they needed to get in better shape in order to do the job.

One newspaper reporter said she found out after Thanksgiving, 2002, that she was heading for boot camp—even before she was assigned an embed slot. She knew little about the military and welcomed the training.

“As a reporter, one of my goals was to familiarize myself with the military,” she said. “I had a little black book filled with acronyms that I would read and study and try to figure out. So the planning phase was happening even if you weren't sure you were going or what you needed to do or what would happen.”

The sessions were conducted at both the Quantico Marine Corps Base and the Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia, at Ft. Benning in Georgia and at Fort Dix in New Jersey.

Many media companies took advantage of a private British company, Centurion Risk Assessment Services, which offered pricey weeklong courses for journalists in Virginia and in the United

Kingdom. As the prospect of war neared, Centurion had to add extra media safety courses to keep up with the demand. A Centurion spokesman said Centurion trained 3,000 journalists preparing to go to Iraq (from many countries, not just the U.S.). Centurion's website features this account of the Centurion experience by *New York Times* photographer Vincent Laforet:

The first thing I'd like to dispel is: it's no vacation. The days are long. About a third of the time is spent outside the classroom on the cold and muddy grounds—if you go, bring waterproof pants and boots—you'll literally be rolling around in mud. Many of us left completely exhausted—both physically and mentally—or maybe we were frankly a bit depressed—we'd been hearing about massive blood loss, legs flying a hundred feet through the air, and nerve gas agents for close to a week.

It's not a PT(physical training) class, mind you—but you do get down and dirty on a few occasions. One day involves taking a 45-minute walk down a path—where you are randomly caught between crossfire and have to hit the deck and crawl to safety on your belly. You can also fall victim to a mortar attack or sniper attack complete with live, loud explosions and smoke. Trip-wires, various mines and booby-traps are indeed included. It's fun—but also very sobering when you realize that you may one day actually be faced with such a scenario.

I must admit that on a few occasions I thought about breaking into wedding photography. The worst nightmare for a wedding photographer might involve forgetting to put film in the camera. A bad day at Centurion finds you stuck in the middle of a minefield prodding dirt with a BBQ stick (you prod the ground at less than a 30° angle one inch at a time trying to find mines buried underneath you). Another finds you surrounded by 3 injured soldiers—one unconscious, the other with his guts

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hanging out of his belly, and the third literally squirting fake blood in your face.

Embeds weren't the only reporters going to training. Scores of other journalists, the unilaterals who intended to cover the war on their own, also went through Centurion's \$3,000-a-week course or other private courses. Centurion reminded journalists of the need for training:

Biological and chemical warfare is a frightening prospect—in fact for most of us a nightmare scenario. Military personnel go through extensive, detailed training in how to use their equipment and decontaminate correctly. They prepare their equipment prior to deployment in readiness for different levels of threat of potential chemical attacks, and are well versed in the different stages of threat levels indicated by siren warnings and other methods.

For individuals working alone, one or two days of training alone cannot take the place of this depth of knowledge, but some training is better than no training at all. Even those embedded with the military will feel under-prepared about procedures, but they at least have the advantage of military expertise, backup and support.

Training camps served another purpose. They weeded out those who mistakenly thought covering a war would be a heck of an adventure. After barely surviving pretend war, some opted to not experience the real thing.

Initially, journalists who participated in the military's first training program weren't convinced the Pentagon would actually follow through with embedding. They would be wrong.

Building pre-war trust

In addition to military boot camp for reporters, many also spent time with military units before they actually went to war.

Army Brig. Gen. E.J. Sinclair was assistant division commander of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during the Iraq war. He was assigned to take 236 journalists with his division—90 of them national U.S. correspondents.

“Several journalists went through the Joint Readiness Training Center (in Ft. Polk, La.) with us (after November) because at that time we already knew our mission would be more or less going into the cities of Karbala, Najaf, Basra, and Baghdad to actually clear out the cities after the Third Infantry Division had conducted their attack,” said Sinclair. “That (training) gave those reporters a very good idea of how we would do the fighting in the city. That was something that really aided them and allowed them to be at the right places as we conducted some of those operations.”

Conferee Kirsten Scharnberg of the *Chicago Tribune* was in Camp New Jersey in Kuwait for two weeks with her unit as they prepared for war. She learned how rigorous the training was, but she also got a feel for just how human war is. Before the war started, she wrote in the *Tribune*:

I know which young sergeants pray before dinner. I know the names of many of the officers' children. I know which guys spend their down time playing video games and which ones fall asleep listening to country music.... I know my experience among the soldiers also will ensure that I am a very human reporter in any conflict that may come. War will not be 'big news,' it will be as tangible and three-dimensional as the soldier sitting next to me at dinner.

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These pre-war experiences helped establish trust and ground journalists in the reality of war.

“The U.S. Army was nothing short of brilliant in terms of the way they prepared us for it,” said CNN’s Walt Rodgers, who embedded with the 7th Cavalry. They “let us go out a week in advance, get to know the troops, build trust. It’s just like any reporter in any situation. You get to know the people you’re covering. You talk to them. They know you. You know them and you build rapport. And that rapport stands you through the whole time very well.”

High-profile journalists may have thought they knew what to expect, but many were surprised, and then grateful, for the preparation. Take ABC anchor Peter Jennings. ABC special correspondent John McWethy said Jennings didn’t think he needed to spend time with the troops beforehand, but McWethy urged him to go.

“You need to go and be with the military and learn a little bit about the way they operate,” McWethy said he told Jennings. “You need to go sleep out on the ground and you need to be out over night. You need to be uncomfortable and understand what it is when I keep saying about U.S. military own the night.”

Jennings went. Afterwards, McWethy said Jennings called him, gushing: “This is so great. You know, we can really see at night. We really have this amazing dominance.”

“One of the most important aspects of the embedding process is, at least, to give your journalists a week in the field with your soldiers before you ever send them out,” advised Rodgers. “You loan them the sat (satellite) phones. You let them listen to your short-wave radio and hear BBC World Service.”

That pre-war, getting-to-know-one-another time paid off for Rodgers. “As a result, I need to tell you that some of the best reporters I had in the field were the soldiers in the unit,” he said. Soldiers pointed out a captured Iraqi truck filled with missiles to Rodgers. Rodgers thought it would be a terrific story because the

stamp on the truck was an Iraqi chemical weapons officer stamp.

“Now, it turns out I could have gone meshugenah with that story, really big. I didn’t because there was no evidence there were any chemical weapons on there even though a chemical weapons officer signed for it,” Rodgers said. The soldiers had set him straight.

Spending time together before had benefits for the military too, Thomas said. “It gave the commander, it gave the soldiers, it gave other service members in the field an opportunity to see what it was like to have media sit next to them, live with them, eat with them, move with them, and look at the challenges associated with that.”

Then there was the power of example. When other commanders saw Col. Dave Perkins (commander of 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division) get media coverage, they said, “By God, if Dave Perkins can do that, I can do it better,” Thomas said.

“On the news organization side, it gave an opportunity...to test out their equipment, to test out their tactics, techniques and procedures that they would use with a unit on the move” and then to fine-tune their technology, he said.

Problems for the Air Force

While the media was preparing physically in the fall for going to war, the military still was working out the details. One detail that never got worked out concerned the Air Force. An Air Force general said the Air Force’s leadership wanted to embed journalists but couldn’t for political reasons. Coalition countries, such as Great Britain and Saudi Arabia, that allowed U.S. aircraft to fly from their bases would not permit American journalists on their bases.

“There’s nobody more frustrated by the lack of embedding that got done with the Air Force than me,” he said. The Air Force flew airplanes from five carriers and 36 bases throughout the area.

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Only on two bases in Kuwait was the Air Force given permission from the host nation to put reporters on planes. But it came with conditions: Journalists could not name the base they were on, the country they were in or anything about that country's equipment or people.

He said even the British refused for political reasons to allow 30 reporters to embed on B52 bombers. He complained that Pentagon leaders didn't start trying to lobby England and Saudi Arabia to allow the reporters until it was too late, and they didn't do so at a high enough level. That wasn't the Air Force's only problem; some of its aircraft just aren't big enough to take along an extra person.

The question of vehicles

The question of whether the media could have its own vehicles was a thorny one. The Department of Defense vehemently opposed the idea despite pleas from many in the media.

“It was decided after lengthy discussions that one of the most dangerous situations that we could have out there in a fast-moving battle going over great distances was to have everybody show up with whatever type of vehicle they could get their hands on in Kuwait and to try to keep up with the combat vehicles that they'd be traveling with,” said DOD's Whitman. “It was one made after considerable thought and discussion with the bureau chiefs—the people that made the assignments, that put (journalists) out in the field.”

Some in the media took their own vehicles anyway.

Rodgers believed that to successfully broadcast to a cable news audience, he had to take along a satellite truck, which was a HUMVEE (formerly known as a High Mobility MultiPurpose Wheeled Vehicle, or HMMWV) with equipment inside and mounted on the roof. So Rodgers and his crew snuck their equipment into

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Iraq, with the help of the 7th Cavalry. Although forbidden by Washington, in Kuwait, the Army was complicit. Rodgers said he was told to keep his mouth shut, lay low, and quietly bring his equipment truck to mile marker 21. Meanwhile, Rodgers should pretend he'd never get his HUMVEE into Iraq.

“You are going to get your truck on the battlefield,” Rodgers said he was told by his embed leaders. “When we get up there and they start seeing the pictures, Rumsfeld’s going to say, ‘What a great idea this was.’ But I must say it was the good soldiers with the U.S. Army in Kuwait who made all of this work and gave us that fantastic ability to file either by a videophone or satellite from the battlefield. They made it work. They trusted us again not to blow their cover. We didn’t blow their cover. The story was told better because of the prescient genius of letting us do what we needed to do.”

Chapter 4

During the War

“Hey, Mr. Reporter,” asks a Marine Lance Corporal to National Journal reporter George Wilson, the oldest of the embeds. “Are you paid extra for going with us?”

“No.”

“Mr. Reporter, how old are you?”

“70s.”

“Mr. Reporter, do you have to go with us?”

“No.”

“Well, old man, you got (expletive deleted) for brains.”

Before the war officially launched on March 20, 2003, nearly 3,000 journalists from all over the world trooped through Kuwait to get the necessary credentials to cover the war. Only 775 embedded with U.S. and British coalition troops. News operations—especially the larger ones—collected news from reporters and analysts in various locations:

- Embeds living with the troops;
- Journalists covering the war from the U.S. staging area in Kuwait;
- Journalists at Central Command in Doha, Qatar covering daily media briefings;
- Untold numbers of “unilaterals,” who chose to operate without the protections or the limitations of embedding, covering the story on

the ground in Iraq but not attached to any particular military unit.

- Pentagon reporters and White House correspondents;
- Retired “armchair” military officers in the U.S. offering television analysis.

No one reporter or analyst could provide a complete point of view of what was happening with the war. The job of painting, or piecing together, the Big Picture fell to the editors, producers, and anchors working in the United States who put out the daily newspapers, hourly radio programs or minute-by-minute television broadcasts. These men and women collected animated eyewitness accounts from embedded reporters racing across the battlefield, which made for exciting network footage and front-page ‘I was there’ stories. But reports of embeds usually could only address what was happening at that moment in that spot in Iraq. And some said the electric accounts and footage produced by the embeds tended to exaggerate a skirmish’s importance.

Editors depended, too, on the men and women operating unilaterally in Iraq. These reporters tried to get a side of the story that wasn’t orchestrated by the military, a side that embeds couldn’t see because they had signed ground rules requiring that they stay with their units throughout the war. By contrast, the unilaterals, although not always in the thick of battle, had the freedom to report the Iraqi side of the story, or to go into a village after it had been bombed and interview residents through translators. Embeds couldn’t stop to speak with Iraqis; unilaterals could. However, while unilaterals could roam wherever they wanted, it was dangerous. Several found out just how life threatening it could be. Others raved about the stories they got. The military found the unilaterals to be a constant source of tension and one large planning headache.

Stateside editors also wove in reports from those stationed at Central Command in Doha, Qatar. From there, at the height of the

war, about 600 American and foreign journalists covered Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks' daily news briefings. Those reporters had to weed through Brooks' daily mix of information and spin, as well as attempt to confirm or deny the steady stream of reports that embedded correspondents were producing by the hour. They were often incensed by Brooks' refusal to elaborate on battles their colleagues had just experienced firsthand.

It was equally frustrating for Pentagon correspondents, who said they were stonewalled by military officials who promised to get back to them in a few hours, or even a few days, about a skirmish just reported by an embedded colleague. Pentagon reporters were highly critical of the slow response time.

On the other side of the table, it was a constant challenge for military public affairs people to try to deal with the reports from the embeds. Information didn't get reported up the chain of command in the military as quickly as the embeds were able to report their stories, so military briefers often had no way of quickly determining whether what an embed reported was true.

Another layer that editors intertwined into reports on television came from a small group of elite but now-retired military officers, whose expertise networks anchors relied on to provide analysis.

One reason why this became an even more difficult job for editors back home was that the war was raging, live, on the air, 24 hours a day. Television and newspaper Internet sites were updating events at the same pace. There was never a moment, many participants said, for the media to step back and put the story in context.

Embeds: going with the troops

But it was the embeds, strategically placed with different military units, that became as much a story as the war itself. Embeds were

the new concept never tried before on this scale—especially since embedding involved placing foreign journalists from Japan, Germany, France, Russia with American and British troops. Embeds got a tremendous amount of press attention themselves while they were providing first-person accounts and live TV footage and radio stories that allowed viewers to virtually participate as war was happening. They offered dramatic action and energetic first-person commentary, like tour guides for war, creating a “you too are experiencing war” feeling for viewers and readers.

Yet, sometimes it was lost that an embedded reporter could offer only an inside, microscopic slice of that moment of the conflict. They couldn't provide context because they usually didn't know what was happening outside of their unit, in Baghdad or at CentCom.

Listen to CNN's Walt Rodgers' broadcast on Day One of the war:

The only opposition the 7th Cavalry has encountered was when we crossed this giant sand berm along the Kuwait-Iraqi border. What they did was they took out the Iraqi tanks, a few of them—just a handful at the very most—and several trucks. And there were a number of, we believe, a number of the Iraqi soldiers were also taken out at this time. And since then, the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry has been rolling unopposed.

Let me give you a picture of how this unit rolls. First come the Kiowa helicopters. Those helicopters are flying quickly. Between 30 and 50 feet above the ground, 80 to 100 miles per hour. And what they're doing is zone reconnaissance, flying out in front of the tanks and looking for any Iraqi units that may be in the way of the oncoming Bradley Fighting Vehicles and the tanks.

I was riding in one of those tanks and also in a Bradley. And you cannot believe how cramped the soldiers are in there. Let

me give you a visual picture of what it's like to be in an Abrams. The commander of the tank is standing the whole time. They've been choking on dust all the way coming up. Also standing is his loader to his left. The loader is the rear observer and he observes on the left side of the tank. The commander is keeping track of things forward. Down below and forward you have the driver of the tank in a two-thirds reclining position. If these tanks stop for more than five minutes you can bet as exhausted as these tankers are the soldiers and the drivers of the tank will fall asleep.

Then there is the gunner, and I sat in the gunner seat on a rolling M1A1 Abrams. It's like riding in the stomach of a dragon. It's growling and screaming all the time. The tank pitches but it actually is very smooth. Tankers call the M1A1 the "Combat Cadillac."

Much the same on the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Very cramped, particularly if you're sitting in the gunner's seat. I was riding with one gunner who was well over 6' 5" tall. I believe his name was Walker from Columbus, Georgia and he was 6' 5" tall. They called him the "Green Mile." How he ever fitted into that gunner's seat, I'll never know.

Army Brig. Gen. E. J. Sinclair wholeheartedly supported having journalists cover the war as eyewitnesses, even when embarrassing mistakes were made. "I felt really comfortable, and the rest of the commanders, I think, were very comfortable with what they shared with the embeds that were with them," he said.

But Sinclair was clear from the start that access to the inner sanctum of his division's military planning would be tightly limited.

"The level of access that each (reporter) gets is different," said Sinclair. "That really caused some hard feelings in points, where we spent several hours trying to tell people, 'No, you are not going to be able to get the same information that (CNN correspondent) Ryan

Chilcote is going to get. Or that (*Washington Post* reporter) Rick Atkinson is going to get.’ A lot of people could not understand that. It’s just a matter of prioritization and time available.”

Dealing with all those embeds

Sinclair was in charge of moving troops from the U.S. to Iraq. That might have proved a Herculean feat in and of itself. But that was only part of his job. He had to also move all those journalists. That “was truly a challenge,” he said.

“Trying to move 236 embeds in vehicles and then as we started to conduct air assaults, trying to get them on the right aircraft. Some were very demanding that they should be in the lead aircraft. We said, ‘You are not going to be in the lead aircraft.’ So there was some bartering back and forth on where they should be—where they could get their story but still be safe”.

Sinclair, Scharnberg, Chilcote, Atkinson, other embeds and about 800 men in the 101st moved out of a rudimentary tent city in Kuwait to a staging area south of the Iraqi border. Their first movement was 385 kilometers, non-stop in a convoy of 5,000 vehicles—not an easy task, Sinclair said. “It became known as the ‘convoy from hell’ and a lot of other things.”

CNN ANCHOR WOLF BLITZER: Ryan, tell our viewers, first of all, where you are, right now, and what you’re seeing from your vantage point?

CHILCOTE: Wolf, I don’t know if you can hear me. I’m under pretty strict guidelines here, in terms of operational security, as to what I can report. But what I can tell you is that the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault now has a brigade sized element inside Iraq. I’m with them. It is the 101st Airborne’s 3rd

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Brigade, and they are now inside Iraq. That is new.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of things I can't tell you. For example, how they got here or where exactly we are inside Iraq.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This report was written in accordance with Pentagon ground rules allowing so-called embedded reporting, in which journalists join deployed troops. Among the rules accepted by all participating news organizations is an agreement not to disclose sensitive operational details.

—March 21, 2003 CNN.com

Chilcote had a great perch to see the war. But not all embeds were treated the same or had similar experiences. Some journalists were embedded aboard the aircraft carriers, such as the *USS Lincoln*, stationed miles off shore. Some were with artillery units that were stationed well behind the front lines. Only about 50 to 60 journalists actually had front row seats for combat. And, once a reporter accepted an embedding assignment, he or she had to stay with the unit. If they left, they couldn't return. The experience and the view of the war depended largely on what unit a reporter was assigned.

Front-row seats were the preferred venue. But having such a seat in an international conflict had its frustrations too. Rodgers lived day in and out with battalion commander Lt. Col. Terry Farrell who gave Rodgers and his crew unrestricted access and briefed them regularly. He showed him maps. He confided his unit's plans and strategies.

"Four days before we went into combat, we were in his tent in the northern Kuwaiti desert," said Rodgers. "Farrell pointed to a map. 'Here's where we are going. Here's where we are crossing. Here's what second battalion, first battalion will do.'

"Bing, bing, bing and the whole thing's laid out in front of us," recalled Rodgers. "I had the greatest story in the world.... I knew

how the invasion was going to take place. We knew virtually everything except the launch hour.”

But from his point of view, it was dreadful. He had agreed to the ground rules. He had access to fantastic information, but he couldn't tell a single viewer. “Which was I guess, you know, okay,” acknowledged Rodgers, “but it was an awful experience for a reporter.”

Other reporters told of similar unprecedented access to military planning hours before it was put into action. They'd salivate at such inside detail and be able to do nothing but wait until the action was over. Those that didn't paid a price. “We disembedded about 26 reporters throughout the process,” said Col. Rick Thomas. “Some of them were embedded reporters. Some of them were unilateral reporters that took temporary embeds.”

“We saw everything that was going on before it got several levels down to being reported in Washington.”

Those that followed the ground rules were more than rewarded, they said. A national magazine correspondent was one. He was with a Marine unit and argued that he had the opposite of a narrow viewpoint as an embed. He and three other reporters were allowed to read the entire plan on the day that combat operations started.

But they did have to fight for access, at first. “It took a lot of banging our heads against the wall and a lot of shouting matches,” said the magazine reporter. “But when push came to shove, we actually got the access we needed and were let into the Marines COC (Combat Operations Center) to the point where CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) reports would be on the wall. We'd be walking in and we'd say, ‘Hey, we missed the first part of that CIA report. Can you call it back up?’”

And the report was called back up.

“It was amazing access that as a reporter was really, really rare,”

he said. “We saw everything that was going on before it got several levels down to being reported in Washington.”

Rebutting the quagmire talk

One instance where that kind of access helped shape reporting back home was during the first week of the war, when the war slowed for a few days, shortly after the dramatic “shock and awe” bombing that began the war.

“During the so-called bad week of the war, there was a lot of alarmist reporting in Washington that the plan was bad, that the war was going badly, and it was a quagmire,” said the magazine reporter. “There was an alarmism and sort of an echo chamber in Washington.”

His editors, along with many other stateside editors, began asking demanding questions and expecting hard-hitting stories along the lines that the U.S. military once again stumbles into another Vietnam-like war.

“Hey, what’s wrong with the plan?” the embeds were asked. “What’s going wrong? Is this Vietnam?”

But because of all the detailed information the Marines shared with these four embeds, they could advise their editors: “Listen, don’t jump off the ledge. Actually, it’s going really well. We can’t tell you exactly what’s about to happen, but something good is about to happen. So don’t start comparing it to Vietnam,” he said.

Unilaterals: going it alone

It would be a mistake to think all coverage came from the embeds. It didn’t. More journalists covered the war as unilaterals than as embeds.

Narrowing the Gap

One of the unilaterals was Knight Ridder's Jonathan Landay. He and Knight Ridder photographer Tom Pennington had no intentions of permanently attaching themselves to U.S. or British military units during the war. Like hundreds of other foreign and American journalists, Landay wanted the freedom and flexibility to cover the war independently, despite the risks.

They weren't sure exactly how they were going to do that. Then in mid-January 2003, the pair unexpectedly received visas to get into Iran. That was the only way they could get into northern Iraq. So they quickly headed for Iraq before the war started. They provided another lens to see the war.

Months before the U.S. sent soldiers into Iraq, the Pentagon had grave concerns about the safety of journalists such as Landay and Pennington who turned down the chance to embed. They were the 'wild card' for Pentagon personnel trying to micromanage and, at the same time, accommodate the media.

In its guidance to commanders and in the way it set up the embedding system, the Pentagon made it clear that its preferred method of coverage was by embedded media, although unilateral coverage would be allowed. The Pentagon provided strong incentives for news organizations to embed and stay embedded—from greater access to information to greater support by the military. In return, embedded media agreed to a number of ground rules that limited them. For example, embeds couldn't break away from their units temporarily to talk with Iraqis affected by the military action; if they did so, their embedding opportunity would be considered over. By contrast, unilaterals were on their own and didn't have to agree to ground rules—but neither could they be sure of support from the military if they needed it. For example, commanders could and did turn down requests by unilaterals to travel temporarily with their units.

Perhaps as a result of the Pentagon's guidance, one newspaper

editor said that “there was some perceived hostility on the part of the military to our having reporters running around the region.”

Several unilaterals attended Cantigny and told their stories. They reported differently on the war, they explained. They could stop when they wanted. They could interview Iraqi casualties. They could film Iraqi orphans. They could report the Iraqi side. They had no threat of censorship. But they also put themselves at a much greater risk of death or injury, military panelists said.

But they are necessary to complete war coverage, journalists argued.

“If you didn’t have unilateral reporters—I hate that term—covering the war unilaterally around the world,” said a network correspondent who reported unilaterally, “you wouldn’t know anything about any of the other wars going on around the world. If everybody came in and had to check in exclusively with the dominant power on the battlefield and ride with their units, you wouldn’t know anything.”

The correspondent has covered other wars, roving between sides.

“We didn’t call ourselves unilaterals,” he said. “We’ve done it a lot. This wasn’t the first time. Just because the U.S. military is involved with the war, we don’t automatically see ourselves changing the rules we operate by. You can force us to. Absolutely. But the public needs to get all sides—not just the U.S side.”

Landay and Pennington “self-embedded” when it worked to their advantage, despite military ground rules. Then they’d move on. Here’s how they did it.

“Tom Pennington and I actually embedded ourselves not with ordinary ground troops but with U.S. Special Forces—not once but twice,” Landay explained. “On the first occasion, we ran into a Special Operations Force unit and its members as thousands of Kurdish guerrillas fought scores of Kurdish Islamic extremists and

Al Qaeda fighters in the mountains on the border of Iran.”

They introduced themselves to the battalion commander and struck a bargain. They would not write or photograph anything about what the Special Forces unit was doing if that was the unit’s wish. The battalion commander said the journalists could cover whatever they wanted as long as they did not reveal any code words or personal surnames or unit designations.

“We readily agreed,” said Landay, who reported from northern Iraq for nearly four months.

“In exchange, we watched the unit’s mortar and sniper teams in action. This chance meeting opened for Knight Ridder readers a rare window in the professionalism and dedication of some of their country’s most coveted warriors.”

And it did something else that Landay and Pennington thought worth the gamble.

“It allowed the Special Forces members themselves to tell the American public something about what they do,” Landay said. “We were writing for general readership but also for the families of those who were sent in harm’s way.”

A week later, less than a mile from the Iraqi frontlines, Pennington and Landay stumbled into the same Special Forces unit. They struck another deal. This time they traded the latest National Hockey League scores and satellite telephone use in exchange for accompanying the unit on a nighttime operation. Same ground rules.

“From a trench dug during the Iraq-Iran War, we watched as they directed F-15s and F-16s and F-18s and B-52s at Iraqi positions less than a three-hour drive from Baghdad,” said Landay. “On neither occasion did we reveal anything that jeopardized the unit’s operation or their security. There was no public affairs officer to keep tabs on us. Even now I cannot tell you the names of the soldiers with whom we spent two days, or even what kind of Special Forces unit they were.”

Operational security questions

Many times in the past, administrations and the military have taken the attitude that the best way to deal with the media is to control them, to limit their access to the “action” and to the individual soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen. Often, people would justify this

There is not a single military mission that you can undertake today that cannot be covered with an embed.

approach based on operational security, based on fear that journalists would disclose information that would impair the military’s ability to succeed and that might even result in the loss of life. This has been particularly a barrier to coverage of Special Forces, one of the most secretive, sensitive types of military operations.

Landay said he hopes that his experience traveling with the Special Forces and that of others in Iraq “drove a stake right through the heart of this argument”—that the presence of journalists on the battlefield is detrimental to the safety of troops and the success of operations.

The *New York Times*’ Thom Shanker seconded his view: “I challenge you. There is not a single military mission that you can undertake today that cannot be covered with an embed so long as the rules and the agreement are written in advance,” said Shanker. “Think about how you’ve had reporters. Think about how few problems you had with them.”

Conferees generally agreed that despite all the unprecedented access—or perhaps because of it—operational security wasn’t breached by having reporters there. However, one Marine general cited an instance where he was very worried that it might have. When a combined force of Rangers and other Special Operations forces, supported by Marines, were carrying out the rescue of U.S.

Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, he saw a report on television, while the raid was going on, telling that an operation was underway concerning Lynch and listing the city in which the operation was occurring. The general said he was furious: “At that point in time, no one knew where that raid was going on and all of a sudden it was spread worldwide that it was going on down in Nasiriya.”

Concerns about safety

For the Pentagon, unilaterals came to be the biggest media nightmare. They feared that embedded journalists might get injured—but they panicked at the prospect a unilateral would be shot down by the enemy or, worse, by a U.S. soldier.

Because unilaterals traveled on their own, Pentagon officials believed they were at greater risk of being attacked by hostile Iraqis, or being misidentified as the enemy, or getting caught in crossfire, or being killed by allied forces.

(One embedded reporter disputed the idea that unilaterals faced more risk, saying that embeds travel with a military unit “which is of itself a target” whereas unilaterals can “come in and out and choose their fights.”)

“The thing I woke up with every time at night was worry (about) how many media we were going to kill on the battlefield, similar to what happened down in the south (of Iraq where American soldiers were killed in a surprise attack at the war’s start), because the enemy comes at you in nonstandard, non-technical vehicles and when you’re in an open war, you’re going to shoot first and ask questions later,” said an admiral.

(By September 2003, 12 journalists had been killed in action in Iraq and another six died as a result of accidents or ailments. Two journalists remain missing. Three of the dead were Americans—two

of whom were embedded. *The Atlantic Monthly's* Michael Kelly and NBC correspondent David Bloom died in ways not immediately related to battlefield fighting. Kelly died in a HUMVEE wreck and Bloom, embedded with the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division, dropped dead from a blood clot that formed after riding for days in a cramped vehicle bouncing through Iraq's rugged terrain. Unilateral Elizabeth Neuffer of the *Boston Globe* died in a car accident after the official end of the war.)

The Pentagon had been clear. Any American or international reporter not officially embedded was on his or her own. They would *not* be protected or rescued by the U.S. military. Repeatedly, Pentagon officials said what unilaterals were doing was too dangerous. The Pentagon had tried to discourage journalists such as CBS' Scott Pelley from racing around Iraq in dirt-encrusted Toyota Land Cruisers. So had the journalists' bosses.

"Scott Pelley would call me and say: 'I'm in Umm Qasr. I want to move north. What you do think?'" recalled Janet Leissner of CBS.

She didn't think much of it. "On your own?" she asked. "You are nuts."

But warnings and ground rules mattered little when journalists actually got into precarious positions. The first people called were Iraq-based U.S. military officials. And then editors called the Pentagon. When the calls came, even though it wasn't the Pentagon's responsibility to rescue journalists, the military felt obligated to, said military members.

"It happens on the battlefield all the time where a reporter will get out there unilaterally, get in a fire fight and he'll call back to the bureau chief," said an admiral who works with the press. Inevitably, the bureau chief calls the Department of Defense.

"If DOD doesn't give him the right answer, then they'll call the White House," he said. "And then the White House will give us an answer. Operational commanders will tell you how many times they

had to go and pull people out of shooting, out of the fire.”

The foreign editor of a major newspaper agreed that roving press put the military in a bind but said that shouldn't stop editors from using unilaterals to cover a war and it won't stop editors from asking for help if their journalists are endangered.

“I'm sitting behind a desk in New York and my reporter is running around and he gets in trouble. We're calling DOD. We want to get him out. I'm not going to be thinking about whether I was irresponsible at that time. We're going to call for help to get our guys out so they don't get killed. That's just unavoidable,” he said.

So it is, agreed one senior Pentagon public affairs official, who received many such calls from frantic editors in the states. “They were killed. They were captured. They were detained. They were lost. Every conceivable bad thing that could happen, happened to unilateral reporters that were out there on the battlefield,” he said.

“Those things happen in all of the wars,” shot back an ABC unilateral reporter. “We are used to that.”

Sinclair described one problem he encountered with a unilateral.

“As we were crossing the line of departure, counting the vehicles through and we're just sitting there, here comes a white Nissan trucked covered with mud,” he said. They pulled the truck aside.

“Who are you? We don't know who you are,” relayed Sinclair.

It was a German reporter, demanding to go with the 101st.

He was pulled out of the truck and told why he couldn't go. He went anyway. Two days later, the reporter managed to cross the line of departure and tried to get back in the 101st assembly area. This time, soldiers shot at his white truck, Sinclair said.

“It was at that stage that we were shooting at any white Nissan truck. It didn't matter what was in it at that stage because of the paramilitary attacks and the car bombs. And if they were coming in our assembly area and they weren't stopping, I mean, soldiers were going to shoot,” Sinclair said.

The nightmares become real

On April 8, 2003, the Pentagon's worst fears concerning unilaterals were realized in Baghdad at the Palestine Hotel. Taras Protsyuk, a Reuters Ukrainian cameraman, and José Couso, a Spanish cameraman working for the TV network Telecinco were filming from the hotel's balcony in downtown Baghdad. The 18-story hotel was home to nearly 100 American and foreign press covering the bloody fighting between allied soldiers and Iraqi forces in downtown Baghdad.

The crew of a U.S. tank saw what they believed to be an enemy observer and sniper on an upper-story balcony of the hotel. They fired one 120-millimeter tank round into the 17th floor and killed Protsyuk and Couso while wounding three other Reuters cameramen.

"The enemy had repeatedly chosen to conduct its combat activities from throughout the civilian areas of Baghdad," and utilized "the Palestine Hotel and the areas immediately around it as a platform for military operations," said a military statement released in August, 2003, clearing U.S. soldiers. "Baghdad was a high intensity combat area and some journalists had elected to remain there despite repeated warnings of the extreme danger of doing so."

Nonetheless, two journalists were dead, felled by friendly fire, and a military exoneration did nothing to quell international press anger over the incident.

"We had very open discussions about Baghdad and reporters there...about what the risks were," an admiral said. "In fact, we saw played out in the Palestine Hotel exactly what we described in the bureau chiefs meeting where somebody was under fire and all of a sudden they would look up and they'd either see somebody with a camera at their shoulders or binoculars or a glint of something...and in fact, they fired at it and ended up killing reporters."

There were even times when troops had to be pulled away from combat operations in order to assist unilaterals, officers said. In

one case, orders came from the White House to bring out José Couso's remains. Doing so turned out to be a major combat operation, a general said. Bringing out journalists' bodies was not something the military had prepared for, talked about or rehearsed.

One colonel said, "I understand you say, 'Well, if the unilateral is out there and he gets in trouble, then that's his own problem and he has to deal with it. He's been warned.' The problem is that is not what happens in real life because what happens is you are involving military people in that whether the reporter wants to or not."

Couso's family and friends were so distraught they used Spanish law to indict U.S. military officials for the deaths. The Spanish legal system accused each man of being a war criminal. The families of the military men paid a price.

"What happened after that is it became widely reported and then our spouses started getting threatening phone calls from other people saying, 'Hey your husband's a murderer. Killing innocent reporters,'" related the colonel. "So I would just throw it out there based on personal experience that the military people become involved in that situation whether or not that reporter was doing what he was supposed to do or not supposed to do."

When two British reporters were killed in the south, the military was called to get the bodies out. The two reporters were in a pick-up truck, heading south, and ran into the Marines, and the Marines shot them. They shot, say military officials, because the unilaterals were traveling in the same area as the Fedahin.

The colonel's concerns about unilaterals were not limited to their safety or interfering with an operational attack. The colonel said the unilaterals he encountered were often ill-informed and they were reporting observations they couldn't corroborate.

"The biggest problem actually with the unilaterals is...they were generally fairly inaccurate in their reporting," said the colonel. "So it's not that they reported what I didn't want them to see... But

they generally did not have a good sense of the total operation of what's going on, in Baghdad anyway.

“They would kind of pool themselves in the Palestine Hotel and you would kind of get the ‘lemming effect’ of circular reporting,” the colonel continued. “One would see one thing, tell the others and they would all report the same thing. In fact, it generally was not that accurate because they didn’t spend that much time out with us. I literally would go to the hotel and try to get reporters to come out into the city and go on patrol with us and it was very difficult. They would tend to do their reports from balconies of the hotel...I just thought they weren’t as engaged.”

Back home: trying to paint the big picture

Reporters on the battlefield—whether on their own or embedded—provided one part of the war story. But just as important in creating a big picture of the war were the journalists, such as Shanker, assigned to cover the Pentagon on a full-time basis.

They had a hard time getting fast and accurate information from the Pentagon. Shanker pointed out an example where there might have been fewer critical stories right after the war started if the Pentagon had worked more openly with Pentagon correspondents. Once the war began, American embedded journalists showed bombs bursting and Iraqis retreating on TV. Initially, as a thick gray line of armor cross the berm, it seemed to editors and the public watching on TV that it was going to be a one-day rout, a catastrophic quick victory.

“There were editors across the country that first night (March 20) who said, ‘Well, let’s start writing the story of the catastrophic victory that we’re going to have,’” according to Shanker.

But then, just as quickly, events turned sour. It looked to editors

like Iraq might morph into a Vietnam. Embeds and columnists alike began using words like ‘quagmire’ and ‘operational pause’ and telling grim stories of units running out of food or not having enough gasoline to transport soldiers. It appeared the weather might win the war for the Iraqis, as ferocious dust storms danced up preventing troop movement.

Within the first week of war, Americans began talking about how the war was going badly. But the military didn’t think so.

“You in the military have to come up with a way to help us in the news media understand the sophisticated work that you do,” advised Shanker. “You didn’t think there was a quagmire. You didn’t think there was an operational pause. We will certainly judge what you have to say. But clearly, you did not help us understand enough what you were doing. And you paid a price for it with all the critical coverage.”

(Shanker’s experience from Washington was quite a contrast to that of the embedded magazine reporter, described earlier, who was able to convince his editors not to go with the “quagmire” story because he had seen the plans and had been briefed, on the ground, about the big picture.)

Pentagon correspondents such as ABC’s John McWethy, CBS’s David Martin, and NBC’s Jim Miklaszewski each night tried to put the war in perspective for network television viewers. They would sift through 10 to 20 reports from their own correspondents, from the BBC and other news agencies. They’d also try to weave in the Pentagon perspective. But it wasn’t easy. Embeds would report something and, asked to confirm it, the Pentagon would tell stateside correspondents that they’d get back to them the next day.

“There were all these wonderful issues of tension between what the field commanders were saying and what Don Rumsfeld in Washington was saying,” explained one network correspondent. He said Rumsfeld would say, “No, no, that’s not right. That field com-

mander doesn't know what he's talking about. Here's the truth." But that often contradicted what reporters on the scene were seeing.

A journalist who works for a cable news network felt she had an even a tougher job. For those reporting round-the-clock, doing stories for just a once-an-evening broadcast sounded like a true luxury.

"By the time Miklaszewski, Martin, McWethy and those guys have had the day to stitch together their big strategic look at the news of the day, I have already been out there doing 11 instant live shots and responding to anchor questions in my ear: 'What's this about? What about that?'" she said.

"I think the American audience has quite rightly come to expect the American news media to offer them not just the tactical picture that the embeds can offer, but the strategic picture from the Pentagon," she said. But it was very difficult for stateside reporters to gather information on a timely basis. And it was especially difficult for 24-hour television to gather "the kind of information that's really needed to put that picture together."

Retired officers: adding their expertise

Another component of media war packages included the so-called "armchair generals," the retired officers who appeared on television night after night giving their comments, complete with their maps, charts and battle plans. They discussed with anchors what they thought was going on and what was likely to happen, even though some had no first-hand knowledge. During the war, the media made extensive use of the retired military officers to try to make sense of the deluge of information the public was getting by the minute—especially from the embeds. Some said anchors relied too heavily on these former generals-turned-military analysts, without questioning them.

CNN hired three such retired military analysts—Air Force Maj. Gen. Donald Shepperd, Army Gen. Wesley Clark and Army Brig. Gen. David Grange—to share their knowledge on “Lou Dobbs Moneyline.” Dobbs said fairly quickly he came to rely on Grange and Shepperd and stopped using Clark when it became apparent he had a political agenda. (Not long after the war ended, Clark declared himself a Democratic candidate for president.)

Dobbs noted that one time during a broadcast a puff of white smoke and then a puff of dark smoke wafted across a TV screen. He said he turned to a retired general to ask, “General, what does that mean? These are obviously different types of munitions that are being used. Could you give us some suggestions?”

Then, Dobbs said, the general responded, “The small smoke means small bombs. The big smoke means big bombs.’ It sounded reasonable to me.”

Grange, who is vice president and chief operating officer for the McCormick Tribune Foundation, saw combat with the 101st Airborne, the Rangers, and the Special Forces during his years in the military. Now that he is out, he said he enjoys explaining military issues and developments to viewers.

“I’ve had some opportunities to do quite a lot of operations around the world, which has given me a little insight,” said Grange, who became a security analyst for CNN and WGN-TV in 1999. “You just take some of that foxhole experience and tie it into emails and newspaper articles and you can get a feel for what is happening. So when events are reported on the 24/7 cycle of who/what/where/when, I enjoy explaining the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ with an anchor or a reporter for a newspaper.”

Having had first-hand war experience, Grange says, helps to bring out the human factors of war and provide insights that reporters might not totally understand. Since the war was being fought eight time zones away, often it felt too far to relate to for

many. Grange said he and other retired military analysts have an experience base of what is happening in combat.

“You can almost feel what the troop is feeling: their fear, their emotion, the confusion, how you feel if a buddy is dead, or wounded,” said Grange. “You get that feeling. You don’t lose it once you have the experience, and you can share that with others when you try to explain.”

Fuller questioned the legitimacy of turning over the analytic function to people who were very strongly biased.

What further informed Grange’s commentary were twice-a-month invitation-only meetings for retired military analysts at the Pentagon with the Secretary of Defense. Initially, Grange suspected it was an “attempt to make sure that we said what the Pentagon wanted to be put out. But it was really not that way,” he said. “It was very open.”

Grange attended three briefings. Briefers would go over current operations and specific issues that varied each session. And then, during the last 45 minutes or so, the Secretary of Defense would come in.

“He was very open and up front,” Grange said. “He was more relaxed than in the Pentagon briefings. The Secretary would answer all questions. I was quite impressed with how he did that, knowing full well that you’re expected to keep your mouth shut if it was something that endangered the lives of American troops. It was very rewarding. And really, I think the reason (why the Pentagon did it) was so you don’t start speculating on something way out there in ‘left field’. You end up having a better idea of what’s actually happening.”

When Grange couldn’t make a session, he received a copy of the non-classified notes that generally followed each meeting.

But many, including some in the military, were critical of TV

generals. Some questioned whether the TV military analysts might have endangered on-going operations.

“If I were going to grade the media coverage of this war on a scale of one to 10, I’d give it a seven,” said an Air Force general. “It would have been higher if it weren’t for this phenomenon of the retired military consultant. Every time we watched TV, no matter which network we were on, yet another new talking head popped up. And as the numbers proliferated, I think the quality and the rank and the experience just kept getting watered down more and more and more.”

Grange said after awhile, he was asked to be on television so often that he finally started turning down engagements because he felt he had nothing new to add.

“To be honest with you, I moved back to agreeing to only doing certain segments that had some substance to them. I don’t need to go on there and do who/what/when again every couple hours. Or explain what an F-15 does. I mean that’s stupid to me.”

Tribune’s Jack Fuller questioned “the legitimacy of television turning over, by and large, the analytic function of something as important as what was going on in the war day-to-day to people who were very strongly biased in one way. They were very knowledgeable, but they had a very strong, lasting commitment and bias...I don’t know what the alternative is, but it was a peculiar thing to have the context be set by people who were...in some cases only a couple of years out of the positions that those of you who are in the military are in right now.”

Chapter 5

Assessing the Results

Embedding became the most-talked about “star” of war coverage. It provided drama and captured war’s inherent danger. It offered viewers scenes of tanks screaming across television screens and wicked sandstorms dusting up behind correspondents. It showed bombs exploding, gunfire ripping. It vividly told the tale of the young men and women at war. It made it all real.

Embedding journalists proved successful in many ways because the administration and the military opened up to give the press (and thus the public) a front-row seat on the war—and because the press took the opportunity to tell the stories of America’s armed forces on a scale that had never been told during a war. It was aided by the wonders of dazzling technology, which enabled the stunning round the clock, up-close coverage.

As a result, Americans gained a better comprehension of what the military does and of the sacrifices and hardships thousands of Americans make on a daily basis. And it renewed pride in the U.S. military.

Embedding also helped families of military personnel by sometimes providing instantaneous news of their loved ones, either through reports in newspapers, radio, the Internet or television. Occasionally, embedded reporters even lent their special phones to soldiers to make calls home.

(Sometimes, when journalists lent their phones to wounded soldiers so they could call home, it caused problems because the mil-

itary hadn't had time to notify families. "So now the family knows their son's been wounded," said a general. "But the military doesn't. By the time the report goes up through the channels and the nearest casualty office in middle America links up with the family, they've already known and they are clamoring for more information. So we need to do a better job on notifying families. That's real difficult in combat.")

As for the military and the media, "The beauty of the embed program was that it served our needs and it served your needs," noted a Washington news bureau chief.

Embedding worked well for the media on many levels. They got unprecedented access to troops and military strategies, which helped them better tell the story and to verify (or dispute) official reports. They were able to broadcast live in the midst of a battle—an astounding feat. They saw and reported what was happening on the ground without censorship and without information being filtered through military briefers. And in the process, they got an education on today's military, which the press admitted they sorely needed.

Embedding was also a big boost for the military.

"The best asset we have to tell our stories is our soldiers and with the embeds this allowed them to do that," said Army Brig. Gen. E.J. Sinclair. "I had a lot of concerns going in, a lot of apprehensions. But I still think it was a great initiative for the American public to see what the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines were doing on a daily basis. The personal involvement, the face applied to what was going on, I think, was definitely the true story and is the success of the embeds."

Army Col. Rick Thomas seconded that view: "We brought military service members into the homes in America. They became the primary spokesperson for the military—not (Defense) Secretary (Donald) Rumsfeld, not Gen. (Tommy) Franks, not Gen. (Vincent) Brooks. No offense to any of those. But we had Sgt. Jones or Lt.

Farrell or Capt. Smith who became the spokesperson for every aunt and uncle in America who had a nephew or niece who looked just like that person who is on TV. That was our goal.”

There was another reason Thomas liked the embed process: “The media either validated what we were saying or had been saying.” There was a way to verify government assertions.

Embedding may also turn out to be a boon for the services that had embeds—when they appear before Congress asking for money—because the American public saw how well they performed. Conversely, not embedding may have hurt the Air Force, an Air Force general fears.

“I’m a budget guy right now. It’s curious to me that three of the four committees in Congress have marked (down the budget of) the Air Force to the order of about \$2.5 to \$3 billion on the current budget and have plussed up every other service,” he said. “Coincidence?”

In the end, embedding also positively affected the often-fragile military-media relationship. In going to war together, the military and media were, by default, forced to spend long amounts of time together and got a chance to get to know—and even like—one another. This hadn’t happened since the Vietnam War. They ate together, slept together, and in some cases, dodged bullets together. It provided a rare opportunity to break down stereotypes and recognize each profession’s dedication to doing its job well. One might say the military and the media developed a grudging, if not growing, admiration for each other. In the process, they established some trust.

It wasn’t all positive

But the experience and the effects of embedding weren’t all positive.

Some embeds chafed at the restrictions that came with the

opportunity. *National Journal's* George Wilson was with a small Marine mobile battery that followed up behind the front-line troops, never more than four miles back from the front-line. The Marines were providing covering fire, sometimes moving three times a night, explained Wilson.

“But when I saw something to the left and right, such as a family cheering us as they stood in front of a burning house, I wanted to get off the train, so to speak or off the dogsled and say, ‘Why are you cheering us? Look at what we just did to you,’” said Wilson. “But if you did that, you’d miss the ride north.”

Wilson believes that embedding, on balance, was a negative. As viewers became fascinated with seeing television correspondents unshaven, hair blowing, riding atop specially outfitted news mobiles with rifle reports punctuating live broadcasts, Wilson said he wondered what viewers were learning. Was embedding more show than substance? Did the act of embedding get a disproportionate amount of attention while more newsworthy topics went uncovered?

Others complained that embedding skewed the coverage so that the public learned a lot about individual soldiers and units and the human side of war—but learned little about the big picture, militarily or geopolitically.

And one television correspondent cautioned that news organizations should reflect about how embedding was used by the Bush administration to further its political objectives.

“Embeds were there for one reason. That’s that Don Rumsfeld wanted them there. He wanted them there for one reason. It would further the administration’s goals and objectives...Whether (embedding) worked out or not, it really isn’t the issue. I think we have to understand why we were put there,” she said.

Much was missing

Participants were quick to point out that, in this war, there was a lot that didn't get covered well. And that meant that viewers and readers suffered:

- The media largely ignored those initially questioning the war, becoming almost stenographers for President Bush's reasons for going to war.
- They didn't adequately cover the Big Picture or put the war in context or fully report the Iraqi side of the war.
- Much was left out in reporting about how the rest of the world viewed the war.
- They ended up sanitizing the war, by preferring to show victorious American soldiers rather than bloody, wounded or dead American or Iraqi soldiers.
- Both media and military public affairs people left Iraq too soon after the President declared the war officially over on May 1. More American soldiers died after the war's official end than died during the official war, but far fewer journalists were on hand to report on developments.

Too little questioning before

Many at the conference, including the journalists, criticized the press coverage of the run-up to the war. There wasn't enough media questioning of the decision to invade Iraq. And once war seemed inevitable, few media outlets bothered to cover the growing anti-war demonstrations.

“There was an odd lack of examination of the potential consequences of the war and the issues regarding going to war—whether one should go to war or whether the country should go to war—

before the war,” noted Jack Fuller, president of Tribune Publishing and a journalist. “It wasn’t absent entirely. But it was peculiarly muted.”

Moderator John Hamre, who has had many different positions in and out of the government, observed that “there wasn’t a real debate in America about whether this was something we should do or not. A real reason was because the political class chose not to make it a debate...The problem that this posed to the press is that they then felt themselves in an awkward position. They sensed and knew that there was disagreement over the rhetoric that was being used in leading up to the war, but there wasn’t any way to report what people were saying about it. And what is then the proper role for raising questions...(when) you’re not able to report it as coming from people that normally make news...The press felt genuine tension over what was the proper role to play.”

“There was an odd lack of examination of the potential consequences of the war and the issues regarding going to war.”

Fuller agreed: “One of our problems was that we had no debate to cover. When there’s no debate to cover, it’s very awkward for us. We don’t exactly know how we’re supposed to raise the issue forcefully without anyone raising it in a central way for us.”

ABC’s John McWethy echoed those concerns: “I don’t feel that the press examined the rationalizations of going to war with a sufficient amount of vigor. It is now, of course, turning out in the aftermath that the rationalizations of Al Qaeda connections, a threat to the region, nuclear threat and some aspects of weapons of mass destruction are, at best, problematic arguments. I don’t know that we covered the fierce battle between the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA over the kind of intelligence that was being parsed at the time prior to the war.”

Assessing the Results

“There was no critical questioning, very little, that was going on,” said Knight Ridder’s Jonathan Landay. “Some television networks acted as virtual state broadcasting authorities on behalf of the administration.”

One senior network correspondent questioned how many high-ranking uniformed officers “who had access to all of the intelligence prior to the war, were aware that maybe Iraq, in the view of the intelligence community, was not much of a threat to its neighbors, that it probably didn’t have a nuclear program that was about to become a major threat, that maybe the weapons of mass destruction issue was far more vague than was being presented and perhaps there were no real links to Al Qaeda.”

One admiral, who was in the Pentagon during the war and had the kind of access the correspondent mentioned, said, “Those of us who were involved early on in the planning would always break for the afternoon session with Mr. Rumsfeld with the press. We often would say (to each other), ‘The press is not examining the run-up to the war with enough vigor.’ I would recommend the press get at why that was. Because I think, at least from the perspective of military professionals, that clearly is not our job.”

One network correspondent expressed a more cynical theory about why the news media didn’t work harder to investigate and challenge Bush administration justifications for the war: by January, they had already spent so much time and money preparing to cover the war that they didn’t take seriously the possibility there might not need to be a war.

“Once we start talking about how we were going to plan for this war and start working out the logistics and start drawing up budgets, we become committed to the war happening. I think a lot of us would have been very, very disappointed—but never really would have said it out loud—if the war hadn’t happened,” he said.

The consequence of all the planning was that “in the period

leading up to the war, we did not pay very much attention to arguments against it... The day that there were two million people in the streets of the United States, we covered it for that weekend. We laughed off Europe's reactions completely. The French were turned into a joke," he said.

"Nevertheless, there could have been legitimate arguments out there and I don't feel that we paid attention to it because we became committed to the process without it ever being a political decision for whether we supported the war or not. The train left the station. We were on it. We were spending money. We were training people. (The war's) very inevitability began to be perceived by us. We began to think that there was no way there would not be a war," he said.

Politics in the way

Many media critics charge that since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the press has shown a certain reluctance to question the White House or Congress as they work to safeguard the nation. Such questioning is considered by many Americans to be unpatriotic. Others argue it is unpatriotic to not question the government.

CNN's Lou Dobbs said he is very concerned. He thinks it's "critically important" for the media to question "the geopolitical discussion, its relationship to the military and our national goals, and the result on the military." But he complained that the media is operating in a country that has "never been more fragmented, never been more polarized" politically.

"I'm keenly aware of the large (ideological) contest that is going on. We cannot criticize administration policies without becoming a lightning rod for polarization. We cannot on the air address an issue with the best and the most objective impulses without being defined as either Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal," he said.

Not enough of the big picture

There was much talk at the conference about how the emphasis on reports from embedded reporters was like viewing the world through lots of little “soda straws”—that the coverage focused too much on individual units and not enough on the big picture. Both military and media faulted themselves for not doing a better job of helping the public better understand not just the tactical details of the war but the bigger picture, militarily and geopolitically.

A military public affairs chief said, “We bear some of the responsibility for not painting the overall picture as well as we could have, particularly from the operational commander point of view where we had everybody there and we could bring the whole plan, the picture together. Some of that was intentional in terms of the thinking of the combatant commander in that he didn’t want to paint too complete of a picture to give to the enemy... We could have probably painted a little bit stronger picture ourselves.”

And a network Pentagon correspondent said, “The American audience has quite rightly come to expect the American news media to offer them not just the tactical picture that the embeds can offer, but the strategic picture from the Pentagon. We did a terrible job, all of us. Not a terrible job, we did an adequate job. I think we could do a lot better and I think we needed to have a better working relationship with the Central Command.”

Wilson believes that the “rah-rah coverage of the military unit...eclipses some terribly important issues like what does preemptive warfare such as we waged in Iraq say to the have-nots of the nuclear world. In other words, if we can’t match the United States tank for tank, troop for troop, we better get ourselves a nuke...I just think that some of these larger questions were eclipsed as we kind of looked at the ground truth of the war and didn’t look at preemptive warfare beyond the tactical level.

“My plea to the media is to ask, as often as you can: ‘Where are we going and why and what are the consequences?’” he said.

Other conferees emphasized the need to better accommodate and support unilateral coverage next time. Scripps Howard’s Peter Copeland said he didn’t send more unilaterals because he was afraid for their safety, given the military’s ground rules.

Tribune Publishing’s Jack Fuller said while embedding is useful, “it’s insufficient” if the media is going to provide an independent, full view of the war. Unilaterals are needed.

For example, Knight Ridder’s Jon Landay noted that as a unilateral, he “witnessed a tsunami of looting, arson, murder, ethnic cleansing” that embeds didn’t see. He “had our reports disparaged by the Secretary of Defense. Nevertheless, the fact is that we needed to be there because this was the beginning of what started the anti-American sentiment because nothing was done to stop it... We needed to be there to set the record straight.”

Not sufficiently international in scope

The pre-dinner speaker, John Simpson, chief foreign correspondent for BBC News, argued that the coverage of American media was too parochial. That’s why, he said, record numbers of Americans tuned into BBC broadcasts, which he said were “especially listened to by American soldiers on the battlefield.”

A U.S. newspaper reporter agreed, saying Americans had to turn to BBC because the U.S. networks and cable stations didn’t include enough foreign voices in their reports, especially that of Al-Jazeera, the Arab satellite news channel. Nor did U.S. stations include many interviews with ordinary Iraqi citizens, peace activists or Middle East pundits with anti-American sentiments. Nor were there many reports from Spanish, Italian or Japanese press offering

their takes on the war.

(In an article in the Summer 2003 *Nieman Reports*, Rami G. Khouri, executive editor of *The Daily Star*, an English-language newspaper in Beirut, asserted, “We in the Arab world are slightly better off than most Americans because we can see and hear both sides, given the easy availability of American satellite channels throughout this region; most Americans do not have easy access to Arab television reports and, even if they did, they would need to know Arabic to grasp the full picture.”)

Simpson, who has spent more than three decades reporting and covering 30 war zones, has a dim view not only of the job many American journalists did during the Iraqi War but also of the way the American military investigates problems. Simpson said American journalists often painted U.S. military brass as heroes. Simpson saw them otherwise, and lashed out at the U.S. media for not questioning harder why some journalists died. He spoke from personal loss.

On April 6, 2003, Simpson, his four-man BBC crew and a Kurdish translator were traveling with Kurdish Peshmerga troops and an American Special Forces unit in northern Iraq. An officer in charge spotted an Iraqi tank about a mile away and called in an air strike to hit the tank, according to Simpson and reports in *The Guardian*. Soon an American F-15 appeared overhead, so close they could almost see the pilots. The F-15 launched a missile toward the Iraqi tank, as Simpson watched.

“I had a bad feeling because they seemed to be closer to us than they were the tank. As I was looking at them, this must sound extraordinary but I assure you it is true, I saw the bomb coming out of one of the planes and I saw it as it came down beside me. It was painted white and red. It crashed into the ground about 10 or 12 (yards) from where I was standing,” Simpson told *The Guardian* that day.

The missile hit so close that it ruptured Simpson’s eardrums and shot shrapnel into his body. It might have done more damage had he

not been wearing a flak jacket. Later, doctors pulled an inch-long piece of shrapnel from producer Tom Giles' foot, according to *The Guardian*. Both men survived but the "friendly fire" missile ripped off the lower legs of one of their crew, who died.

It was a mistake, Simpson told the participants at Cantigny. He suspects the pilots got the navigational details wrong. Simpson complained that while Army officials were apologetic, he does not feel the Army ever adequately investigated the incident or explained it to his satisfaction.

"It really looks as if the United States doesn't care if U.S. soldiers kill journalists," said Simpson. "That's how the Russians behave. Not the Americans.... But I know why people get angry. There's no apology. No explanation. It's allowed to just drift away like it didn't happen. People around the world think that when Americans murder others, they don't care."

Military and media participants at the conference hotly disputed Simpson's contention that the incident had not been investigated. They said the military put a lot of time and attention into the investigation.

Simpson also criticized the attitude of the American and British toward Al-Jazeera.

"If the Americans and British had taken in Al-Jazeera and others properly and made them part of the planning, you'd have had much better coverage in the Middle East," said Simpson. "The world is changing. Treating foreign journalists as the enemy simply because they are foreign does no good."

Landay said he considers Al-Jazeera simply another news source.

"Al-Jazeera, for all the bad things that it did, one of the things it did do was show the realities of combat and show the reality of war and the reality of civilian casualties. I don't believe—and I had access via satellite television—that American networks showed the horror of war to the same degree that Al-Jazeera did," Landay said.

Low light on blood and gore

Some media participants worried that the U.S. media sugarcoated the horrors of war by avoiding gory pictures and using military jargon (“softening up Iraqi targets”) instead of direct, brutal, descriptive language (“killing Iraqis”). Whether the media exercised restraint in the showing of gory images for ethical reasons or for political or commercial reasons, they worried that the result was that the media softened the gruesome reality of war.

“Do we show blood? Do we show the wounded? Do we show the dead bodies on the ground? Or are we sanitizing this war so that the American public is not too shocked? If we’re worried about shocking the American public, then are we meeting our responsibility as journalists, as a free press reporting to a free America?” asked one television bureau chief.

A lot transpired that Americans never saw, she said.

“We did not see American soldiers digging gaping holes to bury dozens of Iraqi bodies,” she said. “We did not see many American troops who had legs shot, arms shot, bodies on the ground. We have in some respects, by our own admission, sanitized a part of our coverage. I think we need to re-evaluate that because we are just providing the public with part of the truth. The real truth is war is very ugly.”

It is ugly, but how much “ugly” are television stations and newspapers willing to show the American public as it eats breakfast thousands of miles away from war?

Show viewers too much blood and switchboards light up. During a live shot, Rodgers showed a dead Iraqi soldier next to a burnt-out armored personnel carrier. “Television viewers love to see war, they love the bang-bang, but show them what it really is about, and the switchboard lights up,” Rodgers told *Newsday*.

In his conference closing remarks, Fuller emphasized the

importance of addressing “the complicated issue of how vivid and complete we should be in rendering the real imagery of warfare. We render it in words. We’re not hesitant to be really quite explicit rendering the imagery of warfare in words. Yet whether we’re on the TV side or we’re on the print side, we hold back a lot the actual visual imagery.”

“From the journalistic side, we’re always concerned about, and I think properly so, overwhelming our readers and our viewers, intruding sort of, putting things before them that they don’t expect and that are so horrible, that they are maybe too emotional to deal with their Cheerios in the morning. So that’s a really interesting subject that I hope will get some real discussion going within our own organizations and our own profession,” he said.

Some worried that the U.S. media sugarcoated the horrors of war by avoiding gory pictures.

Fuller said that while TV audiences may not have been prepared to see dead teenage soldiers, he was surprised to learn that people at “the top levels of the military were prepared for having much more vivid, much more horrible images presented directly to the American people than we, in fact, ever provided—that in some quarters at least within the military, it was thought, very amazingly to me, that the presentation of such reality might be healthy for the country,” he said.

One media conferee recalled hearing a key general in the first Gulf War saying that if Americans really knew how horrific war is, perhaps the country wouldn’t be so quick to get into the next war.

(Simpson’s criticisms notwithstanding, it wasn’t just American media that sanitized war coverage. A BBC academic study released in November concluded after studying 1,500 Iraqi War reports that British embedded correspondents gave a sanitized picture of war. “Researchers found that although reporters who accompanied the

British and the U.S. military were able to be objective, they avoided images that would be too graphic or violent for British television, according to an article in *The Guardian* on Nov. 6, 2003.)

Left too soon

On May 1, President Bush declared the war officially over but, it turned out, the war was far from over then. At the conference in August, three months after the declaration, a “war-after-the-war” raged on in pockets of Iraq. In fact, as far as the military was concerned, and despite administration pronouncements, officers were still running decisive combat operations.

Members of both military and media shared their frustration when reporters quickly packed up and flew home soon after May 1. By mid-August, there were only 52 embedded reporters, according to Army Col. James DeFrank III. But it wasn't just the media who left; the military's in-theatre public affairs offices downsized quickly too.

“The post-war coverage has suffered because the public affairs organizations and the military abandoned the battlefield when the war was over,” said a TV correspondent. “I mean, they just packed up and left. Where did the whole public affairs organizations go? Qatar shut down. Where was everybody? You had a handful of people in Baghdad or various places, terribly overworked, that couldn't respond. Central Command in Tampa couldn't respond.”

“One of the things we are extremely inadequate in doing now is covering the aftermath of the war,” said McWethy. “It's very labor-intensive and it's expensive for all of our news organizations to continue. It's also dangerous to continue to cover what is happening in Iraq. I don't feel that my network or any of the networks, or any of the newspapers, are doing an adequate job. We basically want it to

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go away because it is expensive and dangerous. But of course, it doesn't go away."

McWethy said this is nothing new. After Afghanistan, Kosovo and Bosnia, the media left in droves, but American forces remained.

"The U.S. continues to spend billions and billions of dollars on peace-keeping and nation-building that is a marginal success at best," said McWethy.

The rapid departure of journalists and military press officers hurt the military. Conferee Maj. Gen. J.D. Thurman said at a September War College session in Carlisle, Pa., that the U.S. lost its information superiority edge with the departure of much of the media after major combat ended.

"There were still a lot of great stories to tell, a lot of things to tell the American public," lamented one general at the conference.

Chapter 6

Next Time

How much of a template for the future of military-media relations was the war in Iraq?

Overall, conferees said embedding worked and had many benefits. But they weren't sure whether embedding would work as well in a different kind of war. What would happen if the U.S. invaded North Korea? What if the war had gone on for months or years? What if there hadn't been a long ramp-up period before the war in which joint planning and training could take place? What if embedding journalists with troops had gone badly? Would the Pentagon stick with it or yank reporters out of their units and send them packing? What happens when the novelty wears off? Will people want to see again as much of the kind of coverage they saw in Iraq? What would have happened if there'd been a significant Weapons of Mass Destruction incident? Or major casualties? What if the military had "won ugly"?

"Ultimately, this is untested," concluded a magazine journalist. "The real test will come in a conflict of longer duration, perhaps against an enemy that is far more competent and where there's potential for real harm on U.S. troops in terms of casualties. This is a very good start. But it's hard to draw too many lessons from this embed program. But hopefully the Pentagon sticks to its word and does it in the future."

"I think embedding is such a new and important innovation that it has to be kept as a process," said one network correspondent

who was embedded. “Generally the embedding process as one laboratory experiment worked very, very well this time (but) I think it needs dozens of more experiments before we put this product on the market.”

Another broadcast correspondent said, “I’m delighted that it happened. We asked for it. We got it. I just think we all went embed crazy and because of its sheer novelty, we all wanted to compete to have the most exciting embed experience for the viewer on television. I think Walter (Rodgers, of CNN) and David Bloom (of NBC) captured that crown... (However) most of us neglected to pay a lot of attention to other ways of doing the war other than having a few unilaterals here and there and everyone had someone in Baghdad... We in the media could have been somewhat more balanced in portraying other ways to see the war.”

Thus, while embedding was useful, many conferees felt it had been overemphasized. And many had ideas for changes in ground rules the next time.

More flexibility and independence

After the war, media organizations began examining their coverage and its shortcomings and reached some conclusions. Next time, they will insist on more flexibility and independence, said participants.

Knight Ridder’s Jon Landay said he hopes next time “a much less rigorous, rigid embed system might be designed. In fact, I believe that with the right training and preparations in ground rules, which a vast majority of journalists are willing to follow, not only might you have a more informal embed system, but perhaps do away with formal embedding altogether. How about a concept of roving embeds? This is not such a farfetched idea.”

Landay suggested the Pentagon should convene a new series of

meetings between the bureau chiefs and unit commanders to review the lessons learned in Iraq and to develop ground rules designed to permit more flexible, open coverage whenever and wherever possible. Are there ways, for instance, of credentialing unilateral reporters so they can be more easily identified as friendlies by U.S. troops, or ways to allow for temporary embedment, he asked.

The Pentagon needs to find a better way to handle and help unilaterals.

Embedding is one component, unilaterals another. They complement each other, said Cantigny journalists, who argued that the Pentagon needs to find a better way to handle and help unilaterals. Unembedded journalists are as crucial to telling the whole story as embeds are, said Cantigny panelists.

“You military people need to understand, most of you here do, that we are going to be there,” said a Washington bureau chief. “However we call it. Unilateral. Embed. We’re going to be there and it’s not just us. It’s the world media. We’re fooling ourselves if we think we can sit here and regulate how the coverage is going to be. Media is like the weather. You have to put it in your plan. You can’t ignore the weather. You can’t ignore the media... We need to have a little more flexibility though in the system. We’d like to be able to move from unit to unit or at least within a larger unit like a division.”

Media conferees emphasized that no news organization would ever rely strictly on embedding for their only news source. Embedding worked fine as long as it was one part of the coverage; it wouldn’t be acceptable if it were the only coverage.

Wheels for journalists

No doubt in the future, the military and the media are going to need

to revisit the issue of journalists using their own vehicles on the battlefields.

From one general's point of view, if reporters were permitted to bring their own vehicles, military field leaders wouldn't have to stuff their own men in cramped quarters to accommodate reporters, which became a problem during this war when vehicles were destroyed or damaged. He noted that he faced problems when he got word in the assembly area that media vehicles couldn't go across with his unit.

"I wanted them to go," said the general. They had "a hardened HUMVEE, bucket seats, big satellite dish. It would have blended in real well with our convoy."

But when media vehicles weren't allowed, "we had to strip off the satellite dish, get the phone on here, attach it on one of my seven-ton vehicles and make conditional space in some of our vehicles for the reporters," he said. "I think there's a middle ground and the administration should look at it."

The media, too, want the flexibility that having their own vehicles would provide.

Like other journalists, Scripps Howard's Peter Copeland said he would work to make his reporters less dependent on the military in several ways. Next time, he would still have journalists embed, but he'd insist on bringing along his own translators and his own vehicles, so reporters could stop and ask questions. Media-hired translators could aid the press in interviewing those on the enemy's side. He'd also like more Arabic speaking reporters and more reporters with military experience.

Officers said network executives need to ensure any vehicles setting out for war are tactically equipped and use diesel fuel and they need to accept that their ultra-outfitted tactical vehicle might get blown up or seriously damaged if it runs into a ditch.

One journalist suggested setting up a pool vehicle to embed

with the troops that would be equipped with communication equipment and translators paid for by the press.

“There is some room for that,” said an admiral. “We are going to have to look at it technologically.”

What remains unsolved is how reporters might move safely with military units in their own vehicles but still have the freedom to safely travel to other units or stop to report and catch up later with their units.

“This HUMVEE business is very important because we can’t deny the fact that there’s going to be embedded reporters on the battlefield,” said a general. “So let’s get prepared to do that. Let’s get some vehicles. Let’s train up for it.”

Knowing what the transportation and communications requirements for the media are up front would help greatly, one general said.

“I have to tell you, everybody that walked through my door in Doha needed a HUMVEE. It was the damndest thing I’ve ever seen. They either needed a radio or they needed a HUMVEE,” he said.

Time together

Now that the level of trust between military and media has been increased, it needs to be nurtured and developed, agreed participants. Conferees agreed that just spending time together makes an enormous amount of difference in developing that trust, in the media’s ability to cover the story and the military’s willingness to share information.

That contact needs to happen before, during and after wars.

One way trust can be maintained is by continued military-media training efforts. Reporters and military brass both agreed that training exercises should continue—and not just at a five-day media

boot camp right before a war. CentCom's Col. Rick Thomas said there are great opportunities to incorporate media at all the military training centers so there won't have to be a new boot camp every time there is a war. That would give Public Affairs time to focus on other things, he said, like "how to handle this unilateral beast."

"What would be wrong with incorporating actual reporters to cover our exercises as we do them and actually learn about what's going on as the situation unfolds? Then you develop a cadre of people with a more in-depth knowledge. If we start from now, these are the people who are going to be the (next-generation's) editors and news directors," said DOD's Col. Jay DeFrank.

DeFrank added that training must be ongoing. Otherwise it's not effective when it's really needed.

"We can go out and say that we played war for a week with the troops," he said. "Then everybody forgets and meanwhile, military doctrine advances, military technology evolves and the situation changes," he said. Then war breaks out and everyone has to start anew.

"I think the military people would probably support participation in exercises, but I don't know if the journalism organizations would dedicate the assets and the resources if there isn't a pay-off," he said.

One Washington bureau chief had a quick reply. "I accept (the) offer of joining in training. I will show up. I will personally organize an OpFor (operational force) of news commandos like you've never seen. You get the military together and I'm going to show up on your battlefield. Promise."

One Marine general noted that after reading through about 200 surveys from embedded journalists, it is clear that journalists want and need more training.

"They don't want classroom training. They want hands-on training. They want to participate in exercises because they need to per-

form better,” the general said.

Conferees also stressed how valuable it is for journalists to spend time with the unit they will be covering before going to war.

“You can’t just show up the night before and say, ‘Look, I want to go with you and do this. And it’s not an attempt by the Army or the unit to somehow skew the coverage or make it better than maybe what they think it should be or anything like that,” said an officer who was an operational commander in Iraq.

He continued, “It’s to make sure that the journalist’s needs are met in keeping with the scheme maneuver and making sure that nobody, either a soldier or a journalist, is putting the other person’s life unnecessarily in danger.”

“I can’t overemphasize how important that (preparation) is and how complicated it really is for everybody involved. It’s really no different... than if I was given an extra infantry battalion to bring into the unit. You train with them, you talk about them, you rehearse things. It’s the same thing as when journalists show up,” he said.

Work on communications

Conferees expressed a desire for improved communications during war, in a number of different ways.

The military needs to improve and speed up its internal communications processes and equipment so that it can better respond to the instantaneous, 24/7 environment in which the media is operating. Often military briefers at CentCom and the Pentagon didn’t have information as current as reporters had. Often military families learned the status of their loved ones from media before the military could officially notify them.

One general said the military needs to look into bandwidth for future wars. “I will tell you there are not enough communications

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channels on the military side because now we are operating over great distances,” he said. More and better communications equipment would help the information flow from the field to Central Command.

CNN’s Rodgers suggested improving communications between the military and the media during the war by giving some reporters (at least the embeds who are on the frontline dodging bullets) radios that could both transmit and receive. He said he and some other embeds were given radios that could only transmit. This proved dangerous when, traveling in a line with the 7th Cavalry, they stumbled into a bloody ambush two miles west of the Baghdad. Since Rodgers’ radio could only transmit, he didn’t know what was going on.

“We were going to cross the T at the highway just north of the airport where the Russians got ambushed,” explained Rodgers. “We were in a firefight. We had no communication with the tank or anybody in front of us. They started turning around. We figured we should turn around. But it would have been nice if we had a ‘receive’ as opposed to a ‘transmit’ radio, where somebody in the unit, either the sergeant in the lead Bradley or the captain who was right in front of us, got back to the embed, because that’s how much we were in it. If (only) they could have said to us: ‘Turn around. We’re getting the (deleted) out of here.’”

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In August 1992, journalists and officers came together for the first Cantigny Conference on the Military and the Media. It occurred, possibly too soon after the 1991 Gulf War, when there was no room to cross the sea of animosity between the two cultures. Eleven years and one six-week Iraqi war later, a new and improved trust and mutual respect exists, at least for now, between the military and media.

This came out of the embedding experience and the willingness of Pentagon higher ups to work with the media in as many ways as it could. It was fostered by the performance of the uniformed services and the media during the war. By going to war together, and making a greater effort to understand and respect one another's profession, a shift has occurred from warring neighbors to grudging, possibly fond, admiration.

"The changes are absolutely, absolutely enormous," said Tribune Publishing's Jack Fuller, a participant at both the first and the most recent conference. "There's still tension. But it's not nearly as intense. There are still misunderstandings. But they're very much narrower."

Fuller said the change is in part the consequence of working together on the battlefield. He likened the experience in Iraq to what he experienced reporting for *Stars and Stripes* during the Vietnam War.

"There wasn't any tension as a rule between the civilian corre-

spondents or the *Stripes* correspondents and the captains and lieutenants we were close to when we were in battle. There was no tension then. And there was an enormous amount of respect. The tension occurred at the places where people didn't know each other, hadn't gone through the experience together," he said.

What embedding in Iraq produced—that never happened in the anti-media 1991 conflict—was an opportunity for members of the military and the media to break down stereotypes and see each other as men and women equally dedicated to doing their jobs well.

In the process, they came to understand how different are the cultures of military and media. Members of the military are trained to do what they are told. Members of the media are trained to challenge and question everything. The military is highly disciplined and hierarchical. It does nothing without a tremendous amount of planning. Journalists are free roaming and anything but highly disciplined. The very nature of news and its unpredictability means news organizations often operate on the fly. But each has a mission, with a culture appropriate to that mission.

"We are very, very different creatures," noted one embedded network correspondent. "What that means, in the end, is that we really have to develop strong relationships. One of the most invaluable experiences I had was to learn who the men were—and there were all men in my tank battalion—and to develop a relationship and trust and honesty that developed through the several weeks that we were together."

What needs to happen in the future, most agreed, is on-going communications and conversations between members of the media and members of the military. The relationship will improve if neither side gives up on the other and continues working to explore differences and resolve problems.

One Washington broadcast bureau chief who participated in the negotiations leading up to the war noted that for the Iraq war,

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“The military trusted us to keep our word on the guidelines. We trusted them to do what they said they were going to do.” Neither side was seriously disappointed. So, now, she said, it’s time to build on the trust that was fostered.

“We have time now. We have experience. We’ve got to think about how it’s going to be next time. And I guarantee you that there is every chance that we will screw it up by thinking about it too much. We can’t fight the last war the next time. It’s going to behoove us all to keep our minds open and keep that trust which was essential in making this work,” she said.

In addition to planning together, conferees urged continuation of contacts like the Cantigny Conference.

“They used to say that truth is the first casualty of war,” said Shanker. “Not any more. It’s trust. I think these meetings are important to build that trust in the non-crisis environment.”

An Army general, admittedly apprehensive about interactions with the media, concurred.

“It is truly refreshing to sit in a room like this and see the attitudes and the patriotism, because I think some of us would have even questioned that earlier....I definitely believe we should train soldiers on how to deal with the media because that’s the kind of thing they need to know. Young kids come in. They’ve heard nightmare stories of experiences with the media and they’re obviously going to be apprehensive,” he said.

Moderator John Hamre noted that for all the differences between military and media, “frankly, you are profoundly dependent on each other...When you get right down to it, the military is far more dependent on the media than they realize or are prepared to admit. And frankly, the media is very dependent on their relationship with the military...You’re both trying to sell a good story. It doesn’t mean it’s always sharing the same goals as the story is being told.”

Shanker compared the relationship to a dysfunctional mar-

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riage. “We’ve stayed together for the kids. Your kids are your troops and your sailors and your aircrews. Our kids are the readers, the citizens, the taxpayers. And we’ve made this relationship work through ups and downs and difficult times because of that.”

One general said she used to think very differently about the media. She was trained that way. Ten years ago, the media-training course in the Air War College “consisted of describing the media as definitely having horns. Some of you have tails. But all of you came from the dark side and we were going to be trained how to defend ourselves against you.”

Now, she said, she realizes that “our ways of life are intrinsically tied together and that’s good, because I think anyone that’s in the media or anyone who’s in the military has the same feeling about this country, which is we love it deeply. Whether we care to wear a flag lapel or not, we depend on each other to keep the country free. A free press, and an aggressively free press is really equal in my view to an aggressive and talented military in defending our country and preserving our freedom.”

Conference Participants

Thalia Assuras

Washington
Correspondent
CBS News

Cissy Baker

Vice President, News
Operations & Washington
Bureau Chief
Tribune Broadcasting

MG Kevin Chilton

Director of Programs
U.S. Air Force

Peter Copeland

Editor and General
Manager
Scripps Howard
News Service

RADM Kevin Cosgriff

Director, Warfare
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Office of the Chief
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RADM Doug Crowder

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Lou Dobbs Moneyline

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RADM T. McCreary

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Editor, Foreign News
Chicago Tribune

John McWethy

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BBC News

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Note: Titles are listed
as of the time of the
conference in August
2003.

NOTES

Report Evaluation Form Narrowing the Gap

The McCormick Tribune Foundation is interested in your assessment of this report. Please take a moment to fill out this form. Then just fold, staple and mail it. You may also e-mail your comments on the report to alsmith@tribune.com.

Compared to other reports on military-media issues, how valuable was this report?

- One of the most valuable
- More valuable than most
- Less valuable than most
- Not valuable at all

Why?

How would you describe the book's contribution to your own personal knowledge about military-media issues?

- It makes a substantial contribution
- It makes some contribution
- It doesn't make much of a contribution
- It doesn't make any contribution to my knowledge at all

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Report Request Form Narrowing the Gap

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Narrowing the Gap

U.S. media coverage of the 2003 war in Iraq was unlike that of any previous conflict. American viewers and readers experienced the war in a more personal, more immediate, more ubiquitous fashion than ever before, live from the battlefield. As extensive as that was, there were also startling deficiencies in the coverage.

There are many reasons why 2003 was so different, among them unusual preparations and commitments made before the war by both military and media, a bold new “embedding” policy which placed hundreds of journalists side-by-side with uniformed personnel, and stunning new technology. These differences are explored in detail in this report, based primarily on a two-day conference sponsored by the McCormick Tribune Foundation. The Foundation brought together military officers, journalists and media executives, fresh from the conflict, to assess how things went, what was different about military-media relations and what impact these differences had on the ultimate goal of informing the public. Conferees pointed to changes that might be made to facilitate better coverage in the future.

It was the seventh such meeting between military and media that the Foundation has held since 1992 at Cantigny, the Chicago-area home of the late Robert R. McCormick, benefactor of the McCormick Tribune Foundation.