

**'The Best Covered War in History': Intimate Perspectives from the Battlefields of Iraq**

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## **Abstract**

This study examines combat operations from the 2003 invasion of Iraq War from the “ground up.” It utilizes unique first-person accounts that offer insights into the realities of modern warfare which include effects on soldiers, the local population, and journalists who were tasked with reporting on the action. It affirms the value of media embedding to the historian, as hundreds of journalists witnessed major combat operations firsthand.

This line of argument stands in stark contrast to other academic assessments of the embedding program, which have criticized it by claiming media bias and military censorship. Here, an examination of the cultural and social dynamics of an army at war provides agency to soldiers, combat reporters, and innocent civilians caught in the crossfire.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Wars can be viewed through many lenses, and interpreted in various ways. This study offers evidence of the value inherent in the analysis of combat reporters' first-hand accounts of battle; a collection of news reports, memoirs and collected oral histories that neither fits neatly into the field of traditional military history nor the study of journalism and communications. Indeed, despite being largely overlooked in traditional military histories, these works collectively represent a vital source base that can be utilized together to offer intimate details of war from the "ground up."

The embedding program – where hundreds of journalists were attached to, and reported on the activities of fighting units in the field during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 – produced a plethora of sources that offer detailed views of modern warfare that would otherwise be unavailable to the historical record. These works serve to affirm the value of embedding to the historian, as they offer an inside look at the shared experiences of reporters and soldiers in a way that is critical to understanding the dynamics of a modern army at war, and helps capture the essence of the true nature of modern warfare and its impact upon the individual and on various groups.

Important social and cultural experiences can be gleaned from participant-observers' accounts that have emerged since the authors returned from the battlefields, especially. After the near-immediate news cycle and military regulations and restraints were no longer obstructive to nuance and detail, journalists had the opportunity to introduce a level of frankness into their accounts missing from battlefield dispatches. Various firsthand accounts combine to offer a multi-faceted, multi-perspective look at the modern battlefield and military culture that foregrounds more complex narratives about the war and its toll on humanity that conventional

coverage cannot capture, thus bringing finer details about this conflict front and centre to a reading audience in a way that their much shorter, deadline-driven reportage could not.

This study explores the dynamics of United States military forces at war through first-hand experiences related to various actors in a recent conflict yet to be deeply analyzed by historians. Emerging eyewitness accounts and collected oral histories stemming from the embedding program offer nuanced, intimate, and valuable perspectives that have been ignored by myriad critics of this policy. Utilizing United States military-media relations history as a backdrop, and following in the footsteps of pioneering war and society histories such as John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*, the study forms a critical intersection between the wars of the past and their impact upon contemporary military-press relations while providing agency to "friendly" soldiers; the forces that resisted the American invasion; combat reporters; and innocent civilians caught in the crossfire.

## **Thesis**

Even though journalists have faced various challenges to their ability to report on wars, their eyewitness accounts are critical to understanding the conflicts they cover. In past wars when they were not present, or when their numbers were minimal, the historical record was missing a vital perspective on the true nature of the conflicts that could not be conveyed by soldiers and military documents. In certain cases, this missing element led to the battlefield realities of American conflicts being exaggerated, romanticized, or outright sanitized through various means serving a variety of agendas.

Those conflicts covered more extensively by reporters can be analyzed in a way that they cannot in wars where press freedoms were limited. By contrast, wars characterized by a dearth of press coverage place the historian at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the history



of such events and reconstructing the realities of battlefield experiences. Wars in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century – such as those in Vietnam and Iraq – produced a wide array of first-hand accounts, largely due to the open battlefield access given to reporters.

In surveying battlefield reportage and memoirs from earlier wars, it becomes clear that it's the reporters themselves and the stories that they've shared that are key to enhancing our understanding of these events. Their insights are indispensable. Their accounts offer a unique look at war; especially when they are allowed greater access to the battlefield and even more so when they cover military actions in large numbers. In effect, the level of press access granted by the military impacts the depth to which the conflicts can be understood by historians.

During the Iraq invasion phase of February-April 2003, issues such as images of the enemy in the popular imagination of the press and soldiers; the motivation of soldiers to fight; battlefield experiences combined with environmental conditions, death and killing; and the complex interplay of race, class and gender (especially dominant notions of masculinity) were explored through the combat reporters' lens. Extensive media access to the Iraq invasion, through the embedding program, gave participant-observers a unique opportunity to address through direct experience these (and other) complex questions. In past wars, even in Vietnam, where the press enjoyed far greater freedom of movement and access, memoirs by journalists written after the conflicts did not address matters of military culture and battlefield experience in the same depth, and with the same level of insight, as those focused on the Iraq invasion. In essence, this specific fraction of history generated an unprecedented number of firsthand accounts from reliable observers, which has provided a unique opportunity to analyze the conflict from the point of view of reporters who shared in the combat experience to a far greater extent than journalists in previous wars.

Generally, this study addresses two basic questions. First, it explores the hasty evaluations made by the academic community regarding the merits and value of the embedding program, which are addressed in the literature review. And second, and related in its goal, is an analysis of how the experiences of combat affected the soldiers, reporters, the "enemy," and the local population (i.e. what did the embedded reporters see, and what does it tell us) forms a critical intersection between the invasion of Iraq and modern war and society discourse.

### **Academic Criticism**

Several academic works appeared in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq invasion (2003-2006), and treated the embedding program harshly. In essence, they claimed that the embedding program did not represent true cooperation, but was in fact an information warfare strategy that served as a military means to control the media and shape the story in its favour. Restriction of access limited embeds to individual units, and indeed perspectives, and combined with the ground rules set by the military that restricted the types of information made available to the public, cheerleading a sanitized battle was the result, academic studies insisted. The *brave liberators* became the focus of reports, the narrative goes, as the big picture was replaced with a "soda straw view" that offered skin-deep and narrow reports that missed the real story; the destruction of Iraq and the loss of thousands of innocent lives at the hands of the invasion force. A distinct loss of objectivity, reminiscent of the "Stockholm Syndrome" further tainted the stories from the battlefield during the war, and the audience – particularly the American people – were left with a rosy image of the fighting.

Even though some of the academic critiques of wartime reporting raise legitimate concerns, the embedding program still allowed over 600 reporters to accompany its forces in

major combat operations, and their perspectives offer immense value, particularly their postwar accounts of the conflict. The value of the program, therefore, cannot be limited to the reporting that occurred during the war; it must also include the eye-witness accounts published since, where the participant observers were free of official restrictions and deadline constraints. The embedding program has already produced a valuable resource for understanding what the battle for Iraq was really like for the troops, the reporters, and the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. Indeed, the embedding program, and the firsthand sources it produced after reporters returned from the warzone offers a great deal of inside information and intimate detail lacking in many previous wars.

Christopher Paul's 2004 RAND study *Reporters on the Battlefield: The Embedded Press System in Historical Context* explicitly states that more research is needed to investigate the history of the embedding program, especially concerning its cultural and social dynamics, considering that hundreds of reporters embedded in fighting units during combat operations have since shared their unique, eye-witness accounts in detailed memoirs and oral histories.

This study is meant to answer this specific research challenge by delving deeply into a broad range of war correspondents' personal accounts that are not limited by official wartime policies regarding the release of sensitive information or the pace and communications challenges of modern combat reporting. One can indeed gain a deeper understanding of various important themes related to war and society -- not just of what was written pertaining to American battlefield operations during the conflict, but the deeper reflections possible after reporters returned home. Journalists have always provided a unique perspective on military conflicts and only a small fraction of their experiences made it into their media reports at the

time. These realities leave the job to the historian to go back and trace the roots and substance of these experiences, while considering the various cultural-social dynamics found therein.

### **The 'Ghosts of Vietnam'**

U.S. military public affairs operations during the Iraq War were a direct result of, and pointed response to, Vietnam-era complications in the military-press relationship. A confrontational arrangement in place during the Vietnam War – the source of countless conflicts between journalists and military officials in the 1960s and early 1970s where the unfettered access to the battlefields, and the intimate reporting on human rights abuses and wasteful, costly carnage encouraged a backlash in the United States, resulted in widespread protest and discontentment with the war – would eventually be replaced by a unique and revolutionary program that influenced cooperation between journalists and U.S. military units and personnel in the field.

By inserting journalists directly into small, frontline units, close to the action, reporters were allowed to witness major combat operations from a multitude of perspectives while acting as participant-observers. A positive narrative indeed emerged during the war, where individual journalists were assigned to specific military units, and became part and parcel of an information warfare strategy that allowed for dramatic, but skin-deep reporting on the battlefield's social and cultural dynamics.

With the restrictions on independent reporting inherent in this mutually supportive arrangement, the press had little choice but to cooperate with this new strategy. Embedding did not offer complete transparency, but instead provided a limited view of warfare, focused on narrow aspects of military operations, and ensured public support for military operations -- as

many critics emphasized. The U.S. military was able, through the embedding program, to shape the story in its favour by placing journalists under its command structure, authority, and most importantly *protection*, limiting the reporter's ability to act independently, which is in fact the press's professional obligation. Although these realities indeed limited the depth of reportage, the sources to which reporters had access while embedded provided material with which they could, in their later writings, provide intimate details about combat units, the soldiers within them, and the effect combat had on a nation turned into a battlefield.

Indeed, it is the experiences of the actors directly affected by conflicts that matter most to the war and society discipline; the innocent civilians caught between warring parties; the young, scared and cold soldiers and marines fighting far from home; and the journalists who lived among them. These actors' experiences can offer a bottom-up version of modern warfare, and these stories can be collectively analyzed by exploring the plethora of accounts offered by embedded journalists, providing a unique and detailed version of the Iraq invasion; a "worm's eye view" history that has yet to emerge.

### **Participant-Observer Accounts**

The accounts that have been published following the Iraq War's high invasion phase are many, although the specific focus of this study is found in two distinct genres. First, several oral history collections have been published that offer snapshots into a multitude of battlefield experiences. Although these works offer less detail and nuance than the monograph memoirs, they come with their own strengths, especially considering the wide range of perspectives found in such collections. These works offer the historian an excellent starting point for understanding the array of experiences of embedded reporters. The value of this multitude of perspectives is

apparent when we consider the range of personal experiences shared in each short account. The second set of sources also offers this range, although from fewer perspectives and with much more detail. Indeed, the memoirs written by formerly-embedded reporters offer an immense amount of detail through first-person narrative accounts, although the author's style of writing and selection of themes obviously results in the exclusion of many details in preference to others. What follows as an introduction to these works offers insights into their value and contribution to Iraq War historiography as unique primary sources.

These sources have allowed this study to incorporate social and cultural examination with the traditional methods of studying the actions of individuals and the ebb and flow of battle, and thus provide insights into the culture of a modern army at war.

This thesis is a clear departure from previous academic inquiries. Instead of evaluating the policy and its implementation and consequences, this study utilizes this unique source base for a pointed historical inquiry into modern warfare and the culture of combat.

The new model represented by this approach -- analyzing the experiences of both combat reporters and soldiers through the intimate perspective that embedding provided -- allows us to chart a course for understanding the battlefield history of the Iraq War against a backdrop of rich and important United States military-media history literature. Utilizing these methods, we can examine how embedded media and the soldiers they experienced battle with contributed to this history.

## **2. A SHORT HISTORY OF U.S. MILITARY-PRESS RELATIONS**

The roots of the military-media relationship that had taken shape on the eve of the Iraq War were formed deep within the bedrock of American history, as the press played a major role in American society even before the nation was born. Indeed, the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, Mexican-American War, the U.S. Civil War, and the Spanish-American War offer specific examples of how early American military history coincided with the evolution of an American press free of its British origins. Changing social currents, technology, and the rise of the United States to the status of international military power all played prominent roles in this evolution.

The history of media coverage -- and how news emerged from the battlefields -- of the United States' early wars continued to evolve with critical episodes during the World Wars and the Cold War. These episodes impacted the ways in which those wars were covered from the battlefield, and in turn how they were viewed on the home front and in the history books. For instance, the roots of the embedding program used in the 2003 Iraq War were forged in the fires of political polarization during -- and after -- the social revolutions of the Vietnam era. Those controversies were themselves influenced by the earlier history of America's military interventions and how they were reported in the media.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The focus of the greater study that this historical primer introduces is the value of first-hand reports from the battlefield, which, depending on the level of access and cooperation from the military, help form a critical intersection between the news emerged from combat zones and the history of the related conflicts. A wide array of academic sources are considered in this historical primer that, when considered collectively, offer a clearer picture of the history of the American experience with war correspondence. This introductory survey aims to collate decades of research by historians and other academics, who have aided in bringing the discourse concerning American military-media history to date, in several unique ways from multiple perspectives. One excellent example of a comprehensive reference on American media history is Michael C. Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), which serves as a general source for understanding the interactions between the American people, their government, and the media throughout that nation's history. For another important study, see Joseph J

## Early American Wars, from the Revolution up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

During America's first war, the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the American war correspondent was born. Early news reporters complemented "pamphleteers" (individuals who created and distributed paper pamphlets containing their version of news), and raced details of the revolution's battles to eager readers. Deep political divisions played a major role in the nature and tone of reports, as both sides competed for the loyalties of the population. In fact, the revolution itself was inspired and supported by a political battle within the press long before any shots were fired.<sup>2</sup> When war finally broke out, battlefield reports followed the political atmosphere and "stringers" –war correspondents hired by the fledgling American news outlets -- in many cases forwarded exaggerated and one-sided stories from battlefield commanders aimed at the hearts and minds of their readers.<sup>3</sup>

The characteristics of front line reporting during the American Revolution -- much of it made up of after-the-fact mythmaking as opposed to proper journalism -- continued to feature in America's second war. News outlets helped create the "frontier myth" prior to and during the War of 1812 (1812-1815), employing editorials and romantic accounts of battle based on the ideological construction of the American warrior. Dubious sources again made up mostly of

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Mathews, *Reporting the Wars* (London, United Kingdom: Greenwood Press, 1973), first published in 1957, and still a classic in terms of placing the importance of the media-military dynamic in the forefront. Also see Nathaniel Lande, *Dispatches from the Front: A History of the American War Correspondent, 1776-1991* (New York, NY, United States: Henry Holt & Company, 1995); and the most renowned title on war reporting, Phillip Knightley and John Pilger, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to the Gulf War II* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2003), first published in 1975.

<sup>2</sup> See Arthur Meier M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-76* (United States: Greenwood Press, 1979); and Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>In fact, the correspondents that would produce the stories of the war were not professional philosophers or journalists, but politicians, lawyers and plantation owners (among other things). For reading on the pamphlets and pamphleteers of the Revolutionary War, see Merrill D. Peterson and Bernard Bailyn, "Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 4 (July 1965). Also see Lande, 4-7. Also see John Byrne Cooke, *Reporting the War: Freedom of the Press from the American Revolution to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), especially 5-23.



letters from battlefield commanders influenced what were sold as reports from the front. This contentious war coverage also aided in creating a post-war political climate of polarization and bitterness, a trend found in the discussions of later American wars found below.<sup>4</sup> “Much of what was reported about the war was editorial commentary in the political style of the day – rife with sarcasm and mud-slinging,” which “relied heavily on letters from participants in or witnesses to battles” that often took weeks to arrive, leaving editors the task of “piecing together the information they received.”<sup>5</sup>

"The middle decade of the nineteenth century witnessed a striking transformation in the methods of gathering and presenting war news," according to Joseph Matthews, in *Reporting the Wars*. This period represented a revolution in war information and "the instrument of change was, of course, the war correspondent." This development was shaped also by competition between newspapers vying to bring the most interesting and important news to their readers, and The Mexican War (1846-1847) is regarded as the first war to be "adequately and comprehensively reported in the daily press."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it represented a turning point in war reporting, as telegraph technology provided a hungry readership with timely battle reports for the first time. As with previous experiences, American military successes were announced utilizing strong nationalistic language – although a new dimension, namely racially-based rhetoric – emerged as a focal point for rallying the nation against its enemies (another precedent that had profound consequences and impact upon later war reporting).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A discussion of the Frontier Myth can be found in Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). For a discussion of war reporting on the War of 1812, see Lande, pp. 31-45.

<sup>5</sup>Lande, P. 45.

<sup>6</sup>Matthews, 52; 53; 52-53.

<sup>7</sup>Lande, 47-93. Also see Gene M. Brack, “Mexican Opinion, American Racism, and the War of 1846,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1970).

The expansion of the press and the competition for market share amongst major publications in the cities of a growing nation, influenced the creation of the “penny press,” which relied heavily on soldier/reporters, whose stories rode the Pony Express as well as the revolutionary telegraph system to the printing presses back home.<sup>8</sup>For the first time, comprehensive coverage of the battlefield emerged, and news outlets went as far as employing mobile printing presses aboard ships in order to speed the delivery of war stories to the home front(as was the case with famous newsman George Kendall).<sup>9</sup> These reports helped the U.S. military build a positive image of its operations – even though antiwar dissent to the Mexican War, led by activists like Henry David Thoreau,did emerge.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the victory that the press portrayed culminated in great victory parades that welcomed home the returning heroic soldiers, a lesson in propaganda not lost on the military leadership of the day, or their successors.<sup>11</sup>

The Civil War saw a continuation and expansion of past traditions in war reporting, as both sides engaged in a media battle that highlighted the incendiary political and social conflicts inherent in that titanic struggle. Elements in the Federal government applied an inconsistent censorship of the press, and most war reporters were more than willing to tow the line of the

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), especially Ch. 1, “The Revolution of the Penny Press”, 12-31. Also see Matthews, 53-58; and Lande, 52, 90.

<sup>9</sup> See Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (n.: Oxford University Press, 1988), 17, 18, 23, 228-229, 239, 258; and George Sullivan, *Journalists at Risk: Reporting America's Wars* (United States: Lerner Publications Co.,U.S., 2007), 16-18.

<sup>10</sup>Although this dissent did indeed offer a counter point to the press's one-sided reporting, the opposition to the war's true intent was voiced mainly in criticism of government policy on legal, moral and philosophical grounds, as opposed to military performance. See Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, ed. Bob Pepperman Taylor (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2016). 125-130; Lewis Perry and John H. Schroeder, “Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848,” *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (April 1975). Dissent also was led by the Whig press, which represented the political opposition to the war's true aims and the President's use of force under dubious circumstances and authority. See Frederick Merk, “Dissent in the Mexican War,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, no. Vol. 81. (1969).

<sup>11</sup>See Johannsen, 175-204;Lande, ; and Cooke, 23-41, 54, 248.

formations they followed. As Joseph J. Matthews noted in *Reporting the Wars*, "censorship rules were characterized by vagary, and reporting conditions varied from place to place."<sup>12</sup> Although reports from the front sometimes included the intimate and horrific details of combat, news of defeat and the wholesale slaughter of troops on both sides were rare. It has been argued that the journalistic community -- that had grown exponentially along with the nation it covered, and had new technologies like photography and the telegraph to utilize -- missed an enormous opportunity to report the realities of warfare, but newspapers instead consistently dealt in fiction, exaggeration and outright propaganda during the war. The harsh realities of modern warfare rarely reached the public, as the romantic stories of bravery and victory seldom gave way to the horrors of America's most destructive conflict.<sup>13</sup> Many excellent firsthand accounts were published after the war, and studies utilizing these battlefield memoirs have showcased the value of eye-witness accounts from the front lines. They have enriched greatly the history of that titanic struggle with personal and intimate perspectives on warfare and its true cost.<sup>14</sup>

The Spanish American War (1898) provided a snapshot of socio-political and technological trends in American society through war reporting. The vast urbanization and population growth that coincided with the latter parts of the Industrial and Market Revolutions

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<sup>12</sup> Matthews, P. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Knightley, pp. 21-39, Lande, pp. 96-97.

<sup>14</sup>A plethora of memoirs written by soldiers of the Civil War have been analyzed and published, and indeed represent their own school of interpretation within Civil War scholarship – and offer the types of intimate and nuanced details of warfare that this study strives to regarding the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For examples, see Kenneth W. Noe, William J Seymour, and Terry L. Jones, "The Civil War Memoirs of Captain William J. Seymour: Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger," *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (February 1993); James L. Nichols and David Herbert Donald, "Gone for a Soldier: The Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard," *The Journal of Southern History* 43, no. 1 (February 1977); Michael B Ballard and David Holt, *A Mississippi Rebel in the Army of Northern Virginia: The Civil War Memoirs of Private David Holt with a New Appendix of Excerpts from His 1865 Diary*, ed. Thomas D. Cockrell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Earl J Hess and Abner R. Small, *The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Memoirs of Major Abner R. Small of the Sixteenth Maine Volunteers ; Together with the Diary Which He Was a Prisoner of War*, ed. Harold Adams Small, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1999). For in-depth discussions on the Civil War and the press/media, see Cooke, pp. 43-61; Matthews 79-101; and James R. Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U. S. From the Civil War Through World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 3-24.

provided ever more of an atmosphere for competition to grow amongst news outlets, a fact highlighted by the epic and quite public feud that pitted media magnates William Randolph *Hearst* versus Joseph *Pulitzer*. Indeed, historian George Juergens noted that the media played an ever-greater role in American military history, as Pulitzer competed with Hearst for circulation by "helping to stir up a war with Spain."<sup>15</sup> A distinct type of war reporting emerged, dubbed "yellow journalism," a reference to the exaggerations and sensationalism found in the battlefield reports of the day that, offered racially charged tales of heroics to an eager audience.<sup>16</sup>

News stories followed the precedent of representing propaganda pieces like they had in most instances of American battlefield reporting to date -- as exemplified by the legendary chronicles of "The Roughriders," Admiral Dewey's victory at the Battle of Manila Bay, and other celebratory accounts -- which reflected the deep and pervasive racist notions of the period. Celebrity reporters such as Richard Harding Davis dealt in the romanticizing of combat, as a general sanitization of battlefield events and the narrative of heroic American actions were the order of the day. All of this was in contrast to the true brutality inflicted upon the Cuban and Filipino people by American forces, and the death, violence and destruction they wrought. Instead of

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<sup>15</sup> The importance of this recurrence cannot be overstated, as, for the fourth time in the nation's short history, the press had influenced the call to arms, only this time a clear market-driven influence was a major factor in the subsequent reporting. See George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2015), xv.

<sup>16</sup> See John F. Neville, "The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Heyday of Yellow Journalism," *American Journalism* 7, no. 3 (July 1990); Ernest R. May and Charles H. Brown, "The Correspondents' War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War," *The American Historical Review* 73, no. 5 (June 1968); and Jess Giessel, "Black, white and yellow: Journalism and correspondents of the Spanish-American War." *Spanish-American War Centennial Website* (2005); and for a very early piece of academic study on the matter, see Wilkerson, Marcus Manley. "Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War: A Study in War Propaganda", No. 8. Louisiana State University Press, 1932. For discussion of official policy towards press coverage, see C. H. Brown, "Press Censorship in the Spanish-American War," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 1, 1965),

reporting on the actual events on the battlefield, many journalists, through wildly popular romantic stories of combat, rose to the lofty heights of media celebrity.<sup>17</sup>

### **The World Wars and the Birth of a Superpower**

With the dawn of a new century, and during the First World War, close ties developed between the press and military under an official policy of censorship which allowed for the U.S. government to officially take control of the emerging information warfare battle space. Emerging journalistic practices had introduced new challenges for military security, and the role of combat reporters and the total war nature of the conflict required strict control of the news media. Close between the military and press was the result, with the press cooperating with institutionalized censorship overseen by the War Department.<sup>18</sup>

The official policy of censorship of the press in the First World War coincided with a revolution in military affairs, which introduced mechanized and scientific warfare, which greatly affected the levels of human cost on the battlefield. Propaganda became a tool that would radically alter the ways in which the public would be exposed to distant battlefields, and more reliable communications technology allowed for more timely reporting across vast distances. Indeed, "readers of the 1860s had been afforded heavy coverage of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. But faulty communications facilities often caused long delays." The issue of transmitting timely reports was complicated further by "journalists who substituted lurid imagination for diligent reporting," a phenomenon that continued in the First World War, as

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<sup>17</sup> Knightley, 57-60, 62, Lande, 125-157.

<sup>18</sup> The emergence of the American hero in popular media took an ever-greater hold during WWI, and influenced the ways in which the ideological crusades of the United States were viewed in the press. See Christopher Capozzola, "Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 4, 2014); and for a detailed account of U.S. censorship legislation and its implementation, see David M Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 25th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22-26, 60-61, 76-77. knightley also describes the censorship model, 132-134.

battlefield reports were "hampered by censors and heavily salted with government propaganda."Therefore, the public's appetite for the two pillars of battlefield coverage -- namely accurate details and timely reports -- had remained largely unsatisfied.<sup>19</sup>

Early in 1942, at the beginning of American involvement in the Second World War, the founding of the Federal Office of War Information was based upon President Roosevelt's argument that war reporting was to be shaped by the overarching goal of keeping the home front committed to a total war approach; as opposed to the specifics of battles and engagements.<sup>20</sup> In the field, press officers attempted to accomplish this objective, and only allowed reports that cleared official censors to reach the American public. Although journalists reported from the front while travelling with regular soldiers, many were assigned to work with headquarters elements where they relied on military briefings for information, and although reporters were free to write whatever they wished, only stories cleared by the censors could be published. The result was a sanitization of battlefield realities, at least in the early days of the war, where human catastrophe was the order of the day. Indeed, as a prime example, the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force "prohibited release of photographs of a 'horrific nature.'"<sup>21</sup> News outlets were limited in what they could provide to readers, listeners and viewers on the home front, as the (specific) harsh realities of sometimes wasteful -- and commonly brutal -- fighting

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<sup>19</sup>Michelle Ferrari and James Tobin, *Reporting America at War: An Oral History* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2004), 11-13, 12.

<sup>20</sup>Sydney Weinberg, "What to Tell America: The Writers' Quarrel in the Office of War Information," *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (June 1968), 73-80.

<sup>21</sup> See Roeder, 16, where a discussion of the evolution of censorship's practice in WWII is noted.

from far-off battlefields were subject to strict censorship and an overarching propaganda effort that supported the “total war” effort.<sup>22</sup>

Technology again afforded a new medium for which battlefield reports would reach the home front. Newsreels supplemented the traditional print media and an ever-expanding radio network broadcast war coverage, while the work of combat reporters again took on a new, romantic identity with their voices and faces becoming staples of war reporting.<sup>23</sup> Reports mainly presented tales of heroics, bravery, and the American fighting spirit. The American soldier became synonymous with the struggle against tyranny and dictatorship, and American society was inundated with -- although more timely and factual -- reports from the front that were subject to censorship.<sup>24</sup> Although censorship provided the military with oversight of the news that emerged from the front lines, there was actually an eventual loosening of the strict governance and sanitization of battlefield reports, providing more accurate reporting from the battlefield later in the war. Even though subject to censors and obviously one-sided, newsreels, print and radio reports eventually provided growing value to their audience in terms of raising awareness of the massive toll the fierce battles of the Second World War took on the American soldiers who fought it. World War II indeed represented a sort of leap forward, as it produced proto-embedded journalists, such as Ernie Pyle.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Knightley, 344-358; and Lande, 169-217. Also see Roeder, 18-20, where the historian details the ways in which battlefield death, violence and destruction eventually made its way to the home front at the very end of the war, after being restricted for the vast majority of the conflict.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson, *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin (Trade), 1997). For an explanation of the newsreel's use and of some important issues with it as a propaganda tool, see George H Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 18-21, 44, 163.

<sup>24</sup> See R. W. Steele, “News of the ‘good war’: World War II News Management,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (December 1, 1985). Also see Knightley, 113-128, 269-300, Lande, 169-217.

<sup>25</sup> Roeder, 18-21, 44, 163.

With the advent of the Cold War, a new reality confronted the U.S. military establishment. During the World Wars, journalists accepted censorship as a part of the overall total war concept. But limited conflicts and military interventions, or “police actions,” no longer met the criteria of wars of national survival. The Korean War exemplified the final conflict in which the United States military’s official public affairs policy was based on the censorship model, as the early Cold War – with its emphasis in America on unity of purpose and political consensus – also provided the political climate necessary for tight control of the press.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Korean War marked a watershed moment in the censorship model's effectiveness and suitability for America's foreign interventions, as the advent of the "limited war" dictated a new set of rules. As official censorship was not instituted at first, "honest, inquiring, investigative... fascinating and instructive" correspondence indeed reached the home front; only later would it be stifled and silenced by censorship following its impact on public opinion – and in response to the perceived threat that free access to the battlefield posed to the Red Scare at home.<sup>27</sup> The Korean War became the "forgotten war," in part due to the muzzle that was placed upon the press in its reporting from the battlefield, perhaps to the delight of the policy makers.

The lesson of Korea was not lost on the press or the military in its wake, as the early Cold War’s domestic influence – namely the “red scare” and the spectre of another total war –began to diminish. This meant that the “limited interventions” of the 1960s would pose further challenges

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<sup>26</sup> Reporters had originally been free to report what they wanted, only subject to a “personal code” of conduct, which was replaced quickly with official censorship. See Knightley, 293, 296-301, 306-308, 310, 322-323, 325-327, 350-351, 355; Lande, 269-270.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2010), 80, 78-82. Also see Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 155-168.



to any attempt at direct censorship, as the atmosphere shifted from fears of a war of national survival with the USSR to one where America served as global policeman.<sup>28</sup>

It would become abundantly clear that complete freedom of the press presented an obstacle to meeting ever-evolving Cold War objectives – especially in Asia, and this fact was highlighted by the complete failure of the military-press relationship in Vietnam. The journalistic community was no longer willing to abide by the strict rules set by the military during the past wars of national survival, especially since the undeclared wars in Southeast Asia coincided with domestic social upheaval, and a general challenging of the status quo.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, "short of total war it [was] highly unlikely that the United States would impose total censorship over military operations [again]."<sup>30</sup> These domestic social and political realities influenced a confrontation between the military and the press in Vietnam, the results of which proved disastrous for U.S. military public affairs efforts.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Watershed Moment: 'Uncensored War' in Vietnam**

The U.S. military could no longer rely on an official censorship model to ensure that the press would cooperate with its military interventions, as increasing openness for a critical press in Vietnam went hand in hand with the changing domestic culture of America. The nation had transformed a great deal since 1950 – by the later 1960s, it had become more divided and adversarial and polarized, and even President Lyndon Johnson understood that any official

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<sup>28</sup> Casey, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> "The times, not The Times had set the rules," according to Clarence R. Wyatt and C Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1993), 22, 19-23.

<sup>30</sup> Harry G. Summers and Col Harry G Summers, Jr., *On Strategy a Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2009), 191.

<sup>31</sup> See Daniel C Hallin, *The "uncensored war": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 211-217; and William M. Hammond, "The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat: A Critical Examination," *Reviews in American History* 17, no. 2 (June 1989).

ensorship of the action in Vietnam would force his administration to confront vast changes in society's willingness to accept the government's position.<sup>32</sup>

An adversarial relationship between the press, the U.S. military, and its allies developed rapidly on the ground in Vietnam, as legendary reporters such as Peter Arnett and David Halberstam found themselves in the midst of the Diem regime's domestic security crackdown in the early days of U.S. involvement; a brutal campaign at clear odds with the official line of the U.S. government who had insisted that they supported a democratic leader in Diem and that their intervention there was based upon it. Much of the early (1961-63) reportage -- that was more critical of Diem -- was based upon his overwhelming autocratic brutality, and would contribute to a culture of dissent so pervasive in America by the second half of the decade.<sup>33</sup>

The press eventually also found much to criticize in the military's approach to this unconventional war. As the war escalated, and military success began to be questioned by the antiwar movement, dovish political figures, and especially a critical press, the U.S. military clung to its argument that it was winning in Vietnam; and in response, the press began to object to lofty reports of battlefield achievements. A "credibility gap" (a term used by the press to describe the military's lack of credibility pertaining to its release of information) emerged, where the press no longer trusted the military version of events.<sup>34</sup> The problems that near complete freedom of the press caused for the U.S. military's public relations efforts were profound, as the American public reacted negatively not only to questions surrounding the effectiveness of

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<sup>32</sup>Although Johnson had indeed considered imposing censorship in Vietnam, he decided that it was not possible due to the domestic situation he found himself in. See Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy: 1963-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43-45.

<sup>33</sup> See Peter Arnett, *Live from the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad - 35 Years in the World's War Zones* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1994), 80-89, 120-140. Arnett offers a first-hand account of the early days of the military-press confrontation here. Also see Clarence R. Wyatt and C Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1993), 110-112.

<sup>34</sup>Hallin, 35, 49.

military operations, but also to reports on the consequences of these actions found in battlefield reports from the front. The press began to focus on the daily death and destruction, which clearly highlighted the effects of flawed military logic and operations in Vietnam.<sup>35</sup>

A cursory glance at the battlefield memoirs of a variety of war reporters shows just how prevalent the disconnect was between what was actually happening on the battlefield and what was claimed by the military command in their briefings. From the beginning of the war, dating back to the Diem regime's conflict with the American press corps in the early 1960s, journalists found reason to question the rosy picture painted by the Pentagon, and for good reason. This trend continued throughout the war, and only deepened as war correspondents flocked to the war zone and witnessed firsthand the brutality, death and destruction that defined that conflict. Indeed, they were free to witness – and report on, due to a lack of any direct control of their stories – the growing and catastrophic dissent within the ranks of the U.S. military in terms of their role, their effectiveness, and the war's very value.<sup>36</sup>

Technology once again influenced the course of the war; a consistent theme through American military-media history. The first “TV War” captured the attention of the American public, and the technology available to reporters drastically altered the perception of a war in a

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<sup>35</sup>Hammond, “The Press in Vietnam as Agent of Defeat: A Critical Examination” offers an excellent discussion of the impact of daily news on the public. Also see Judith RaineBaroody, *Media Access and the Military: The Case of the Gulf War* (Thousand Oaks, CA, United States: University Press of America, 1998), 54-56; and Hallin, 6.

<sup>36</sup>Several intimate accounts of the Vietnam War were produced by war reporters in its wake, which demonstrate the value of journalists' battlefield memoirs as key primary sources for understanding the intimate cultural and social aspects of soldiers at war – while also providing firsthand accounts of the way the war and its fundamental issues played out. See Arnette; Malcolm W Browne, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A Reporter's Life* (New York: Times Books, 1993); H. D. S. Greenway, *Foreign Correspondent: A Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Publisher Unknown, 1977); Jacques Leslie, *The Mark: War Correspondent's Memoir of Vietnam and Cambodia* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995). For a survey history of war reporters in Vietnam, see William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles* (New York: Random House, 1996).

far-off land fought, in many cases, by young, unwilling draftees.<sup>37</sup> A personal connection to the war had developed for the vast majority of Americans – shaped by the dispatches of war correspondents from the front lines -- as a generation’s dinner was served along with TV reports that reminded citizens of somebody they knew, over there, fighting this costly and “unwinnable” war.<sup>38</sup> For some, the reputation and sacrifice of the soldier of the Second World War had been replaced by the characterization of Vietnam-era soldiers as uncivilized, undisciplined troops, whose identity became synonymous with atrocities and policy failure.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Long Shadow of the Five O’clock Follies: From Confrontation to Exclusion**

The Vietnam War clearly produced a confrontation between the United States military and the press, the results of which are apparent even today. The failure of public affairs policies, exacerbating an inherent conflict between military culture and press freedoms, brought far-reaching changes to the United States military’s interaction and cooperation with the media. Analyses of the policies leading to and the impact of the “uncensored war” can now be undertaken, with the Vietnam War serving as a backdrop for understanding the exclusion of the press from the battlefields of various United States military interventions afterwards that severely limited battlefield reporting, and the public’s access to the ground truths of those conflicts.

An analysis of military, media, and academic sources related to the history of war reporting in the post-Vietnam era offers insight into the impact of the Vietnam War’s media battle, the reporting done from the battlefields there, and the resulting restrictions the United

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<sup>37</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, “Vietnam: The Television War,” *Print Culture and Video Culture* Vol. 111, no. No. 4 (1982). Also see Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy: 1963-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50-52.

<sup>38</sup>Wyatt, 146-148.

<sup>39</sup>This was the view held by military commanders and government actors, especially. See Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations: The U.S. Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2007), 53-56.

States military levied upon battlefield reporting in its wake. A discussion based upon the influence of military culture upon the resulting relationship between the military and the media in places like Iraq and Afghanistan follows.

Indeed, referring to the Vietnam War in 1971, President Richard M. Nixon proclaimed that besides the threat of international Communism, the United States government's "worst enemy [seemed] to be the press."<sup>40</sup> Military brass widely shared this sentiment, as they had for years witnessed the deterioration of relations with an ever-more-confrontational press clearly influenced by the unfolding debacle. The Vietnam experience left the military with stark demands on their planning for subsequent dealings with the press, as the conflicts of the future would demand serious internal deliberations aimed at redressing the failures of allowing completely unfettered press coverage of their operations.<sup>41</sup>

A striking change after the Vietnam War involved the exclusion of the media from international interventions, as clearly shown in the case of Operation Urgent Fury. The 1983 invasion of Grenada represented a clear line of departure from the Vietnam-era's free media access to battlefields; which caused a great deal of negative press reporting, and in turn, influenced the public in such a devastating way for military public relations.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the Grenada experience is of prime importance to understanding the hardening of official U.S. policy towards access to America's post-Vietnam battlefields. Indeed, this also influenced a lack of firsthand accounts that emerged from these conflicts; and the academic/media outcry and

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<sup>40</sup>William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), ix.

<sup>41</sup>The lingering effects of the Vietnam experience, especially in regards to the media-military environment in the post-9/11 era are discussed in-depth in following chapters. Also see Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations: The U.S. Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> See Eugene Secunda and Terence Moran, *Selling War to America: From the Spanish American War to the Global War on Terror* (London: Praeger Security International, 2007), 116-121.

subsequent congressional proceedings following them offer examples of how the exclusion of the press there re-ignited confrontations of the past. An inquiry into the impact of the Grenada episode on the media-military relationship, and the flow of reports from the battlefield, is critical to understanding the lengths that the military continued to go to in order to avoid another Vietnam-like situation.<sup>43</sup>

### **The 'Credibility Gap'**

A litany of factors played into a fundamental divergence between the media and the military that led to the critical confrontation that would shape the media-military relationship and any first-hand reporting from the front lines of America's new wars.

The very nature of a "police action" that was never fully recognized as an actual war forced the military to adapt its policies as the situation developed, including the way the military allowed access to its operations; in effect, the ad-hoc nature of public affairs operations dictated that no official policy was adopted in a timely and coherent fashion, limiting any sort of curtailments on press access, especially outright censorship.<sup>44</sup> In addition to this, the United States' stubborn support for the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem (President of South Vietnam, 1955–

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<sup>43</sup>Later conflicts— dealt with below in the same manner -- represented an opportunity for the military to allow access to the media and repair their relationship, especially as Congressional reports and various studies offered guidance to future cooperation. This was not to be the case, however, as major limitations to press inclusion were instituted, which again strained relations while, critically, stifling firsthand accounts from the battlefields of the late Cold War.

<sup>44</sup> Arnett, 138-141; Hallin, 6, 9, 213; Summers, 39, 191; Wyatt, 118, 159;

1963) in the early days of the conflict soured influential journalists' support for any ideological explanation of the intentions of the American intervention as a democracy-spreading exercise.<sup>45</sup>

Another major factor was the reliance on body counts as a device to convince the press and the public of military success opened a fierce debate over the accuracy of information provided by the military, and led to general suspicion of military reports and the credibility of the public affairs offices tasked with providing updates. The response to this "credibility gap" was profound, as reporters sought out their own sources for reporting on the combat taking place; and what they found stood in stark contrast to the military's version of events.<sup>46</sup> As reports of death, violence, seemingly needless destruction and senseless human sacrifice – especially amongst Vietnamese civilians and American troops -- emerged; protests to the war on the home front began to influence both the press and the military regarding the ways in which they interacted.<sup>47</sup>

The military's daily briefings, the "Five O'clock Follies," as the press soon came to term them, took on a circus-like atmosphere, as reporters clashed with public affairs officers in an open and humiliating fashion, often mocking the reports as fanciful, and even more damagingly, obviously deceitful.<sup>48</sup>

This confrontation led to the forming of a chasm between the military and the press that widened exponentially with the deterioration of the military situation, especially in the wake of the Tet Offensive in the early months of 1968, where the government's guarantees of military

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<sup>45</sup>Arnett, 80-121; Hallin, 42-48; Richard H. Immerman, "Dealing with a Government of Madmen: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Ngo Dinh Diem", in David L. Anderson, ed., *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). 138.

<sup>46</sup> William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (United States: United States Government Printing, 1989), 22, 214, 296; Rid, 54-55, 61, 177; Hallin, 140-141; Wyatt, 62, 78, 195.

<sup>47</sup>Leslie H. Gelb, "The Essential Domino: American Politics and Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs* 50, no. 3 (1972); Hammond, 288-289, 355; Rid, 58, 61-62.

<sup>48</sup> Arnett, 169-173; Hallin, 146; Hammond, 239-251; Rid, 11, 56, 177.

progress were clearly challenged by events on the ground; and seemingly right there for the world to see. Johnson's "light at the end of the tunnel" election campaign that focused on military and political gains in Vietnam was overshadowed by the perceived realities on the ground in South Vietnam's war zones broadcast across the United States, seemingly confirming that the military and political leadership was misleading the public about their operations. The press continued publishing articles and broadcasting stories painting a rather different picture of the situation than the Johnson Administration.<sup>49</sup>

Military officials regarded the public's increasing discontent as a reaction to negative press reporting that focused on a "credibility gap," which had, by the early 1970s, deepened into a proverbial canyon. The Vietnam War ended on this grim note in mid-decade, with the military and the press at odds on several critical fronts. No longer was the military willing to assist the press in reporting on their operations, and no longer would the press accept the military's version of events as accurate or credible. A confrontation had developed that would influence the military-press relationship – and stifle reporting from the battlefield -- for decades to come.<sup>50</sup>

### **'Explicit Tension': The Invasion of Grenada and the Exclusion of the Media**

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<sup>49</sup>Anderson ed., 186, 200, 257; Hallin, 165, 170; Hammond, 96; In fact, the idea that the war was going well had become so ridiculous that at one point, "some young Americans from the embassy and the other U.S. agencies threw a 'light at the end of the tunnel' party to poke sly fun at the official optimism." Arnett, 237, 226-237

<sup>50</sup> The military perspective on the lingering effects of the Vietnam confrontation with the media available in James J. McHugh, "The Media Factor: An Essential Ingredient to Operational Success", Naval War College, 1997, 3; and Richard B. Marvin, Commander U. S. Navy, "The Media and Operation Desert Storm: Executive Research Project S62", The Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 20319-6000, April 1992. For an academic perspective, see <sup>50</sup>Jon Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 92-101.



The 1983 Grenada intervention was the first sizeable United States military operation since the Vietnam War ended a decade earlier, involving over 6,000 United States ground troops and a determined enemy force that fought several pitched battles.<sup>51</sup>

The Grenada crisis was rooted in a combination of America's long-standing freedom of the seas naval policy, and the Cold War's encroachment on Central and South America, as the United States sought to continue its dominance over the Caribbean Sea as a critical trade route adjacent to the Panama Canal. Indeed, Soviet-backed Cuban challenges to the balance of power in the region in the late 1970s influenced president Carter to issue several warnings to any nation to refrain from becoming involved the region's affairs, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant the target nation in question (this line was in lock-step with over a century-and-a-half of policy, officially mandated by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823).<sup>52</sup>

Grenada itself was a nation fraught with political division influenced by fragmented socialist movements, a fact that predisposed U.S. attention, as the strategic value of this seemingly insignificant island nation was due almost exclusively to its proximity to America's proverbial – and literal – backyard. When the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) took power in a coup in 1979, it began pursuing policies that stood in clear contrast to stated U.S. objectives in the region. In effect, the growing ties with Soviet-backed socialist states, and shunning of U.S. sponsored regional security agreements only exacerbated American concerns over the construction of a new airport – that could serve the Soviet and Cuban air forces<sup>53</sup> – and

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<sup>51</sup>Western, 94-95.

<sup>52</sup>National Archives and Records Administration, "Our Documents: Monroe Doctrine (1823)" n.a.,n.d., <<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=23>> (1 February 2015).

<sup>53</sup> President Reagan held a press briefing in April 1983 regarding this airfield, and its perceived intention of threatening U.S. interests. See Aggrey Brown, "The West Indies and the New International Information Order: The Case of Grenada" in *Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives*,

lead to action following a coup by the even more socialist-leaning Revolutionary Military Council (RMC) between October 13-21, 1983. The official line went that the resulting brutality of a crackdown on civil liberties and a perceived threat to over 1,000 U.S. citizens prompted President Reagan to form a military and political coalition with regional allies and deploy a military force to secure the island and U.S. interests there.<sup>54</sup> A sharply contrasting viewpoint at the other end of the political spectrum charged that the invasion was merely a political ploy intended to sway American voters in the coming 1984 presidential campaign, by “exploiting the time-tested anti-communist theme – ‘the devil at our doorstep’ syndrome,” as one study noted.<sup>55</sup>

The RMC and its foreign allies posed little challenge to United States military power, as a naval and ground combined task force dispatched the resistance in under a week’s time. The nature and history of the fighting in Grenada, which left minimal American casualties and a “liberated” island secured, was relegated to a footnote, as very little reporting emerged from the battlefield due to the exclusion of the press.<sup>56</sup> In the event, the United States military, acting on direct orders from the highest levels of political leadership, essentially banned the press from covering the campaign. Indeed, the military admitted this in its official report on the intervention,

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(conference proceedings) Walter C. Soderlund and Stuart H. Surlin eds., Ontario Cooperative Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, 1985, 14.

<sup>54</sup> For detailed accounts of the political situation leading to the Grenada intervention see Robert J. Beck, *The Grenada Invasion: Politics, Law and Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 10-17; William C. Gilmore, *Grenada Intervention: Analysis and Documentation* (New York: Facts on File, 1984), 20-28; Vijay Tiwathia, *The Grenada War: Anatomy of a Low-Intensity Conflict* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1987), 33, 37-40, 61-64;

<sup>55</sup> Aggrey Brown, “The West Indies and the New International Information Order: The Case of Grenada” in *Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives*, (conference proceedings) Walter C. Soderlund and Stuart H. Surlin eds., Ontario Cooperative Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, 1985, 13.

<sup>56</sup> In fact, the only details to emerge were from military sources. See Ronald H. Cole, “OPERATION URGENT FURY: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada, 12 October - 2 November 1983”, Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997: “Nearly eight thousand soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines had participated in URGENT FURY along with 353 Caribbean allies of the CPF. US forces had sustained 19 killed and 116 wounded; Cuban forces lost 25 killed, 59 wounded and 638 personnel captured. Grenadian forces casualties were 45 killed and 358 wounded; at least 24 civilians were killed.” 62.

stating that “due to the unexpected intensity of Cuban resistance and the needs of operational security, military leaders had denied reporters access to Grenada until the third day of the operation.”<sup>57</sup> However, according to Philip Knightley, “the United States Military, which believed that it might have won the war in Vietnam if the reporting had not sapped the public’s will for the fight, had its new media strategy in place” when it intervened in Grenada. “Basically the plan was to confront the media head on, to tell journalists that unlike Vietnam, this was a war they would not be allowed to cover.”<sup>58</sup>

### **The Impact of URGENT FURY upon Military-Media Relations**

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, speaking to his subordinates just prior to the D-Day invasion of June 1944, proclaimed that "with regard to publicity, the first essential in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first essential in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide-open publicity. It is your job and mine to try to reconcile these sometimes diverse considerations."<sup>59</sup> These considerations were in no way reconciled during or after the Grenada intervention, as the media took exception to the secrecy and exclusion that represented the military public affairs strategy. A flurry of sources that

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<sup>57</sup>Ronald H. Cole, “OPERATION URGENT FURY: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada, 12 October - 2 November 1983”, Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 484.

<sup>59</sup>From the forward of "Regulations for War Correspondents Accompanying Allied Expeditionary Force in the Field." Copy found in U.S. Cong. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs Hearing on Pentagon Rules on Media Access to the Persian Gulf War, 102nd Congress, 1st Sess., S Hrg 1042-178, 887, Cited in Richard B. Marvin, Commander U. S. Navy, “The Media and Operation Desert Storm: Executive Research Project S62”, The Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 20319-6000, April 1992, 1.

appeared shortly after the Grenada invasion – academic studies, Congressional reports and military documents – sought to make sense of these policies and their implications.

Indeed, the very legality of the invasion was contested early on. Many in the media cited the lack of a fundamental legal pretext for the war as a mitigating factor in the Reagan Administration’s decision to exclude the media from covering the invasion altogether.<sup>60</sup>

Recent scholarship proposed that Reagan era military public relations strategy was based on distrust of the media, and an overarching sentiment amongst military and political leaders that the press was indeed an “enemy,” a continuation of the Presidents of the Vietnam era’s perception.<sup>61</sup> The solution, from the military’s point of view, was to present only what the government wanted to reveal, and only when it chose to do so. This meant keeping the prying eyes of the press away from the operation, and forced journalists to rely on the official government version of events if they were to report on the conflict at all. In fact, the Reagan Administration actually kept the operation secret from its own press secretary, who threatened to resign in protest, and whose deputy indeed later quit over it.<sup>62</sup>

The administration’s efforts at secrecy failed almost immediately. In the early hours of the invasion, the press had learned of a large military operation taking place through independent sources. Journalists had gathered in large numbers in nearby Barbados, waiting for an opportunity to report on events. When it was clear that no assistance from the U.S. military or government was forthcoming, several reporters attempted to unilaterally land on Grenada to

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<sup>60</sup>Maurice Waters, “The Grenada Intervention of 1983: Legal Issues and Analysis” in *Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives*, (conference proceedings) Walter C. Soderlund and Stuart H. Surlin eds., Ontario Cooperative Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, 1985, 13. See also Robert J. Beck, *The Grenada Invasion: Politics, Law, and foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (London: Westview Press, 1993), 210-216.

<sup>61</sup> See Eugene Secunda and Terence P. Moran, *Selling War to America: From the Spanish American War to the Global War on Terror* (London: Praeger Security International, 2007), pp. 122-123.

<sup>62</sup>Secunda and Moran, 122-123.

report, only to be chased away by American warplanes firing warning shots at their hired vessel. In one instance, American forces detained a journalist on the island, a commentary on the realities of the restrictions on battlefield reporting. The media was only allowed to visit the island days after the invasion began, and well after the fighting had ended, relegating their reportage to after-the-fact speculation on what had occurred, with little immediate journalistic impact – or any value to the historical record from the critical eyewitness perspective. The military had dictated the story,<sup>63</sup> as the liberation of Grenadians and the rescue of a thousand American citizens overshadowed the combat that left nineteen American troops dead and hundreds of enemy soldiers killed and wounded, not to mention dozens of civilian casualties and the related destruction of civilian infrastructure.<sup>64</sup>

In the wake of the campaign, the academic community voiced its concerns over the exclusion of the press, and took aim squarely at what it considered a deliberate act of defiance aimed at fundamental and constitutional press freedoms (a phenomenon that would be repeated several times afterwards). “The October 1983 intervention in Grenada might just illustrate the deepest and most explicit tension between the press media and the U.S. government for all of our history,” wrote George H Quester, in “Grenada and the News Media.” Although highly critical of the military exclusion of the press, Quester highlighted the possibility that just as the Reagan Administration was “at its worst in terms of low sensitivity for liberal considerations of freedom of information,” and the military was at its worst at dealing with the “burdens of having to deal with an enquiring press establishment,” that the “episode [also illustrated] some recent failings“ of U.S. media outlets and journalists, who had, in the post-Vietnam era, become very quick to

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Cole, 62.

judge any U.S. foreign policy venture as “automatically bound to be wrong-headed in its conception, and sure to be an ultimate failure.”<sup>65</sup>

The military also “recognized the impact of its actions regarding press exclusion had on its image, and on its ability to deal with the press going forward. “As criticism mounted, Pentagon planners “recognized the need to conduct thorough inquiries into various aspects of the operation.” The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John W. Vessey, “began with the press embargo,” and during an interview on November 6, 1983 on the television show *Meet the Press*, the Chairman admitted that “military leaders had denied reporters access to Grenada, and promised to review the quandary of balancing legitimate news coverage with operational security. Vessey announced that a commission of military and media experts be formed, made up of eight media representatives and six military officers, under the leadership of former Army public affairs chief, Major General Winant Sidle, “would recommend creation of a media pool of selected reporters who would, on short notice and in secrecy, be called to accompany joint task forces either for training exercises or on real joint military operations.”<sup>66</sup>

Later, influential journalist and academic Peter Braestrup wrote a book-length study on the post-Grenada military-media confrontation entitled *Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media* that offered analysis in addition to the presentation of the report itself.<sup>67</sup> His survey of sources, combined with the recommendations of the Sidle Commission, offered insights into how this episode impacted military-media relations in its wake. The recommendations of the commission can be cast upon a backdrop of later events

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<sup>65</sup>George H Quester, “Grenada and the News Media”, in Peter M. Dunn and Bruce W. Watson, eds., *American Intervention in Grenada: The Implications of Operation “Urgent Fury”*(London: Westview Press, 1985), 109,109-129.

<sup>66</sup> Cole, 64.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Braestrup *Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media* (New York: Priority Press, 1985), 61-77.

like the intervention in Panama in 1989, the 1990-1991 Persian gulf Crisis, and, critically, to the embedding program in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The Sidle Commission offered eight main recommendations, including that “Public Affairs planning should be made concurrently with operational planning,” a clear indication of the importance that media-operations would continue to play in military strategy. Other recommendations included utilizing larger media pools(for limited durations), the possible use of a Department of Defense “ready list” of reporters (who would be called on to cover operations at a moment’s notice), and recommended that a mandate be imposed ensuring that access was dependent upon the media’s “voluntary compliance with security guidelines.” The recommendations also included guidance for the military’s facilitation of coverage, with “public affairs planning [to] include enough personnel and equipment to assist correspondents,” and a stipulation that “planners should strive to accommodate journalists at the earliest possible time without interfering with combat operations.” Planners should also “attempt to include intra-and inter-theater transportation for the media,” and “military public affairs representatives and news organization leaders should meet to discuss their differences.”<sup>68</sup>

As new foreign policy issues arose, and as foreign military operations were conducted in the subsequent Administration of George HW Bush, the lessons of the past greatly influenced the course charted by the military in its policies of battlefield access. The recommendations of the Sidle Commission were rarely followed as a set standard, and access to military operations and the flow of firsthand accounts would continue to suffer.<sup>69</sup> In 1989, the military and the media would have an opportunity to test the recommendations of the Sidle Commission during the

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<sup>68</sup> McHugh, 21. These recommendations would be followed to varying degrees in the subsequent U.S. military operations, and the influence of the report can be linked to conflicts covered in later sections of this study.

<sup>69</sup>See Rid, 177.

invasion of Panama that was engineered to oust Manuel Noriega from power. As one article in the *Mercer Law Review* later noted, “press pools arrived soon after the fighting commenced but were unable to gain access to the areas of operation” until after the hostilities began. “The military, therefore, had not completely adhered to the Commission's standards, [again] exhibiting the reluctance born of having been burned by the press in Vietnam.”<sup>70</sup> The experience with the 1991 Gulf War continued this trend, with the military operating at long distances away from the prying eyes of the media pools that were left well behind at hotels in Saudi Arabia, while critical actions and events from the front lines escaped unreported; with the sanitization and romanticizing of combat re-emerging.<sup>71</sup>

### **Operation DESERT STORM and the Re-Emergence of the American Hero**

The opportunity at media-military reconciliation took a backseat to the rebuilding of the U.S. military in the lead up to the 1991 Gulf War, which had, at its core, a return to an all-volunteer force, a factor that had major ramifications as to how the American military was viewed by the society it represented. No longer were wars to be fought by the unwilling masses; instead, the conflicts of the late Cold War would be handled by a new, high-tech, professional force: the “best of the best” that America had to offer. With the approach of America’s first large-scale overseas intervention since the Vietnam War, such changes helped restore public confidence in military involvement overseas.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Steven S. Neff, “The United States Military vs. the Media: Constitutional Friction”, 46 *Mercer L. Rev.* 977 (1994-1995).

<sup>71</sup>Keith Beattie, *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 10-13. Also see Rid, 69-87.

<sup>72</sup>Lance W Bennett et al., *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).



Motivated by a desire to leave terrible memories of Vietnam in the past, American officials in the early '90s sought to fashion what they regarded as a new model of media-military relations. A new era of American military prestige had been born, as reflected in jingoistic, triumphalist blockbusters of the day (e.g., *Top Gun*, *Navy Seals*), and aided the U.S. military in marketing itself as the ultimate professional force, equipped with the newest, video-game-like technologies that would inspire a new reality in terms of public interest in military affairs.<sup>73</sup> The resulting strategy of pooling reporters in the five-star accommodations of Dhahran and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia all but guaranteed the curtailment of an independent, objective press covering the war from the front, on the battlefields; yet, paradoxically, new satellite technology would have allowed war coverage light years ahead of Vietnam-era reporting.<sup>74</sup>

“Hotel warriors,” as the Gulf War journalists came to be known, were indeed successfully persuaded to focus their stories on the new, high-tech Army, Marines, Navy and especially, the Air Force. The strategy of pooling the press, which had been tested in the 1980s, drastically limited access to the actual battlefield, and highlighted the clear departure from the Vietnam-era’s unrestricted access to the battlefield to a more controlled program by the U.S. military – that was less provocative than Grenada. The military’s strategies in the 1991 Gulf War indicate that the Sidle Commission Report’s recommendations could be interpreted more as devices to limit access to the battlefield, constrain the press, and shape the optics of the situation, as opposed to tools aimed at cooperation and openness with the media.

In effect, the press was co-opted, and utilized as a tool for communicating positive military stories, allowing the U.S. military to market the war to the American public as a new

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<sup>73</sup> Beattie, 159; Rid 93.

<sup>74</sup>Rid, 1-6;

type of sanitized conflict that resembled the bloodless video games that had entered prominently into American pop-culture; as opposed to the bloody struggle it was.<sup>75</sup>

Operation Desert Storm came off as a brilliant success, with American military personnel and technology taking center stage, with such weaponry as the F-117 Stealth aircraft and Tomahawk Land Attack Missile sharing the spotlight with press darlings such as “Stormin’ Norman” Schwarzkopf. What got largely overlooked or significantly downplayed in the coverage was the horror and carnage of frontline fighting.

Douglas Kellner, in his important book *The Persian Gulf TV War*, summed up the war’s media reach. “Against the ‘evil’ Hussein and threatening Iraqis, the media thus posed images of the ‘good’ American soldier and powerful U.S. technology,” Meantime, the overriding narrative “bonded the American people with the troops and helped create positive feelings” about the war effort and the American soldiers doing the fighting. “Likewise, the frequent images of planes, tanks, artillery, and more exotic high-tech items provided splendid images of U.S. military technology.”<sup>76</sup>

Many of the public affairs successes of the Gulf War would carry over to the crises following the September 11, 2001 attacks on America, when the challenges of garnering support for the American soldier were mitigated by a direct attack on the United States. In the wake of these spectacular and destructive acts, and with new wars on the horizon, a conflagration of events would transpire that would influence the U.S. military to once again allow war reporters in their midst; this time with lessons of the past guiding the way.

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<sup>75</sup> W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*. Boulder: Westview, 1992. John R. MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*. New York: Hill and Wang (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1992.

<sup>76</sup>Douglas M. Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992)  
<<https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/gulfwarch2.pdf>> (2 February 2017), pg 11/38.

### **3. HISTORIOGRAPHY & LITERATURE REVIEW**

A plethora of sources are available to put the embedding program to an historical analysis through the records and accounts of journalists who accompanied U.S. forces into combat in March 2003. There are also several important studies that help frame the present work. One study that blazed a trail for subsequent contributions was conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism at Columbia University. The article “Embedded Reporters: What Are Americans Getting?” offered analysis produced during the invasion of the content of TV news reports filed by embedded reporters, and introduced the types of stories the embedded media were reporting at the height of major combat operations in 2003.

The authors prefaced the study by stating that that “the battle for Iraq is war as we've never it seen before. It is the first full-scale American military engagement in the age of the Internet, multiple cable channels and a mixed media culture that has stretched the definition of journalism.” This definition, it argued, highlighted the role that the Information Age played in the evolution of war reporting, which, the authors noted, had clearly affected not only journalistic methods and practices, but also affected the policies that governed the military-press relationship, and indeed, the consumption of news by an evolving audience.<sup>1</sup> The study’s authors intended to answer specific questions, namely: “What are Americans getting... from this ‘embedded’ reporting? How close to the action are the ‘embeds’ getting? Who are they talking to? [And] what are they talking about?”<sup>2</sup> These inquiries, although important, only offered a superficial overview of what the embedding process provided in terms of news content; the stories that reached the public while the event itself was playing out. The study addressed the

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<sup>1</sup>*Project for Excellence in Journalism*, n.a., n.d., “Embedded Reporters: What Are Americans Getting?”, 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

early stages of the war, as does this dissertation; the “days in which ground troops began their push into Iraq, when they first encountered serious resistance and the first day that some began to suggest that U.S. troop momentum had slowed.”<sup>3</sup>

“Embedded Reporters” introduced a critical tone in its early evaluation of the program, as “some observers wondered how much the embedded reporting would be about actual fighting, or whether the embedded reporters would be limited to ‘feel good’ stories about troop morale, supply lines, maneuvers and preparations.” The study claimed that “anyone who imagined the embedded reporting wouldn’t focus on the actual battlefield was mistaken.” Indeed, as the numbers showed only 41 percent of all the embedded reports cited in the study focused on combat or fighting, and “not surprisingly, the percentage of stories that focused on combat and its results rose over time,” and eventually reached just over 60 percent. “The second biggest topic of the embedded stories studied was pre-combat activity, such as troop movements or military strategy,” the report noted. “Roughly a third of the stories focused on such matters, 32%.” Only 16 percent of stories “focused on military issues such as troop morale, the jobs of specific soldiers, or the role of certain pieces of equipment,” and even less, just seven percent, “considered long-term effects of the war” with even fewer stories focused primarily on other issues like “interaction with civilians and humanitarian aid.”<sup>4</sup> Although the report had offered a disclaimer about making premature assessments of the entirety of the program, the die had been cast for the deep and scathing academic indictments of embedding that followed.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism report was not the only source for early criticism of the program. Indeed, scores of journalists had taken to their platforms to challenge, question, or outright condemn this new cooperative model for war coverage. Pre-war and wartime columns

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

made their cases against this program that would put the press "in bed" with the military. Indeed, even before the war began, news items appeared spotlighting the suspicions of veteran reporters and editors. "For Tony Burman, editor-in-chief of CBC News, the embedded relationship between the news media and the military suggests the expectation of journalists cheering for the good guys," an article in the *Globe and Mail* reported. "News reports and pictures, after all, will be examined and possibly censored by unit commanders."<sup>5</sup> It seemed the new program was all an elaborate scheme by the U.S. military to shape the stories in their favour. In fact, the very nature of the term "embed" was used as a focal point for early criticism. In an article that appeared in the *New York Times* just days before the invasion began, William Safire attempted to define the use of the term, within the context of the new military-media relationship:

In the above outburst of Pentagonese, the pronoun that the spokesman chose in referring to a unit was not it or its but them or their. This cannot be ridiculed as incorrect, because Pentagonese -- a lingo in which all deterrents are credible and nobody opts for choose -- is not Standard English but a dialect unto itself, with its own load outs and send-offs. And although the transitive verb to bed has long had an informal meaning of "to seduce; to induce a person of the opposite sex to join one on a comfortable mattress," the verb to embed has no such meaning and can be used without fear of causing snickering.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the source, or its criticisms of the program, one fact remained: Embedded media members had access to, and were able to report on, live combat operations, in near real time, to audiences across the globe. Such access represented a revolutionary leap forward in American military-press relations. It is clear that, considering the vast majority of war coverage focused on U.S. forces and their actions, that the objective of the embedding policy was being met: the news media was indeed telling the military's side of the story. The limits on reporters

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<sup>5</sup> William Houston, "When reporters get in bed with the military" *The Globe and Mail*, March 1, 2003. For further reading of early press criticism of the embedding program, see Howard Kurtz, "Embedded, And Taking Flak", *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2003;

Antonia Zerbisias, "Rumsfeld's 'embed' a loaded word" *Toronto Star*, March 11, 2003;

<sup>6</sup>William Safire, "And So Embed", *The New York Times*, March 9, 2003.

embedded with units forced them to report on what they saw, rather than what they could investigate in any depth. Howard Kurtz, in an article entitled "Embedded, And Taking Flak," published by the *Washington Post* on March 31, 2003, weighed in: "The strongest criticism of the embedded reporters, as they themselves acknowledge, is that they are providing a narrow snapshot of the war," he wrote. "This can create a distorted picture as small battles fill the screen with gripping pictures, and a single wounded soldier being interviewed by an MSNBC reporter can become a constantly repeating image." Complications with accuracy and context seemed obvious to Kurtz, and unintentional misrepresentations could follow. "If 100 things go right on the drive to Baghdad and five go wrong, viewers are likely to see the most harrowing moments for U.S. troops again and again," Kurtz argued.<sup>7</sup> Even though these concerns were known, embedded reporters still saw the value in having this type of access. "I don't think 'embed' means 'in bed,'" said Kathryn Kross, CNN's Washington bureau chief, who was quoted in Kurtz's article. "I can't imagine an alternative that would give us this kind of access, this kind of firsthand view, and be this comprehensive."<sup>8</sup>

Another important academic study entitled "How we Performed?: Embedded Journalists' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Covering the Iraq War," offered specific polling data of embedded journalists' experiences with the program. This academic report's findings offered only a piece of the story regarding how embedded media members viewed their experiences while travelling across the battlefields of Iraq with military forces; however, of utmost importance was the study's polling data, which included responses from over 150 journalists in 2005. Their "results suggest an overall positive perception of embedded reporting among those doing the reporting" and that "only a limited number of respondents viewed embedded

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Howard Kurtz, "Embedded, And Taking Flak", *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2003.

reporting as biased and sensational,” and a majority “claimed their reporting was accurate, trustworthy, and fair.” Although most “indicated their stories provided a ‘narrow slice’ of the conflict, they believe embedding provided great access to the battlefield and understanding to what was happening on the ground.”<sup>9</sup>

The merits and some important limitations are apparent when we take into account a *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* article authored by Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson in 2005, entitled “‘How we Performed’: Embedded Journalists’ Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Covering the Iraq War.” “While respondents concede that embedding provided a tunnel vision perspective, they strongly believe their reports were as complete as possible and that they were successful in reporting the war,” the report found. In fact many reporters were surprised by the level of access they were granted to battle planning and other facets usually off-limits. One reporter's personal experience, quoted in the study, highlights how the military had indeed opened its doors to these outsiders. “It was humorous, no hilarious, to see some videotaped images from CNN and Fox TV in the final days before the war” where panels of military analysts and “so-called ‘experts’” basically guessed about the strategy the war planners would use. “We all already knew the battle plan in advance but were sworn to keep out of our copy. The joke became ‘an expert is anybody who is more than 50 miles away from what is really happening.’” A clear majority of the study's respondents did admit that their small slices of the war were not conducive to conveying the big picture. “Many reported they often had a limited perspective, as they were not able to compare or check facts because they did not have the

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<sup>9</sup>Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson, “‘How we Performed’: Embedded Journalists’ Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Covering the Iraq War” in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2005 82, 310.

Internet or television."One of those embeds who participated in the study said, "Embedded journalists had limited perspective on what was happening' outside the unit they were embedded with. Their stories were therefore fragments."<sup>10</sup>

Embedded journalists, however, "did not perceive the difference in perspective as having jeopardized the quality of reporting," Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson explained. "Approximately three fourths reported their stories were accurate, trustworthy, and fair. They believe their reports were, for the most part, as complete as possible about the units they were assigned to cover; but also inherently different from the non-embedded reports." The firsthand accounts contained in their study were informative in capturing the experiences of embedded journalists. "As an embedded reporter, you report about the army from the inside. You get a much closer look on the war-machinery than a non-embedded journalist would get. So the perspective differs, but that does not make embedded journalism inaccurate or biased."<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, Fahmy and Johnson highlighted positive aspects of media embedding while also drawing attention to some of the program's negative aspects. Predictably, major academic criticisms of the program emerged soon after the invasion, with several important studies arguing that the embedding program offered little value, especially in terms of integrity and depth of reporting. Where Fahmy and Johnson summed up five main areas of concern about embedding that the surveyed reporters expressed, a more serious and sustained effort to delegitimize the program came from academic studies that ensued. Fahmy and Johnson's points included an argument that the ground rules imposed on reporters were too tight; that reporters became completely dependent on the military, not just for supply, transport

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 311.



and security, but also for the subjects of their stories – and thus were fundamentally restricted in their coverage; that journalists only received the American side of the story; that reporters too often accepted military claims concerning their actions and the results of those actions; and finally, that embeds were unable to report on the consequences - i.e. civilian casualties -- of military actions due to the distance at which combat occurred.<sup>12</sup> These concerns are clearly relevant when evaluating the embedding program as a wartime policy and as a conduit to the timely reporting of events; but were they too quick to dismiss the program's value as a source of battlefield experiences? Perhaps these concerns spoke to the haste in which the program was evaluated in such studies, and the fact that reporters – once freed of the constraints of the embedding program – would be free to expand their wartime experiences to more in-depth accounts. Moreover, when placed in the larger context of past media-military experiences, the merits and value of the program become even more strikingly apparent.

The pooling policy of the 1991 Gulf War, for instance, offered an example of the embedding policy's inherent value, on a very basic level. In his 1992 book *War and Television*, historian Bruce Cumings wrote that media spin during and after the first Gulf War was closely related to invasion coverage. "The Gulf War was a war fought to demolish a memory," he argued. "It was our first 'television war': not blood and guts spilled in living color on the living room rug, not the transparent, objective immediacy of the all-seeing eye, not George Will's instrument of pacifism, but a radically distanced, technically controlled, eminently 'cool' postmodern epic which, in the doing, became an instrument of the war itself."<sup>13</sup> In a repeat of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 303-304.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (New York: Verso, 1992), 103.

this in 2003, war had again become somewhat of a voyeuristic experience for the audiences of the embedded media during the invasion, just like it had been during Desert Storm in 1991.<sup>14</sup>

In reference to the 1991 Gulf War, renowned left-wing journalist and media critic Chris Hedges alluded to the fact that the details of war in the western public's mindset were only "minor footnotes to a stage-managed tale of triumph. As in most conflicts, the war, as presented to the public, was fantasy."<sup>15</sup> Although many have argued that the embedding program only repeated this exercise, it must be said that the end result offered much more to the historian, if not the average TV viewer, newspaper reader, or internet surfer at the time. The embedding program ensured that media outlets had little choice but to cooperate with the military's media operation if they wanted access to military forces and actions. In essence, journalists and soldiers became part of an exclusive club, one that would witness the counterattack to 9/11 and indeed bring the war in Iraq to a global audience. The soldiers had become the story, as "their" embedded reporter endeavoured to re-introduce the regular combat soldier to the American public.

Danny Schechter, reporter, media executive and academic, presented an early critical view of the embedding program in 2003 that resonated within a community of media-watchdogs, journalism academics and practitioners, and scholars of communications from various fields. Embedded media members "were not really restrained but rather assisted in their work by Pentagon press flacks," he argued. This, he claimed, was "the reason the system worked so well.

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<sup>14</sup> For a survey of academic accounts comparing the 1991 Gulf War's coverage to the 2003 invasion's see Susan L Carruthers, *The Media At War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 131-140; James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping The Military-Industrial-Media Entertainment-Network*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 64-65; Anthony R DiMaggio, *When Media Goes To War* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 115, 209, 244; Calvin F Exoo, *The Pen And The Sword*, 1st ed. (Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE, 2010), 27-32; and Paul Rutherford, *Weapons Of Mass Persuasion*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 70-73.

<sup>15</sup> Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 149.

Manipulation is always more insidious as well when the manipulated do not fully recognize how they are being used in a carefully calibrated media spin operation." He cited emerging reflections by embeds that "acknowledged that they came to identify with and sometimes befriend the soldiers in the units they tagged along with," and that their proximity to their subjects produced a relationship devoid of objectivity. His assertions rested on the belief that what was sold as a compromise between news managers and the Pentagon was in fact a scheme meant to offer one-sided coverage. He cited Michael Burton, embedded reporter, who said that the Pentagon only wanted to ensure "proud, positive, and patriotic coverage over the national airwaves. If the editors agreed to all their provisions for security reviews, flagging of sensitive information, limitations on filming dead bodies, and other restrictions, then journalists would be welcome. The editors not only went along - they accepted the ground rules without a fight." Schechter's narrative rested upon these early reflections, where the news stories had been "seen through the eyes of the American battalions, but without the real violence." American children, the narrative went, wouldn't see as much violence in war coverage as the average TV show or evening newscast. "Instead, they see a fascination with high tech weapons, battle tactics, and military strategy reporting," Burton said.<sup>16</sup>

The embedded press perspective did in fact offer a limited slice of the war to each reporter, as they were contained within the units they travelled with. This phenomenon was likened to a "soda straw view," and was a product of the tightly controlled and governed military-media cooperation that was heralded by the military and many reporters and media executives as completely unrestricted – which it was not. An in-depth article that appeared in the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, a Los Angeles Newspaper Group publication on March 28, 2003

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<sup>16</sup>Danny Schechter, *Embedded: Weapons Of Mass Deception: How The Media Failed To Cover The War In Iraq* (Boston, MA, United States: Prometheus Books, 2003), 19.

entitled "No shortage of opinions on TV war coverage" quoted several media analysts, including Brooke Gladstone, who extensively studied Iraq War coverage:

"It was the wide range of sources viewers have at their disposal through satellite receivers and news organizations' Web sites, coupled with live field transmissions from embedded reporters, that is setting this war's journalism apart from all its predecessors. 'Anybody who watches the news as much as I do knows there is something historic happening here,' she said. Gladstone praised the access of the embedded reporters, journalists such as CNN's Walter Rodgers and MSNBC's David Bloom, for bringing a real-time perspective on the ground to viewers, while noting it is often a 'soda-straw' vision lacking meaningful context."<sup>17</sup>

Adhering to the military's rules indeed meant that reporters could only report on the “narrow, narrow slice” that they were assigned to cover.<sup>18</sup> In effect, their stories would offer great insights into military operations and personnel – i.e. the military’s side of the story -- but only through the limitations and strictly governed rules set out for them, which they had to agree to in order to receive an “invitation” to embed.

In the numerous studies that followed the invasion of Iraq concerning media treatment of the war, many scholars and analysts argued that press coverage was shaped exclusively by the U.S. military in order to create the illusion of complete transparency, while in fact providing a very limited view of its operations through the embedding of journalists. This, they argue, resulted in major limitations on the flow of accurate information to the audiences back home. Coverage of major combat operations was diluted, they argued, and the cold hard realities of the war were misrepresented by the media, thus contributing to the U.S. military's information

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<sup>17</sup>Beth Barrett and Valerie Kuklenski, "No shortage of opinions on TV war coverage" *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, March 28, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Christiane Amanpour, interview in Michelle Ferrari, *Reporting America at War: An Oral History*. (New York: Goodhue, 2003) 221.

warfare strategy by representing the war in a positive light.<sup>19</sup>

These studies argued that through the close cooperation, embedding guaranteed a distorted view of the war in Iraq emerged, which falsely represented the reality of the situation by setting aside the humanitarian catastrophe that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. Elements of the program, such as the lengthy list of “ground rules” that had to be agreed upon by media outlets that sent reporters into the field, only served to strengthen the military’s control over coverage, critics insisted. In their view, the focus of press reporting during the war emphasized the “brave” actions of “liberating” American soldiers. Due to the limitations of the embedding process, the critical narrative went, journalists did not ask the more probing questions they might otherwise have, had they been allowed unrestricted access to the war zone. Instead, they reported on the narrow subject matter they were fed by their military handlers, and in turn misled the public regarding the ramifications of the U.S. military's operations (such as “friendly” and civilian casualties). Many in the academic community sought to expose the ways in which the U.S. military utilized the embedding of journalists to meet its strategic objectives, and counter official claims of true cooperation and unfiltered battlefield reporting.<sup>20</sup>

The embedding program’s critics argued that the Department of Defense opened its doors to scores of journalists not to cooperate with the fourth estate, but in order to pre-empt claims of exclusion by the press, and also to show it had *nothing to hide* – while shaping and influencing the reporting. Indeed, many of the scholarly critiques of the program proved accurate, as the

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<sup>19</sup>The list of academic studies highly critical of the embedding program is extensive. See John Nichols and Robert W. McChesney, *Tragedy and Farce: How the American Media Sell Wars, Spin Elections, and Destroy Democracy*. New York: The New Press, 2005, Chapter 3 “Oh What an Embedded War”; Danny Schechter, *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2003; Justin Lewis et al., and *Shoot First and Ask Questions Later: Media Coverage of the Iraq War*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006, Chapter 5 “‘In Bed’ with the Military? The Journalists’ Perspective”; and Brandenburg, Heinz. "Journalists embedded in culture: War stories as political strategy." in Yahya R. Kamalipour and Lee Artz eds., *Bring 'Em On: Media And Politics In The Iraq War*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Rowman& Littlefield, 2005) for examples of major studies critical of the embedding program.

<sup>20</sup> See Schechter, 56-73.

public relations experts in the United States military recognized the failures of past policies regarding the ways in which they had allowed reporters to cover their operations. Fresh in their minds was the troubling example of strained military-press relations during the Vietnam debacle; or, more recently, criticisms of the 1991 Gulf War's pooling of reporters far from the battlefield, and the exclusion of journalists in the Afghanistan operations preceding the Iraq War. All of these problematic approaches which will be explored in this dissertation in more detail later, offered cautionary tales of past military-media confrontations that military brass hoped to avoid this time.

Ever adversarial, the academic community accused the military public relations establishment of claiming full cooperation and access, while only creating the illusion of true freedom of the press in an attempt to ensure that reporters did not interfere with their mission. The embedding program – the argument went -- constrained the public's access to the fighting and, in turn, sanitized the realities of the conflict by limiting the press's exposure to people, places and events outside of the confines of embedding. Hence, the “embedding” process stifled journalistic integrity by limiting the exposure of the public to the harsh realities of war, as opposed to allowing complete freedom of the press that critics regarded as the key to getting the facts straight.

The embedding of reporters alongside the troops in the field also created a symbiotic relationship between journalists and the troops among whom they lived, travelled with, and, in some tragic cases, witnessed the deaths of in combat. The very nature of the relationship guaranteed that reporters would come to rely on the troops they were tasked with reporting on, and as a result, the various media elements were forced to cooperate with the military's media operation due to the close cooperation required to survive in the hostile environment of the Iraqi

battlefield; a relationship one academic study called “censorship and hostage syndrome.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, reporter and media analyst Chris Hedges wrote in 2004 that “embedded reporters, dependent on the military for food and transportation as well as security, have a natural and understandable tendency, one I have myself felt, to protect those who are protecting them. They are not allowed to report outside of the unit and are, in effect, captives.”<sup>22</sup>

Applying Hedges’ observations to a grander scale, an article that appeared in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* in 2005 summed up the negative evaluations of embedded reporting: “News stories were more favorable in overall tone toward the military, more favorable in depictions of military personnel, and featured greater use of episodic frames which, as a result, elicited somewhat more positive relational cues.”<sup>23</sup> Although the press had been placed in a complicated position, where its freedom of action was contained without it being directly controlled, the military also faced a corresponding set of challenges, since its strategic objectives were always centered upon protecting their soldiers and the mission, not to mention conveying their side of the story via the civilian press attached to its fighting units.

This is where this dissertation diverges from the multitude of critical studies cited above, for the embedding program -- despite its shortcomings -- still allowed over 600 reporters to accompany America’s armed forces in major combat operations. The value of the program, therefore, must not be limited to the reporting that emerged during the initial stages of the war, during high intensity combat operations, but must also include the many eye-witness accounts

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<sup>21</sup>Exoo, 99.

<sup>22</sup>Chris Hedges, “On War”, *New York Review of Books*, 16 December 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Pfau, Michel M. Haigh, et al., “Embedded Reporting During the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq: How the Embedding of Journalists Affects Television News Reports”, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Volume 49, Issue 4, 2005.

published after the fact, where the participant-observers, formerly known as embeds, produced narratives about their individual experiences of combat, free of official restrictions.

Reporting during the initial stages of the Iraq War indeed highlighted the limits of the U.S. military's new public affairs doctrine, and inevitably introduced debates regarding constraints and restrictions; but it also, as this study argues, produced a rich and invaluable resource for understanding wartime realities for the troops, the reporters, and the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. The intrinsic value of the embedding program, therefore, was not limited to coverage of major combat operations, but also includes the intimate details that shed light on a policy that embedded hundreds of reporters with various types of combat units spread across a wide area for a sustained period.

### **The Military's View**

In the wake of the Iraq invasion, and during the occupation phase, the embedding program flourished, although the numbers of reporters attached to the occupying forces shrank considerably.<sup>24</sup> Military officials wasted no time in assessing the program, and several accounts emerged from the practitioners' perspective, as armed forces personnel directly involved in the planning and implementation of the embedding program participated in studies alongside the embedded reporters. In addition, several important articles appeared written by officers studying at U.S. military universities.

As opposed to the academic community's hasty judgments and scathing indictments, the military community regarded the embedding program as an overall success on several levels. Bryan Whitman, Deputy Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and one of the chief architects of the program, argued that by embedding so many reporters, the military had "done a

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<sup>24</sup>Vaina, David. "The vanishing embedded reporter in Iraq." *Project for Excellence in Journalism* 26 (2006).



tremendous amount to improve the military-media relations." He further stated that embedding was the best way to "accommodate the media in being able to do what they want to do and for them to accomplish the task of informing the American people." He elaborated that "to the extent that the American people get an opportunity to have some insight into the military, I think that [was] good, and there was "no better way to do that than with independent, objective observers reporting on their activity."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the military regarded the embedding program as a tool against the disinformation and propaganda campaign of Saddam Hussein's regime, which had used images and scenes of civilian casualties to garner support against the U.S. in the past. Hence, according to the Public Affairs Officers, the overarching success of the embedding program's mission was to successfully counter" the propaganda and misinformation for which the Iraqis were famous."<sup>26</sup> The primary accounts of these military practitioners, found in the same oral history collections as many interviews with embedded reporters -- which form the basis of this study, along with battlefield memoirs -- offer insights into how the people tasked with implementing and managing the program saw the results during the invasion phase of the war. Whitman summed up this sentiment: "What embedding allowed for was a framework which commanders and reporters worked under to ensure both could accomplish their mission without compromising the journalists' integrity or the success of the military mission."<sup>27</sup>

By no means was the program ever seen as perfect, according to its organizers. Indeed, Whitman, and the military officers in charge of running the program on the ground, also acknowledged some of the same issues at the center of academic critiques of the program, such

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<sup>25</sup> "Bryan Whitman" in Suzanne Huffman and Judith L. Sylvester, *Reporting From The Front: The Media And The Military* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 43, 45.

<sup>26</sup> "Major Tim Blair" in Suzanne Huffman and Judith L. Sylvester, *Reporting From The Front: The Media And The Military* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 49-60, 50.

<sup>27</sup> "The Birth of Embedding as Pentagon War Policy: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs Bryan Whitman" in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, *Embedded*, 1st ed. (Guilford, Conn: Lyons Press, 2004), 208.

as close bonds forming between reporters and soldiers; narrowness of individual assignments; and limitations imposed by the military "ground rules" governing what could and couldn't be reported. Military practitioners, however, treated such limitations as the cost of offering the best access possible, as dictated by the situation on the ground and the available resources.<sup>28</sup> "This unprecedented access was a double edged sword, as it would show the good, the bad, and the ugly of what was going on the battlefield," Whitman said in an interview with a military officer studying the program in 2004.<sup>29</sup>

The military academic community offered several studies post-invasion, from Master's theses to position pieces in military journals and published after-action reports. One such report, entitled "The Role of the Department of Defense Embedded Reporter Program in Future Conflicts," published by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and authored by Lieutenant Commander Raymundo Villarreal Jr. of the U.S. Navy, cited the program as a "feasible and effective means for the DOD and the United States Army to facilitate the media on the battlefield," and argued that the policy should continue as "an element in media policy for future military conflicts."<sup>30</sup> The report stated that "in exchange for cooperating with the ground rules, the media went everywhere with their embedded units. In an unprecedented manner, reporters were able to see and experience what the troops did on the battlefield. They ate, slept, and traveled with their units. They were able to broadcast live in the midst of firefights and engagements."<sup>31</sup> Although Villarreal cited the concerns raised by critics calling the embedding a form of Stockholm Syndrome, which "charged that the embeds would unwittingly become voice-pieces or cheerleaders for the military, "the piece conveyed the military side of "the controversy

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<sup>28</sup> See Huffman & Sylvester, 42-63; Katovsky 203-280, 73-78.

<sup>29</sup> Villarreal Jr, Raymundo, "The role of the Department of Defense embedded reporter program in future conflicts", ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS, 2005, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., i.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 43.

on embedded media objectivity [that] remains a dichotomy of sorts." He conceded that "the reporters naturally would tend to lose their objectivity, but this is unavoidable in the context of war. The urge to live often overwhelmed the urge to be an objective journalist."<sup>32</sup>

In reaction to criticisms that the embeds' access and perspectives were limited to a small slice of action, the report challenged the view that the "limited soda straw perspective" represented "merely a series of images and audio reports that the reporters themselves could not collate into a larger perspective in their dispatches." Although the limitations that being attached to one small unit within a large battle did pose restrictions, "the lack of mobility of the embedded reporters, who were linked to their combat units for food, security and transportation, most certainly contributed" to the soda-straw effect, the report cited embeds that claimed that "the frenetic movement of the combat units often did not allow for the journalists to stop, investigate and get the full story. As the troops moved, so did the reporters."<sup>33</sup> In effect, the report counters the narrative that the soda-straw view was a purposely invented measure to restrict deep reporting. In a bold and straightforward counter to media critics, Lieutenant-Commander Villarreal made a prescient point: "Media pundits and armchair generals in the studio often tried to explain how an embedded reporter's live report fit into a larger understanding of the operation, often without success." Therefore, he maintained, "the embedded media's own reports were criticized and marginalized by the same organization that demanded access to the battlefield in the first place."<sup>34</sup>

According to the report, "There were two major objectives DOD sought to accomplish with the embedded media program: improve media access, and counter Saddam's misinformation efforts. By all accounts, it appears the embedded media was effective in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 55, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 58, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

achieving these objectives. Further, "the journalist, while not able to report on what he or she had observed, nevertheless was able to see and appreciate the operation from the commander's perspective. Thus, the embedded journalist was able to gain insight into the purpose of what the unit was doing."<sup>35</sup> In defence of the program, the author argued that "the embedding process itself reflects an evolutionary change in military-media relations," and that "while the program was not without its problems, it successfully re-established a working relationship between military and media while allowing each to fulfill its responsibilities."

On the subject of the ground rules representing a new type of hybrid censorship, the author argued that "this concern that the ground rules and unit commanders would keep the media from telling the real story was folly. Those in the media establishment who were openly cynical of the military's motives with embed process had to admit otherwise." He cited Dan Rather, an outspoken critic of the program from the start, as one who "begrudgingly made the following concession after the first reports were coming in, 'it wasn't perfect . . .; in some cases [they] embedded people, but they didn't let them up with the far-forward units. But there's [little] to complain about, and there's a lot to applaud.' On this aspect alone, the embed program was a success."<sup>36</sup>

Colonel Franklin Childress's "Operation Iraqi Freedom Media Embedding: Wave of the Future or Flash in the Pan?" published by the Army in 2005, is another example of an after-action report available to the public.<sup>37</sup> "There is no doubt," Childress argued, "that the Media Embedding program that was launched by the Department of Defense in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom was one of the most successful ventures between the military and the media in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 72, 74, 69, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Also see Pasquarett, Michael. *Reporters on the Ground: The Military and the Media's Joint Experience During Operation Iraqi Freedom*. ARMY WAR COLLEGE CARLISLE BARRACKS PA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP, 2003;

history. It is also the most widely written about in academia, military and research publications." Nevertheless, Childress identified five areas of criticism he regarded as valid. Childress's report focused exclusively on equipping media to join the troops in combat, with an emphasis on logistical and operational matters. Childress explored a series of obstacles that hindered effective coverage. First, the banned use of private vehicles was an issue that prevented independent movement and reportage, and one that was circumvented in many instances. Second, the problems caused by the availability and loaning of gas masks (an entirely logistical matter). Third, the banning of the Thuraya Satellite Phone, which was the communication device of choice by most media representatives because it could transmit voice, data, fax and text messages from anywhere. This issue was seen by many outside the military as a intentional way to restrict coverage, but was, the report claimed, an operational security matter, as the fear was that enemy forces could hone in on the signals it emitted and target the forces the reporter was covering. Fourth, "media representatives thought that the assignment process was arbitrary and showed favoritism." The article concluded that this wasn't the case, as "Major Blair and all the other PA professionals down to the Division PAOs worked the assignment issue very hard before and during the campaign. The consensus from the majority of the military and media was that 'it was done about as well as it could have been.'" Fifth, was the issue of international media, who the military claimed were invited to embed, lacked true international diversity. The Americans were "sharply criticized for not having enough Arab and other international media represented." This issue, the report conceded, was never truly rectified. The lessons-learned report stated, "the lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom of equipping and manning the media must be applied so that future efforts become win-win situations not only for the military and the media,

but also for the viewers who are the ultimate decision makers as to the success of the embedding program."<sup>38</sup>

The military's view was also shaped by polling the troops that were in charge of the embedding program at the lowest levels; the officers who had embeds along with them and their soldiers during the operations. From this important perspective, one study performed by a Marine officer who interviewed dozens of junior officers that had embedded reporters attached to their units offered examples of how the embedding program offered a level of cooperation and access not found in other conflicts. It found that:

The impact of the DOD's media policy on non-public affairs Marines in combat was largely benign. Junior officers understood upfront the purpose of the program despite some skepticism about the media's intentions. They resigned to the fact that the decision to embed journalists was made at a level much higher than their own. They communicated directly with embeds in a no-nonsense approach characteristic of Marine Corps leadership. They treated embeds no better or worse than the members of their own unit, instituting a one-for-all, all-for-one mentality. They provided protection, sustenance, transportation, and facilitated communications to the best of their ability without hindering their unit's safety or operational security. They allowed embeds access to Marines in their natural environment, trusting that their Marines would do the right thing. They censored their Marines from speaking about policy issues, but rarely found the need to screen, let alone censor the news reports of embeds. Essentially, a junior officer hosted embeds in their endeavor to chronicle the war, adopting them into his or her fold of responsibility.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, a chasm existed between the military and academic communities in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion concerning the value of the embedded journalism. The controversy centred squarely upon whether the program had value as a mechanism for informing the public on one

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<sup>38</sup>Childress, Franklin. *Operation Iraqi Freedom Media Embedding: Wave of the Future or Flash in the Pan?*. ARMY WAR COLL CARLISLE BARRACKS PA, 2005.

<sup>39</sup>Hering, Ana-Klara. "Operation Embed: The Host Officer Experience with Embedded Media During the Iraq War." PhD diss., University of Florida, 2006.

hand, and helping achieve the military's mission on the other. Such criticisms remain relevant and useful in evaluating the program on a fundamental level that includes limitations highlighted above. In particular, the narrowing of content by individual assignments that left very little besides the American troops themselves as the subject of reports hindered rigorous investigative reporting. The military and the academic communities actually agreed on the limitations of the program. Differences arose largely from interpretations of the significance of those limitations, with one side – academics – arguing that these restrictions were a deliberate scheme to limit deep and insightful coverage of the negative aspects of the battle, while the other side – military officials – insisted that these limitations were natural and logical due to the logistical and operational considerations inherent the arrangement. The military argued it did the best job it could under the circumstances, while the critics argued that they intentionally undermined opportunities for balanced reporting. The truth, it seems, lies somewhere in the middle if we are to evaluate the program simply as a news source, or as a military information warfare strategy.

Staking a middle ground, this study takes the products of the policy and utilizes the vast set of experiential, firsthand accounts that embedded reporters shared post-deployment to Iraq, where the topics emphasized by critics and the military alike became less relevant. Indeed, the embedding program had its flaws, well documented by critics; yet also, as the military reports identified, it was also a program that offered an unprecedented number of reporters access to major combat operations, even for a short time and under stringent rules.

### **War and Society, Influential Military Histories, and the Way Forward**

Influenced by revolutionary military histories such as John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*,<sup>40</sup> and utilizing methodological and theoretical frameworks pioneered by Jeremy Black in *Rethinking Military History*,<sup>41</sup> it is possible to establish a unique, ground-up approach to battlefield history by analyzing the experiences of both combat reporters and soldiers through the intimate perspective that embedding provided. This allows for an original contribution to war and society studies by utilizing embedded reporters' experiential narratives. Black's approach emphasized the significance of innovative and original approaches to military history, which he explains offers a counter to the limited cultural and social analyses found in most battle piece<sup>42</sup> histories and "great man"<sup>43</sup> biographies. Although noteworthy studies have utilized such innovative techniques, few works on post-World War II military history have focused on the unique accounts of combat reporters and their shared combat experiences with regular soldiers. What better war to put this narrative method to the test than the Iraq War, which was accurately described by General Tommy Franks, the U.S. Iraq War commander, as the "best covered war in history?"<sup>44</sup>

Using accounts by embedded reporters, the realities of the modern battlefield and the culture of combat attain clarity through multiple perspectives. An array of personal accounts became available in the wake of the 2003 invasion. Utilizing them collectively enables an analysis of several fundamental issues pertaining to modern military history and studies of the

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<sup>40</sup> Much like this study, although with a focus on wars of the more distant past, Keegan's work focuses on battlefield conditions, soldiers' emotions and behavior, and the motivation to fight in three famous battles (Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme). See John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976).

<sup>41</sup> Black "re-positions military history at the beginning of the twenty-first century" and "proposes a new manifesto for the subject to move forward." See Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), i.

<sup>42</sup> Battle piece histories are defined by Keegan as descriptive, exaggerated accounts of combat, which substitute "romantic prose" for the realities of warfare. See Keegan, 30, 38.

<sup>43</sup> The Great Man Theory is a nineteenth-century idea according to which history can be largely explained by the impact of "great men," or heroes. The theory was popularized in the 1840s by Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle. See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes & Brother, 1888).

<sup>44</sup> General Tommy R. Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 412.



intersection between war and society. The first drafts of history that emerged from the battlefields of the Iraq invasion in early 2003 must be scrutinized, organized, and presented as a complete package that provides agency to soldiers, the combat reporters who experienced the war so intimately, and especially to the innocent victims of this conflict.

Although the main criticisms of the program highlighted above seem relevant and fair in many cases, it is still important to recognize the positive value of the embedding of scores of reporters within fighting units during the invasion of Iraq in early 2003. The personal accounts published since then, written by journalists regarding their experiences in Iraq, offer in-depth accounts to the historian of great value, and provide insight into combat operations that would otherwise be unavailable.

The fact that journalists were indeed allowed to witness actual combat operations in the field, on such a vast scale, has greatly enhanced the historical record. The soldier's eye became available from a multitude of perspectives, ranging from recon Marines, commanders and planners, armoured forces, artillery units and many others. Although World War II and the Vietnam War produced a limited number of journalistic memoirs and postwar accounts by reporters, more recent wars leading up to the conflict in Iraq were devoid of media being welcomed into the world of military operations in such vast numbers, with a cooperative policy in place. Reporters in the Iraq invasion rode along with the troops and witnessed the every-day lives of soldiers in combat; and indeed, shared experiences of the effects that those operations had on a variety of levels.

The embedding program has produced invaluable in-depth primary materials, especially first-hand accounts written by journalists during and after the war. The nature of post-battlefield

accounts -- collected oral histories and war memoirs -- contrasted sharply with what had been written, broadcast and published when the journalists were on the ground in Iraq, due mainly to the restrictions placed on embedded media by the official ground rules dictated by the United States military.<sup>45</sup> The relentless pace of the modern news cycle added to the challenges presented by the official ground rules and also influenced the limitations stemming from the daily coverage of the war. These two chief factors restricted the depth of reportage, as combat reporting fell victim to restricted content and time limitations that prevented the type of nuanced and detailed accounts that have since emerged. In the model of pioneering war and society studies, a multi-faceted approach will highlight the value of the embedding program by offering cultural and social analyses of a modern army at war, while detailing the Iraqi battlefield from the ground up through the lens of the journalists who covered it.

Although frequently limited by their approach and focus, traditional military histories focusing on battle analysis and/or leadership techniques cannot be cast aside, as the decision-making process, chain of command, and the execution of combat operations provide valuable – if sometimes descriptive – analyses of warfare. The new academic challenge is to forge a hybrid version of military history through innovative styles and methodologies that offer balanced and multilateral lines of investigation into particular conflicts. This study represents a response to Jeremy Black’s call for new approaches to military history and war and society studies, and builds upon John Keegan’s *Face of Battle* model. Furthermore, it incorporates social and cultural examination with the traditional methods of studying the actions of individuals and the ebb and flow of battle, by focusing on the unique perspective of embedded journalists and the vast,

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<sup>45</sup>United States Department of Defense, Document 101900Z FEB 03, “Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR),” (2003).

largely under-utilized primary source base they produced. This provides a new way forward that merges individual narratives, new accounts of battle, and insights into the culture of a modern army at war. It represents one of the first detailed accounts of the Iraq invasion that utilizes participant observer accounts and a unique and original collection of sources, based upon the fruits of the embedding program that initially caused so much controversy regarding its value to the audience experiencing sustained, real time war for the first time in history.

The concept of ground-up, cultural and social analysis of combat used here is by no means new. On the contrary, studies similar to this one, such as Joanna Rourke's *An Intimate History of Killing* and Gerald Linderman's *The World Within War*, have broken ground utilizing a socio-cultural approach to battlefield history, although they focus on conflicts predating the Iraq War, and thus utilize more traditional sources.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, comparisons to these and other works are inevitable, especially considering the dearth of secondary historical sources on the Iraq War. The lack of accessible and reliable scholarly accounts on the conflict in Iraq makes an examination of the embedding program, and the journalists in it, all the more necessary.

This study departs from previous academic inquiries into the embedding program; instead of evaluating the policy and its implementation and consequences, this account sheds light upon nuanced details of the invasion of Iraq; issues such as how embedded journalists and the soldiers with whom they experienced warfare viewed the enemy and some of the consequences of those views; how the desert environment influenced life on the battlefield for the troops; how soldiers and reporters viewed the death, violence and destruction of the war as they experienced it close-

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<sup>46</sup>Linderman offers an original social history, detailing the "full experience" of combat through the perspective of regular soldiers. Rourke delves into the nature of violence and the behavior of soldiers during the First and Second World Wars, and the Vietnam conflict. Gerald Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Joanna Rourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Warfare* (London: Basic Books, 1999).

up; and finally, the study drills down further in detailing experiences with social issues rarely seen outside the military combat environment, like the relationship between officers and their men, the decision-making process in the heat of battle and the consequences of poor choices, and the identity constructions of heroes, cowards and other masculinity issues inherent in the gendered world of combat arms. This new approach analyzes the experiences of both combat reporters and soldiers through the intimate melding of the two that embedding provided. Moreover, it allows historians to chart a new course for understanding Iraq War battlefield history.

Peter Arnett, the famous Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who covered Vietnam and was one of CNN's stars during the 1991 Desert Storm campaign, was vocal in his criticism of the Pentagon's restrictive policies that had basically banned them from combat zones when quoted just before the invasion in the *Globe and Mail*: "The Pentagon is fond of blaming its mistakes on the media," said Arnett from Baghdad. "So, it said, To hell with it. We won't let them go into action with us anymore. But that was counterproductive, because the military became a mystery. Correspondents didn't know anything about the military... Hence, for public-relations purposes, the Pentagon introduced embedding." The scheme was smart, as not only would reporters be "educated on war," but they would become part of the team. "The Pentagon is being friendly to the media in the hope they will respond and do nice reports, basically," Arnett said. "The big advantage is the reporters are going to be there. Sooner or later, the information will get reported."<sup>47</sup>

With this study, that time has arrived.

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<sup>47</sup> William Houston, "When reporters get in bed with the military" *The Globe and Mail*, March 1, 2003.

#### **4. GENESIS OF THE EMBEDDING PROGRAM**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq witnessed the development of a new and radical strategy for managing media access to the battlefield. The “embedding” program was introduced to suit the U.S. military’s evolving public affairs objectives, which were shaped by past conflicts, the rise of technology, and an enemy that had utilized disinformation to garner support for an anti-American position in 1991 (and was expected to do so again). In turn, this new program created an atmosphere of cooperation and a new, empathetic and symbiotic relationship between journalists and the soldiers that they covered. This represented a far cry from the depths of the media-military confrontation during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the subsequent exclusion of combat reporters from the front lines of America’s conflicts afterwards.

Although the 1991 Desert Storm campaign was perceived by military brass, policymakers and the public alike as a major victory for the U.S. military, and received remarkable public support for the mission and the press coverage of it, the journalistic and academic communities quickly came to the realization that the true depth of the Gulf War story had not been accessible to the public, and that the press was in fact extremely limited by the official policies that kept any exposure to the battlefield to a bare minimum.<sup>1</sup> "I don't think the public has a clue about what happened in Kuwait, for example," said veteran

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth study of public opinion of the Gulf War, see Barbara Allen et al., “The Media and the Gulf War: Framing, Priming, and the Spiral of Silence,” *Polity* 27, no. 2 (1994); and see Christopher Paul and James J Kim, *Reporters on the Battlefield: The Embedded Press System in Historical Context* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), 42-46, for further discussion of the limits on wartime coverage and the reactions to them. For period reports on press complaints regarding access, see "After the War: 15 Top Journalists Object to Gulf War Curbs", n.a., *The New York Times*, May 2, 1991; and "Lawsuit on Gulf War Press Curbs Dismissed", n.a., *The New York Times*, April 17, 1991.

journalist Peter Arnett weeks after the war ended. "They don't have a clear idea about the impact of the allied bombing, or what really happened in the ground war."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, very few reporters accompanied coalition forces into Kuwait and Iraq during or after the 100-hour ground war; most were fed their information by the military briefers in Riyadh, and didn't witness the aftermath of the wholesale destruction of the Iraqi army and the slaughter of up to 100,000 of its soldiers by the coalition air and ground campaigns, or any of the collateral damage inflicted on the region.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, towards the end of the Desert Storm campaign, American troops engaged in "one of the most fearsome, if one-sided, armored battles in history. The Americans destroyed more than 100 Iraqi tanks and vehicles in 45 minutes," and "the Battle of Medina Ridge became part of Army lore." But if you search Medina Ridge on the internet, "you'll get dozens of stories about a racehorse by that name - and very few about the battle. No journalists were there to witness it, and only a handful were close enough to interview participants immediately afterward."<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the military had limited the press's access to battlefield events did not go unnoticed in academic literature and journalistic publications following the victory parades of spring/summer 1991.<sup>5</sup> In fact, deep criticism of the lack of direct access to the

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<sup>2</sup> "Pentagon 'sanitized' gulf war, Arnett says", n.a., *The Toronto Star*, May 7, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> One firsthand account that did emerge from the front lines of the ground war was John J Fialka and Peter Braestrup, *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1992). For a discussion of the destruction of the Iraqi army and the numbers of casualties it sustained, see John G. Heidenrich, "The Gulf War: How Many Iraqis Died?," *Foreign Policy*, no. 90 (1993); also See Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Gulf War* (London, United Kingdom: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 477 ;For a discussion of the widespread destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and the slaughter of Iraqis according to noted anti-war scholars, see Ramsey Clark, *War Crimes: A Report on United States War Crimes Against Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1992). 83-94.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Dilanian " Seeking the inside story in an Iraq war;Unprecedented access for reporters may lead to bias, or to more truth and less anti-U.S. sentiment", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of the immediate academic response to the Gulf War and the media, see John R. MacArthur and Ben H Bagdikian, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993);Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Lance W Bennett et al., *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago

battlefields of Iraq and Kuwait began while the very short 1991 Gulf War was unfolding, and a new confrontation between the military and the media threatened to once again damage the tenuous relationship.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, while the war was being fought, "Defense Department policies restricting coverage of the Persian Gulf War were not universally popular with the media, and drew several court challenges."<sup>7</sup> The experience of being bottled up in the 1991 war lingered, according to *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Ken Dilanian. "The first Gulf War was a paradox: The public got unprecedented views of bombs bursting over Baghdad on the first night of the air war," he argued. "But the pool system set up to cover troops in the field was largely viewed by journalists as a failure, as "during the four-day ground war, the handful of reporters who went into battle relied on the military to dispatch their stories - which often took so long the reports were unusable. There were promises to do better next time."<sup>8</sup>

The 1990s saw a substantial backlash from the press against the 1991 experience of limiting battlefield access, prompting a military response that again included recommendations for future cooperation, just as the Sidle Commission report had done with Grenada in the previous decade. Agreements were made, in principle, to allow more access to the battlefields that would continue to erupt around the globe in the post-Cold War era.<sup>9</sup>

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Press, 1994); Jean Baudrillard, Paul Patton, and Professor Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Martin Harrison, "Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—a Global Perspective," *International Affairs* 69, no. 3 (July 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Paul and Kim, 45.

<sup>7</sup> The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, "Jefferson Muzzles" < <http://www.tjcenter.org/muzzles/muzzle-archive-2002-2/> > (12 January 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Ken Dilanian " Seeking the inside story in an Iraq war;Unprecedented access for reporters may lead to bias, or to more truth and less anti-U.S. sentiment", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 2003.

<sup>9</sup>See Judith Raine Baroody, *Media Access and the Military: The Case of the Gulf War* (Thousand Oaks, CA, United States: University Press of America, 1998), 103-139, and especially 135-140; and Stanley W. Cloud, "The Pentagon and the press." *Nieman Reports* 55, no. 4 (2001): 13, where the author details the "Principles for News Media Coverage of DoD Operations" agreed to by the press and military in March 1992. It should also be noted that a subsequent document entitled *Principles of Information* was produced by William Cohen, Secretary of State under the Clinton Administration, that again attempted to put a framework in place that would allow access to American

The United States implemented what can be termed a “proto-embedded press system” in Bosnia and Kosovo, for instance, in Desert Storm's wake. Indeed, U.S. operations in the former Yugoslavia were accompanied by greater media-military cooperation, including another iteration of a cooperative model allowing reporters to accompany the troops in the field. It was in Bosnia in 1995 that the term "embedded press" was first used to describe a style of a formal procedure for granting access to reporters to American military units and personnel. As Paul and Kim note, “the process of 'embedding' referred to a reporter being assigned to a unit, deploying with it, and living with it throughout a lengthy period of operations.” In Bosnia, the reporters were embedded for approximately a month, and around thirty media organizations from the U.S. and Europe and thirty-three reporters were embedded with the troops, according to a RAND study.<sup>10</sup>

The Kosovo conflict of 1999 highlighted another factor in the decision to have reporters along with military units in the emerging digital age, as information warfare and deception could more easily be turned against the American military. The Kosovo experience "illustrated the difficulty of preventing the press from gaining access to information in an age of technology." Thus, it was up to “the military to determine how to pro-actively implement a system of press relations that maximized operational security while providing sufficient press access to prevent damaging enemy misinformation from playing undisputed in the news.”<sup>11</sup>

The lesson of Kosovo and the enemy's use of disinformation -- or, rather, blaming U.S. forces for carnage and bloodshed that they may have had no part in by broadcasting digital images around the world -- was not lost on the Pentagon planners of the wars to

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military operations while protecting the overall mission. See James Terry, “Press Access to Combatant Operations in the Post-Peacekeeping Era,” *Military Law Review* 154, no. 1 (1997), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup>Paul and Kim, 48, 46-50.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 50, pp, 46-53.



follow. "If the military doesn't tell its story through the media by letting them go out and see what they are doing, then the bad guys will make up their story for them," said reporter George Wilson on the *PBS Newshour* on October 10, 2001, during a panel discussion attended by media members, military brass, and top Defense Department officials including the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. "And if the U.S. government just stiff arms us, I think they're going to be ill served."<sup>12</sup>

### **Exclusion Redux: Afghanistan**

Following the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terror attacks on the United States, the public's perception of military intervention changed. No longer would wars be fought exclusively on far-off battlefields, as a war had reached the American homeland for the first time since the Second World War, and the press would strive to offer dramatic reports of the counter-attack in the new "War on Terror." Indeed, in a study of newspaper editorials in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, it was found that "no editorial suggested that military intervention would be inappropriate and none stated that military intervention would not ultimately succeed, although some urged caution."<sup>13</sup>

Even though an atmosphere of cooperation began to emerge in Kosovo and Bosnia, covering the early days of a war in Afghanistan fought by Special Forces and local militias offered major obstacles to the media, and indeed the military as well. "In Bosnia, there was a policy of embedding the media with select units in the field. But if this is going to be a war with special operations [forces], that won't happen, and we'll probably find out what

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<sup>12</sup>*PBS Newshour*, "Pentagon and the Press", *October 10, 2001*, *Transcript*, < [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress\\_10-10/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress_10-10/)> (23 February 2017).

<sup>13</sup>M. Ryan, "Framing the War Against Terrorism: US Newspaper Editorials and Military Action in Afghanistan," *International Communication Gazette* 66, no. 5 (October 1, 2004),

happens after it occurs," said Mark Mazzetti, a national defense correspondent with *U.S. News & World Report*, just days after 9/11.<sup>14</sup>

Secret missions and “black” operations were the reality of the Afghanistan operation at first, and many journalists felt left out. “The U.S. engagement in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) represented a noticeable decrease in press access compared with similar operations in the past,” a 2004 RAND study argued. “Afghanistan was the first U.S. military intervention waged against non-state actors (*Al Qaeda*) and the regime that harbored them (*Taliban*),” the study said. “The restrictive press policy adopted in Afghanistan was partly the result of the nature of the operation: The engagement in Afghanistan was difficult for the press to cover simply because most of the ground elements of the campaign were special operations forces, which move rapidly and covertly over often very rugged terrain and make regular use of classified equipment or techniques,” which limited their willingness to have media cover their actions.<sup>15</sup>

Two key firsthand accounts confirm the findings outlined above. The fascinating battlefield memoir *Kill Bin Laden*, written by Special Forces field commander Dalton Fury involved in the early battles of the Afghan campaign, offered a common sense explanation regarding the exclusion of the press from the battlefield there. The media was left out of the Afghanistan mission, according to this commander, due to their “inability to control the roaming scores of journalists,” which were a major hindrance to his unit’s activities. Indeed, he notes that he was actually ordered to avoid the press at all costs. But instead of blaming the journalists for seeking access to the troops, Fury took aim at the policy of excluding the press from the developing story, and explained that “the real issue was the questionable

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<sup>14</sup> Paul D. Colford, "Coverage in question: News groups unsure of access", *Daily News* (New York), September 24, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Paul and Kim, 50.

constraint placed on us by our higher headquarters. The requirement to not be seen or photographed by the press actually limited our freedom of movement more than the enemy did.”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the difficulties in conducting special operations in inhospitable conditions were complicated further by having reporters following these secretive missions.

Even though U.S. forces were initially off-limits to the press, reporters still arrived on the Afghan battlefield in astonishing numbers. The United States had been attacked in a shocking and very public way, which influenced news outlets around the world to send reporters into the field to bring the story of the counter attack to the global audience. Philip Smucker, of the *Christian Science Monitor* and *The Daily Telegraph* explained:

I numbered just one of the hundreds of journalists who descended on steamy Peshawar Pakistan, in late September 2001. The Pakistan-Afghan border provided all the palpable doom that a war correspondent could have hoped for, and the media lacked no shortage of interest in the story, in contrast to so many other conflicts I had covered. After 9/11, many in the United States itched for retribution, and the new "war on terror" offered the vehicle, emotional and practical, to set things right. The war promised high drama, excitement, and justice for all.<sup>17</sup>

The media campaign in Afghanistan took on a comical flavour, as reporters scurried after any crumb of information they could find. Fury offered a story of being chased by a committed reporter through the dangerous passes of the Afghan Kush, only to escape with a lesson on the value of good relations with the media. He posed a worthy question to himself while being pursued not by enemy forces, but by the press: “How are we supposed to fight this war if we have to hide from the damned reporters?” Fury’s profound query would

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<sup>16</sup>Dalton Fury, *Kill Bin Laden: A Delta Force Commander’s Account of the Hunt for the World’s Most Wanted Man*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 128.

<sup>17</sup>Philip G. Smucker, *Al Qaeda’s Great Escape: The Military and the Media on Terror’s Trail* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s US, 2004), xxii.

eventually make its way to several planning departments at the Pentagon.<sup>18</sup> As the war progressed, reporters and their editors back home began to question the motives of the U.S. military and government once again; a confrontation was brewing that also affected policy-makers in their planning for future operations.

Neil Hickey, in an article entitled "Access Denied," which appeared in *Columbia Journalism Review* in its January-February 2002 edition, noted: "Journalists [had] been denied access to American troops in the field in Afghanistan to a greater degree than in any previous war involving U.S. military forces."<sup>19</sup> This was in direct contravention of assurances made by the Pentagon before the Afghanistan operation began, when Assistant Secretary of Defense Victoria Clarke promised cooperation at a military-media conference. "Unfortunately, however, when the raids in Afghanistan actually began -- first in the air and later on the ground -- no members of the National Media Pool or any other journalists were allowed to cover them."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, a CNN reporter argued on a televised panel on coverage in Afghanistan that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had "issued an edict essentially telling everybody not to talk about anything. So, even the flow of routine information [was] shut down."<sup>21</sup> A turning point came when the first U.S. casualties, in their flag-draped coffins, were hidden from the press attempting to cover the story, as members of the press were actually confined by military personnel. In the event, Victoria "Torie" Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, was forced to apologize for barring the press from military operations,

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<sup>18</sup> Fury, 116-118, 118

<sup>19</sup> Neil Hickey, "Access Denied," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January-February, 2002.

<sup>20</sup>The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, "Jefferson Muzzles" < <http://www.tjcenter.org/muzzles/muzzle-archive-2002-2/> > (12 January 2012).

<sup>21</sup>*PBS Newshour*, "Pentagon and the Press", *October 10, 2001*, *Transcript*, < [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress\\_10-10/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress_10-10/) > (23 February 2017).

and a commitment to media access was promised. “What we will try-what we try to do, and what we will continue to try to do, is provide access and facilitate media coverage of this very unconventional war,” Clarke explained. The caveat of operational security still applied, however, because “if something could impede or hinder operational security or could put lives at risk,” then the military would “not let something go forward. But as a general course, as a general principle, what we’re trying to do is facilitate coverage,” Clarke professed.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Clarke’s personal account shows that these issues became a priority task for the Pentagon’s Office of Public Affairs to address. In her memoir, she detailed a conversation with a media representative that had inquired about the detention of journalists in Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> She explained that “what happened [went] against policy and all our training. It shouldn’t have happened,” and that she would “fix it.” It is clear that the Pentagon had come to the realization that in order to avoid the pitfalls of historical media-military relations -- such as in the Vietnam, Grenada, and Desert Storm examples -- a new strategy was required; one that would help ease the tensions of the “antagonistic relationship between the news media and the government.”<sup>24</sup> In response to the fear of a disintegration of that relationship, this formal apology was drafted by Clarke’s office and sent to major media outlets:

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<sup>22</sup>Victoria Clarke, *Lipstick on a Pig: Winning in the No-Spin Era by Someone Who Knows the Game* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 19. Period press reports also detail this confrontation. See Carol Morello, "Tight Control Marks Coverage Of Afghan War; Curbs Exceed Those of Past; Broader Access Is Promised", *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2001; Jim Rutenberg, "Noting 'Shortcomings,' Pentagon Says It Will Remove Some Obstacles to Covering War", *The New York Times*, December 10, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> “The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) is the principal staff advisor and assistant to the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense for public information, internal information, community relations, information training, and audiovisual matters. Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) follows the Secretary's Principles of Information in providing defense department information to the public, the Congress and the media.” See “Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, OASD(PA)”, <<https://www.defense.gov/About/Office-of-the-Secretary-of-Defense/OASD-PA>> n.d., n.a., (08 Feb 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Clarke, 22.

We owe you an apology. The last several days have revealed severe shortcomings in our preparedness to support news organizations in their efforts to cover U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. We have a significant responsibility to provide your correspondents the opportunity to cover the war. It is a responsibility that we take seriously. Our policy remains the same as it always has been: Keeping in mind our desire to protect operational security and the safety of men and women in uniform, we intend to provide maximum media coverage with minimal delay and hassle. That has not always been the case. The road ahead will not be easy. While we cannot do everything you might want in covering this most unconventional of wars, we can guarantee one thing: we will keep the lines of communication with you open at all times to address these and other issues.<sup>25</sup>

Clarke explained that “the letter went on to describe the actions we took to address the problems. They included assigning more senior staff to handle media logistics in the theater, and reissuing guidance that clearly expressed our intent, ‘maximum coverage, minimum hassle.’” The apology ended with “a statement of a very sincere belief and a commitment that became even more critical in the months ahead,” a commitment to address the issues with access and accountability in the Afghanistan operations. Scepticism about the Pentagon’s latest promises and apology understandably abounded in the media, as reflected in an article published in the *Washington Post* on December 7, 2001. “Whether that translates into better access for journalists to troops and battle information remains to be seen.”<sup>26</sup>

Such doubts proved warranted, as two weeks later, on December 20, Afghan forces detained three photographers, apparently at the request of U.S. officers, and their

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>26</sup>Jim Rutenberg, "Noting 'Shortcomings,' Pentagon Says It Will Remove Some Obstacles to Covering War", *The New York Times*, December 10, 2001.

photographs were seized; even though the Pentagon had openly discussed the presence of American troops.<sup>27</sup>

### **Iraq: A New Opportunity for Military-Media Cooperation**

As Department of Defense (DoD) planning accelerated in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003, the fear of scandal influenced a new information warfare strategy that had been born out of the ashes of the failures of past policies. "The experiences in Grenada, Panama, and the Gulf War left neither side satisfied with either the flow of information or the way those actions were covered," a *PBS* report exclaimed. "But now, in this different kind of war, both the Pentagon and the press recognize that they are moving into uncharted waters likely to be more difficult than anything they have encountered in the past."<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the media was unimpressed with the way in which it was excluded from the Afghanistan mission and other military operations. In order to avoid another confrontation, the DoD sought out a policy that would allow for a cooperative arrangement; one that would also help get its side of the story out to the world. General Tommy Franks, commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, summed up the difficulties with excluding the media from combat operations. He called it The CNN factor. "Ever since the Gulf War, and the proliferation of cable and satellite networks, the competition for 'scoop' reporting had become rabid," he reflected. "Any unusual event with good 'visual' potential became a headline. Accurate or not, that headline became reality in the public perception. Military

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<sup>27</sup>Neil Hickey, "Access Denied: Pentagon's War Reporting Rules Are Toughest Ever," *Columbia Journalism Review* 40.5, no. 26 (2002); The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, "Jefferson Muzzles"

< <http://www.tjcenter.org/muzzles/muzzle-archive-2002-2/> > (12 January 2012).

<sup>28</sup>*PBS Newshour*, "Pentagon and the Press", *October 10, 2001*,

*Transcript*, < [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress\\_10-10/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media-july-dec01-pentpress_10-10/) > (23 February 2017).

commanders might not have liked this trend, but we had to live with it.” Indeed, in the coming war in Iraq, “the media will eat us alive unless we give them something,” he said at the time.<sup>29</sup>

As the top military commander worried about how the perception of his operations could adversely be affected by a lack of access, and in turn negative spin, so too did the Secretary of Defense. “Rumsfeld was not pleased,” explained Franks. “The Coalition had been bombing Afghanistan for over a week. International journalists who had swarmed in from Pakistan were transmitting video of American planes bombing mountainsides.” Not only had the press highlighted a perceived wasteful and ineffectual bombing campaign, but they also began “running and rerunning tape of Taliban armoured vehicles moving in daylight with apparent impunity,” a story line that could alter the optics of a successful military campaign and persuade the world audience that the United States Armed Forces was unable to find, fix and destroy the Taliban and al Qaeda. This certainly posed a dilemma for the coming battle for Iraq.<sup>30</sup> News reports in the early days of the campaign continually questioned the strategy of bombing from the air with negligible results. One rather scathing indictment came from Afghan warlords allied to the Americans: “If the United States is going to rely just on this little bit of bombing, I think it's wrong, a mistake. People thought America was powerful. If they don't achieve their aim, the whole world will mock them like they mocked the Russians.”<sup>31</sup> Other critiques included ones from the enemy, a rather deep thorn in the sides of the top brass.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Tommy Franks, Malcolm McConnell, and General Tommy R Franks, *American Soldier* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 218.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>31</sup>Andrew Maykuth, “‘American bombing is so little’; Among foes of the Taliban, frustration with the limited U.S. strikes continued to rise,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 26, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> See Norimitsu Onishi, “Taliban talks tough; In one southern stronghold, Afghani regime retains control”, *Hamilton Spectator*, November 21, 2001.



Negative reports continued to make their way onto American televisions and computer screens, and Franks noted that one such story “got wide media play by reporting that hungry villagers in the bleak northern mountains were chasing the bright yellow plastic ration packs into mine fields. Although there was no evidence that this had actually happened, the perception tainted the remarkable humanitarian effort.”<sup>33</sup> That humanitarian effort was being countermanded by reports in the press that focused primarily on the civilian toll in the bombing campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, the Afghanistan public relations efforts were failing, and had become a distraction for both the military and political leadership. The fact that the Afghanistan mission had been handled in such a counter-productive way supplanted a general fear of scandal amongst military brass, Pentagon officials and policymakers regarding the military’s use of deception in its operations. As planning began for the invasion of Iraq, word had emerged – accurately or not -- that the United States would employ “‘black’ campaigns that would use disinformation” in their battle against Saddam’s Iraq.<sup>35</sup> This was a tactic the planners at the Office of Strategic Intelligence, or OSI – a shadowy branch of the Pentagon headed by the infamous Douglas Feith, deemed necessary to counter Saddam Hussein’s own use of information warfare. Saddam had indeed utilized images of death and destruction to criticize American attacks against Iraq – and garner international support and violent

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<sup>33</sup> Franks, 299.

<sup>34</sup> See Edward Cody "Taliban Claims Large Civilian Casualties; Afghan Rulers Increase Efforts to Win Support From Islamic World", *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2001; Jonathan Manthorpe, "100,000 Afghans may die this winter: Not enough attention is being paid to the humanitarian effects of the bombing, Lloyd Axworthy says.", *The Vancouver Sun*, November 7, 2001; and John F. Burns, "U.N. Official Urges Restraint in Bombings to Avoid Casualties", *The New York Times*, October 31, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 173. For examples of the period news reports he refers to, see Jonathan Weisman, "Pentagon might use deceit in war on terror", *USA TODAY*, February 20, 2002; Vernon Loeb and Dana Milbank, "New Defense Office Won't Mislead, Officials Say", *The Washington Post*, February 21, 2002; Peter Benesh, "All The Leaks On Iraq Plans: Is This Clever Or Confused?", *Investor's Business Daily*, August 9, 2002; Connie Cass, "U.S. reactivates Cold War-era information pedlars: Iraq replaces Soviet Union as target of team helping embassies identify and rebut other countries' disinformation about U.S." *The Vancouver Sun*, March 11, 2003.

demonstrations across the Middle East -- at several points in the past, and was expected to do so again in order to bolster support for Iraq and cast a negative light upon the United States and its allies.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, during the Afghanistan operation, the fear of enemy disinformation actually directly affected the success of the mission, as General Franks "put great weight on the advice of the central command's top lawyer, judge advocate general Shelly Young," a news article reported. "On one occasion, Captain Young is reported to have vetoed a strike on what appeared to be a Taliban military convoy in case it was a decoy filled with children."<sup>37</sup>

Rumours of Feith's plan to use of disinformation tactics influenced a backlash from not only the press, but the Department of Defense's Office of Public Affairs as well. The negative military-media relationship in Afghanistan clearly needed to be repaired, and the OSI story only complicated that task for the public affairs departments.

While Torie Clarke assumed responsibility for the military's exclusion of journalists from the Afghan battlefield, this obvious setback had to be countered. "Clarke also raised a more fundamental objection: OSI was supposed to give policy guidance not only to military personnel engaged in information operations and 'psy-op, 'but also to public affairs officers,'" Feith recounted. "Clarke feared that putting both of these information-related responsibilities into one Policy office ran the risk of damaging her office's credibility. Though she often stated her case antagonistically, I thought she had a point."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Michael J. Ybarra, "Propaganda Plays on Fear Of Westerners; Iraqi Campaign Seeks Confusion, U.S. Says", *The Washington Post*, August 26, 1990; Elaine Sciolino, "Iraq's Propaganda May Seem Crude, But It's Effective" *The New York Times*, September 16, 1990; Howard Kurtz, "White House Criticizes CNN Report; 'Baby Formula' Story Called Iraqi Deception", *Washington Post*, January 24, 1991; Tony Mauro, "Saddam's propaganda war; Global focus on casualties 'disturbing'" *USA TODAY*, February 12, 1991.

<sup>37</sup>Julian Borger, "War in Afghanistan: US held back from attacks on Taliban", *The Guardian*, November 19, 2001.

<sup>38</sup>Feith, 172.

This confirmed that Clarke -- and the United States military public affairs community by proxy -- had fundamental concerns about the credibility of the United States military, which had taken a hit in Afghanistan. Feith, in his personal account, explained how a battle had developed between Clarke and his Office of Strategic Intelligence -- due mainly to a fear of scandal. "Clarke and her fellow public affairs officers wanted, reasonably, to maximize their credibility by insulating themselves from other activities of the Department -- especially military activities relating to psychological operations and military deception of the enemy."<sup>39</sup>

Feith asserted that "In early 2002... OSI took what turned out to be a fatal hit on the front page of the New York Times." Indeed, an article that appeared in the *Times* on February 19, 2002 cited unnamed military officials, and claimed that the "Pentagon is developing plans to provide news items, possibly even false ones, to foreign media organizations as part of a new effort to influence public sentiment and policy makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries." The story went further: "The plans, which have not received final approval from the Bush administration, have stirred opposition among some Pentagon officials who say they might undermine the credibility of information ... [from] the Department's public affairs officers."<sup>40</sup> Feith argued that the article influenced unnamed senior officials, prompting questions about the legality of the OSI's mission. In the end, "the *Times* story became a sensation."<sup>41</sup> Feith's group was even compared to the Nazi propaganda machine of the Second World War at one point by political pundits, and was eventually re-tasked, leaving military public affairs to Clarke and her team of public affairs

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "A Nation Challenged: Hearts and Minds; Pentagon Readies efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2002.

<sup>41</sup>Feith, 172.

professionals.<sup>42</sup> A decision had been forced; the Pentagon would pursue what the *New York Times* had called “white” public affairs that would rely on truthful news releases.”<sup>43</sup>

## **Genesis**

In order to redress the failures of the Afghan operation, and the growing negative sentiment within the media community, Clarke, with the input, direction and blessing of Secretary Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks, implemented a radical public affairs strategy that would aim to end the exclusionary and abrasive relationship between the military and the media that had existed, in several forms, since the Vietnam War.

A clear goal of the campaign was to counter the Iraqi regime’s expected psychological operations and propaganda actions. The response to past failures, fear of an enemy deception and propaganda campaign, and a seemingly sincere desire to have the press witness and report on combat operations was in order, according to several sources. Clarke claimed that her office’s inclusion in the planning stages for the Iraq campaign “was a deliberate signal by Rumsfeld that communications would be a top priority... not as a public relations imperative but as a military one.” Clarke argued that Rumsfeld “was one of the few people who instinctively understood how the Information Age had changed military conflict forever,” and that this program would help counter Saddam’s efforts at presenting false stories of U.S. atrocities, as the Taliban had, by offering “falsified photos around the internet claiming [U.S. forces] had struck civilian targets like hospitals.” Clarke explained that “Saddam’s operation was far more extensive” and that the Office of Public Affairs was “concerned about its potential impacts” and that “the world’s understanding of the war would affect our ability to win it.”<sup>44</sup>

The new play entailed a massive undertaking “to flood the zone with information,” and

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 174-177.

<sup>43</sup> Dao and Schmitt.

<sup>44</sup> Clarke, 54-55.

achieve “information dominance. The communications plan was nearly as exhaustive as the war plan, and its centerpiece was the embedding of journalists with military units on a scale never seen before.”<sup>45</sup> Clarke summed up the reasoning for implementing the embedding plan. “We had several reasons for wanting massive embedding in Iraq” she said. “First of all, it was the right thing to do. Even before 9/11 and certainly after, Secretary Rumsfeld and most of the Pentagon's senior leadership shared one of my most strongly held beliefs: the American people deserve to know as much as possible about their military.” Defining the program in terms that offered a noble explanation was Clarke’s recollection. “What its objectives are, how it's performing - the good, the bad, and the ugly.” Even though this program allowed multiple journalistic perspectives, the overarching objective of the program was clear. “If there's one aspect of their government that [the public] should care about, though, it's the military. And we did everything possible to make their military accessible to them.” She continued: “Strategically, embedding reflected our confidence in three essential facts. First, we had a good story to tell - that our troops were topflight professionals taking great care to achieve their military objective while minimizing the impact on, and reaching out to help, civilians,” she said, and “media coverage of that story would be the best antidote to Saddam's propaganda.” Secondly was “transparency - in other words, accountability.” And lastly “the only way to maintain our credibility was to own up to [mistakes] quickly.”<sup>46</sup>

In a 2009 article detailing the embedding program’s influences, the argument was made that “these traits indicate that the DoD sought to learn from its mistakes in Afghanistan,” and that “the process of embedding reporters in Iraq not only intertwined the military and the media but also simultaneously diffused much of the hostility that had come to characterize the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 55., 62-63.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

relationship between these two institutions throughout the post-Vietnam period.”<sup>47</sup>

### **A Roll of the Dice**

Clarke and her superiors took a major gamble in the campaign in Iraq, one that was clearly reactionary in nature – influenced by history, mainly more recent events. Clarke would have to win over the “the president, who was not alone in high-level opposition to integrating reporters and television crews into combat units. Vice President Dick Cheney had opposed the idea as well. Only the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld backed his deputy's idea but with reservations.”<sup>48</sup>

Securing the support of the commanding general eased the program through at the highest levels, however. Franks recalled the genesis of the plan, in his personal account, where he called the embedding program “a brilliant media relations plan,” even though he had personal issues with dealing intimately with the press. He recalled that Clarke had worked hard with Jim Wilkinson and Rumsfeld, on a revolutionary plan to allow media to cover the war in great numbers, from the most intimate perspectives. “When I heard the term ‘embedded media,’ it sounded dangerous. Assigning newspaper and magazine writers and broadcast correspondents to combat units could present problems: transportation, support, and liability. And there were concerns about operational security, in this age of satellite phones and Internet video cameras,” General Franks wrote. “But when Torie and Jim briefed me on the details of the program, I saw it as a winner.” There was one main reason why: “Press coverage in Afghanistan had been so error-ridden and mediocre – and often anti-military in its bias,” he argued. This was due to the fact that “the journalists had been kept away from combat operations. Instead, they had to

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<sup>47</sup>A. Cortell, R. M. Eisinger, and S. L. Althaus, “Why Embed? Explaining the Bush Administration’s Decision to Embed Reporters in the 2003 Invasion of Iraq,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52, no. 5 (January 1, 2009),

<sup>48</sup>Walter C Rodgers, *Sleeping with Custer and the 7th Cavalry: An Embedded Reporter in Iraq*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY, United States: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 4.

depend on leakers for their stories.” This posed problems for a host of reasons, but “if the media were actually living and marching with the troops on the other hand, they would experience war from the perspective of the soldier or Marine. ‘At least they’ll get their facts straight,’ [he] said. ‘Besides, the American people [deserved] to see the professionalism of their sons and daughters in uniform.’”<sup>49</sup>

The United States military would work hand-in-hand with, and grant unparalleled access to, the media during the invasion of Iraq in March-April 2003. Its goal was to ensure that its story was told the way military brass and Bush administration officials hoped it would be reported, as opposed to the rampant tales of military failure in Vietnam and the use of deception in the 1991 Gulf War. With the example of Afghanistan fresh in the memory of the Pentagon planners, it was clear that “different times require different tactics,” Clarke remarked, pointing to history as the overarching inspiration for the decision. So “we contemplated something for Iraq on a scale and scope that made it quantitatively and qualitatively different. One thing was certain: if we went to war with Iraq, the conflict would be very different from the Persian Gulf War in 1991.”<sup>50</sup>

The nature of a full-blown invasion would offer its own set of challenges, as “there would be no stopping at Kuwait this time; the goal would be to end the Hussein regime,” Clarke recounted, while pointing to a new dilemma for managing the press; the ever-advancing technology of the day. “Media technology had advanced dramatically, making transmission of product a lot easier under the right circumstances,” she opined. This time, the U.S. military wouldn’t be able to bottle the press up in hotels, hundreds of miles from the front. “‘Forget what you remember about the Persian Gulf War,’ we said repeatedly to

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<sup>49</sup>Tommy Franks, Malcolm McConnell, and General Tommy R Franks, *American Soldier* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 411-412.

<sup>50</sup> Clarke, 56.

the news media in the fall and winter of 2002. ‘If we go to war with Iraq, it will be dramatically different, and we need to plan for your coverage of such a conflict in dramatically different ways’” she told media representatives. “Some got it. A lot didn't.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Strange Bedfellows: Negotiating Access to the Battlefield**

Even though the embedding program was seen as a positive development by policy elites and top military commanders, it was at first looked upon with suspicion and concern by lower-ranking officers. After all, they were the ones who would be tasked with turning policy into practice, as opposed to the Public Affairs Officers in Vietnam, and the generals who oversaw media relations in the Gulf War. “It tended to be much more junior officers this time,” recounted one veteran reporter.<sup>52</sup> It would take some convincing to sell the program as one that would help, rather than hinder their overall mission. “When the program was announced, some Army battalion and brigade commanders complained about the prospect of ‘babysitting’ a bunch of reporters,” General Franks recalled. “But when the word spread that the Marine Corps - probably the most PR-wise branch of the military - was seeking ‘embeds,’ the Army joined in the competition for the best print and broadcast reporters,” Franks wrote after the war, pointing to an inter-service rivalry spanning decades, and the Marines Corps’ reputation as the most media-savvy of the armed services.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, “both the media and the military wanted a way for journalists to report from the front lines,” and “the commanders were told to cooperate and support” the embedding program once the battle was joined.<sup>54</sup>

One of the key differences would be the symbiotic nature of the new relationship. Indeed, multiple meetings and information sessions were held with media representatives

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<sup>51</sup> Clarke, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Judith L. Sylvester and Suzanne Huffman, *Reporting from the Front: The Media and the Military* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 38.

<sup>53</sup> Franks, 411-412.

<sup>54</sup> Sylvester and Huffman, 41.



in the early planning of the embedding program. We "held a lot of bureau chiefs meetings," Whitman said. "We made this as transparent as we could. We recorded the sessions with the bureau chiefs, and we posted the transcripts on the website."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, DoD records show a deep effort by Pentagon planners between October 2001 and the launch of the Iraq invasion in March 2003, led by Clarke and Whitman, that included the lessons of Afghanistan and past conflicts in negotiations with the press for a new model in Iraq. In a striking example of military-media cooperation that stood in stark contrast to the confrontations of the Vietnam era and subsequent conflicts, the framework for a program emerged that would allow scores of reporters access to the Iraq battlefields.<sup>56</sup>

In order to implement the new policy of embedding journalists within U.S. military field units, the press was courted to join the program, and the results were no surprise. The lure of direct access to military units, personnel and activities – something the press had been fighting for decades following the Vietnam confrontation -- was greeted with enthusiasm by the press; a group eager to report from the front lines of this new war. Most were willing to take part in the program, which would clearly make their jobs easier, or at least more organized. Content would be provided by the daily activities of military forces in the field – as opposed to briefings of those actions -- a fact that offered highly sought-after storylines and first-person perspectives. The Pentagon worked tirelessly to "come up with a

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<sup>55</sup> "Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 42.

<sup>56</sup> For a succinct discussion on these meetings, see Cortell et al. For transcripts of these sessions, see United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Media Pool Bureau Chiefs; Presenters: Victoria Clarke, ASD PA", October 25, 2001 <<http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2181>> (27 February 2017); United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs; Presenter: Victoria Clarke, ASD PA", March 14, 2002 <<http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=3107>>(27 February 2017); and United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs; Presenter: Victoria Clarke, ASD PA", January 14, 2003 <<http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=1259>> (27 February 2017).

means to let [the media] do what they wanted to do: cover the war from the front lines and do it in a way in which our commanders in the field were going to feel comfortable."<sup>57</sup>

Clarke and her office held meetings with the major media outlets in preparation for the implementation of the plan. "In October of 2002, the public affairs team at the Pentagon held one of our regular meetings with media bureau chiefs. Topic A (and B and C) was a potential war with Iraq and our embedding plans for it." Representatives from the highest echelons of government and press organizations attended the meetings. "Rumsfeld dropped by at my request. I knew the bureau chiefs would grill him on the same topic, and it was important for him to put his personal seal on the program." Speaking to the very recent and long-standing conflict between the military and the press, Clarke recalled that "the secretary talked about the desirability of having reporters witness the conflict. I could see some eyebrows rise and felt the scepticism in the room."<sup>58</sup>

The press was justified in their scepticism, as they had been promised access before, but Rumsfeld responded philosophically: "I think that as a principle, given our Constitution and the way our free system works, that it's always helpful, generally almost always helpful to have the press there to see things and be able to report and comment and provide information about what's taking place."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Clarke argues that the consultations with the editors and representatives of the national news media were only allowed due to Rumsfeld's belief in the free flow of information, as one of the "original sponsors of the

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<sup>57</sup> "Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 42-43, 42-48.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, 57.

<sup>59</sup> See Clarke, 57. Whitman confirms Rumsfeld's "strong support" for the program on a fundamental level, and points to Clarke and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard. Meyers and the Bureau chiefs as key players who "made it happen." See "Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 42-43, 42-48.

Freedom of Information Act.”<sup>60</sup> Rumsfeld gained a reputation as a media hound, meeting and discussing the minutia of the embedding program until an agreement was reached.

These negotiations were seen as a step in the right direction by the media as well, as journalist Kim Hume described in her article “Birth of the Embed”:

On October 30, 2002 Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wandered unexpectedly into a Pentagon meeting of Washington bureau chiefs of the major media outlets. This motley group had been meeting on and off since the war in Afghanistan. As journalists always do, we spent most of the sessions complaining. Our favorite complaint: lack of access. Secretary Rumsfeld, charming, impish, and in command had something to tell us: He was on board with the public relations strategy of embedding media with warriors. He wasn't kidding around. If there was a war with Iraq, journalists would be with the troops. In Afghanistan, he said, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda showed great skill in news management. The best way to combat that was to have accurate, professional journalists on the ground to see the truth of what was going on. He said he already had intelligence from Iraq that they were arranging things to mislead the press. "Having people who are honest and professional see these things and be aware of that is useful. So I consider it not just the right thing to do but also a helpful thing."<sup>61</sup>

Other reporters corroborated the story of the genesis of the embedding program, although some saw it as a military scheme to manage the war's image in the media, rather than an idealistic overture by the Pentagon. Michael Burton offered his view of why the media agreed to participate in the program: "The idea originated with the Pentagon, where military and political strategists pitched the idea to editors last year as a compromise," he recalled. "The Pentagon strategists, already planning for the Iraqi war, wanted proud, posi-

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<sup>60</sup> Clarke, 58. Also see Judith Sylvester and Suzanne Huffman, *Reporting from the Front*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 229: "At least three meetings occurred during the fall of 2002 in Washington, D.C. Pentagon officials invited representatives of the Washington bureaus to participate in the meetings. Although it is likely that a smaller number of news organizations were informally contacted before these larger meetings, no one in either the Pentagon or the news organizations contacted would confirm who participated or the extent to which they were advising the Pentagon in the early stages. However, transcripts of the three formal meetings are available on the Defense Department's website at [www.defenselinkmillnews/Nov2002/t11012002\\_t1030sd.html](http://www.defenselinkmillnews/Nov2002/t11012002_t1030sd.html) [www.defenselinkmillnews/Jan2003/t01152003\\_t0114bc.html](http://www.defenselinkmillnews/Jan2003/t01152003_t0114bc.html) [www.defenselinkmillnews/Feb2003/t02282003\\_t0227bc.html](http://www.defenselinkmillnews/Feb2003/t02282003_t0227bc.html)."

<sup>61</sup>Kim Hume "Birth of the Embed", *The Weekly Standard*, 28 March, 2003.

tive, and patriotic coverage over the national airwaves. If the editors agreed to all their provisions for security reviews, flagging of sensitive information, limitations on filming dead bodies, and other restrictions, then journalists would be welcome. The editors not only went along -- they accepted the ground rules without a fight.”<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, the Pentagon drafted a document that would enable them to control certain aspects of the embedding program, through a series of rules called Public Affairs Guidance (PAG), which served as the military’s instructions to military commanders with embeds under the authority of their units. These rules governed the agreement between the U.S. military and any embedded reporter, and would serve as clear guidelines for this new arrangement. This document, entitled Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), took months to conceptualize and implement.<sup>63</sup> The document was sent out as a communiqué to all U.S. forces involved in the operation, and served as a basic agreement between the media and the military. The military order-style document (which appear in all capital letters) stipulated that media would have “LONG-TERM, MINIMALLY RESTRICTIVE ACCESS” to the troops in the field, as media coverage would, “TO A LARGE EXTENT, SHAPE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT” in the U.S. and around the world. “WE NEED TO TELL THE FACTUAL STORY GOOD OR BAD - BEFORE OTHERS SEED THE MEDIA WITH DISINFORMATION AND DISTORTIONS,” it read, and the troops

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<sup>62</sup>Danny Schechter, *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception: How the Media Failed to Cover the War in Iraq* (Boston, MA, United States: Prometheus Books, 2003), 19. It should be noted that these restrictions and rules influenced a great deal of criticism of the program during and following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This topic is discussed in depth in following chapters.

<sup>63</sup> For a firsthand account of the drafting and implementation of the PAG, see "Major Tim Blair", interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 49-51. Also see Clarke, 62-68.

themselves needed “TO TELL OUR STORY.” The onus was on the leaders in the field, as “ONLY COMMANDERS CAN ENSURE THE MEDIA GET TO THE STORY ALONGSIDE THE TROOPS.” The PAG came with a directive that would shape battlefield access – and the reporting that emerged from it – as the brass in Washington wanted these commanders to “FACILITATE ACCESS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TO OUR FORCES, INCLUDING THOSE FORCES ENGAGED IN GROUND OPERATIONS.” To accomplish this objective, the United States would “EMBED MEDIA WITH OUR UNITS,” the order said. “THESE EMBEDDED MEDIA WILL LIVE, WORK AND TRAVEL AS PART OF THE UNITS WITH WHICH THEY ARE EMBEDDED TO FACILITATE MAXIMUM, IN-DEPTH COVERAGE OF U.S. FORCES IN COMBAT.”<sup>64</sup>

The PAG ground rules document, ten pages in length, also clearly defined the rules that media members were obligated to "sign and agree" to in an official embedding agreement. One of these rules included “all interviews with service members will be on the record,” a regulation intended to avoid un-authorized transfer of information and opinions, but would clearly limit the reporters’ traditional investigative methods.<sup>65</sup> As opposed to pursuing stories via various sources – both official and private -- media members would act more like witnesses, recording what they saw as raw, uncut material for their stories – and indeed for their reflections after the war. “All I had to do was stand there and write down what was right in front of my face,” one reporter quipped.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>United States Department of Defense, Document 101900Z FEB 03, “Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR)”, Section 2A.

<sup>65</sup> This point is expanded and analyzed in later discussions, and is referenced in several media accounts of their experiences with embedding.

<sup>66</sup> John Bebow, “Charging into Bad-Guy Country with Custer” in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq - an Oral History* (United States: The Lyons Press, 2005), 8.

The PAG ground rules document represented a main part of the official application that news media outlets had to sign before their members joined the military units they would cover. The exercise was repeated in the field with individual reporters, all but guaranteeing adherence to the official agreement and hence, the ground rules if the news outlet, and assigned reporter, was to be accepted into, and play a role in, the program. “The Pentagon established strict criteria for embeds. While censorship was not tightly enforced, there were plenty of restrictions about what couldn’t be reported -- details of tactical deployments, precise location, specific numbers of troops, or identification of casualties before next-of-kin had been informed,” Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson argued, in their important oral history collection entitled *Embedded* argued. “These rules were amply detailed in a well circulated document.”<sup>67</sup>

Once the news outlets and the reporters had signed the agreement, they would be offered special training to integrate them with the troops, and make them more accustomed to basic military procedures. It was also aimed at introducing them to the troops with whom they would live, sleep and travel. This aspect of the program was a crucial step towards access and cooperation from the military’s perspective, as the earlier fears that journalists would become a burden to combat operations were eased somewhat by this outreach program. The policy won acceptance amongst military commanders who had earlier been opposed to the program.

The CENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks, approved of the boot camp indoctrination. “One aspect of the embedding program that won over commanders was the weeklong course in Joint Military Contingency Training for Media,” he said. “It was billed

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<sup>67</sup>Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq - an Oral History* (United States: The Lyons Press, 2005), xv.

as a boot camp that would teach reporters how to stay alive in combat -- and how not to become a burden to the units to which they were assigned.” One aspect that gave the military commanders some inkling of comfort was that “the training itself became a media event, with Marine gunny sergeants and Army NCOs in DCUs and Kevlar helmets sweating squad-size groups of journalists up through the briars of Cardiac Hill. There were mock gas attacks with smoke grenades, and ambushes with ‘aggressors’ firing deafening bursts of blank cartridges from M -60 machine guns.” This was all seen as a positive development to Franks, who would command the entire invasion force. Military trainers were “doing big business,” Jim Wilkinson had told him. “You’ve got newsies sitting around Nathan’s on M Street comparing the merits of cleated boot soles and cargo pocket trousers.”<sup>68</sup>

Although this introduction to military life was seen in a positive light by many reporters and military officials, a 2005 study that surveyed reporters who had been embedded during the invasion showed that the “perceived effects of military terminology and the Pentagon media boot camp on embedded reporting were limited,” as “the Pentagon media boot camp ranked last in impact.”<sup>69</sup> Even though that report had found a majority of embeds did not find the training impactful, the program’s limited objectives were met. If taken simply as “an introductory yet comprehensive look at what they might encounter in battle,” it seems to have worked, in the eyes of Torie Clarke. “Even the veteran journalists -- those who had seen combat -- said they were surprised at how useful the week had been,” she said.<sup>70</sup> It had definitely put some of the troops at ease, as it “gave my commanders out there confidence that reporters with their units had basic skills and

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<sup>68</sup> Franks, 411-412. For further discussion of the boot camp's goals from the military's perspective see "Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 47-48.

<sup>69</sup> Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson, “‘How we Performed’: Embedded Journalists’ Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Covering the Iraq War” in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2005 82, 310.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, 194, 194-197.

would not compromise missions or endanger personnel," Whitman reflected in a postwar interview.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, in period accounts of the program, journalists understood, and respected the need for this training. "The idea behind the boot camps is simple: The more reporters experience military life, the less chance there is they will slow down, screw up, or report inaccurately about the military unit they are embedded with. It's also a way to make the military brass comfortable with once again letting reporters bum rides on the way to war -- a policy that, for the most part, was abandoned after Vietnam," Mark Mazzetti of *Slate Magazine* said in his article published on November 18, 2002.<sup>72</sup>

The complicated task of assigning reporters to units was challenging, and in order to avoid "charges of media manipulation and or favoritism," the Pentagon worked again with the news outlets in filling slots.<sup>73</sup> The experiences most reporters had shared with the military up to this point were as outsiders looking in, who had been allowed into the world of the U.S. military only grudgingly in the past. They would soon be faced with the very real and dangerous environment of the modern battlefield, but first they would face integration into units made up of sometimes suspicious, usually young soldiers, who they would be forced to live, sleep, eat and travel with for the duration of their assignments.<sup>74</sup> In effect, they would now rely on these soldiers for food, transportation, protection, and of course, the subject matter for the stories they would present to a global audience.

The embedding program would draw harsh criticisms during the invasion, and especially in its immediate aftermath, from multiple perspectives. Still, the eye-witness

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<sup>71</sup> "Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 47.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Mazzetti, "Dispatches From Media Boot Camp", *Slate Magazine*, November 18, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Clarke, 64. Also see "Major Tim Blair", interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 51-56.

<sup>74</sup> Bryan Whitman" interview in Sylvester and Huffman, 46.



accounts it provided tend to support Victoria Clarke's grandiose assertion that the Iraq invasion could very well be "the best covered war in history."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Franks, 411-412.

## **5. CONSTRUCTION OF THE ENEMY**

In this, the first of four chapters addressing the embedded media experience, the training and indoctrination of embedded reporters will first be examined. Second, views of the “other” -- that is, how embedded media and soldiers perceived opposing forces through constructions of the enemy -- will be explored.

### **Joining Up: Preparation, Training and Indoctrination**

Getting from the point where a reporter signed up for the embedding program to the point where he/she was deployed with the troops was a complicated process. The embedding program was a major undertaking that would offer an unparalleled level of access to soldiers at war, and require careful preparation for both the military and media taking part in the program.

Experiences with "joining up" offer intimate details of how embedded reporters were introduced to their new lives as first-hand observers of fighting units, and the accounts and descriptions of these experiences highlight that the very process of being *embedded* took several forms. The military took a number of steps to acquaint media participants with the ways of the forces they would cover. For instance, they set up orientation courses utilizing the same training establishment responsible for new recruit training, introduced the reporters to basic military knowledge, and prepared them for the dangers they would face alongside the troops. Once the reporters had completed their initial training, individual assignments were handed out -- or, in several cases, lobbied for -- and experiences with the rather disjointed process of being attached to specific units is an area of interest. In effect, this section explores the process by which reporters became embedded in the first place, before they headed off to cover the war on the battlefield.

### **Initial Orientation and Embed "Boot Camp"**

Most embedded reporters attended some sort of military training program, and were immersed in military culture in order to acquaint them with the environment (and adversaries) they would face in Iraq once the war began in March 2003. Here, the embedded reporters were trained in basic military knowledge, first aid, and the use of gas masks and protective gear; all aimed at subjecting the “embeds” (as embedded reporters were called) to the type of initial training that a fresh military recruit would experience. This was a humbling experience for some; but for all, the true nature of the embedding program quickly became apparent.<sup>1</sup>

Journalists taking part in military orientation "boot camps" were issued a "Soldier's Handbook," a clear indication that they had agreed to participate in a military-run program, that was to be facilitated by their leaving civilian life behind.<sup>2</sup> Once the training began, reporters were assigned individual tasks and responsibilities during mock combat drills, where they witnessed the horrors of combat for the first time. "Every time we practiced combat first aid during boot camp," Katherine Skiba of *the Milwaukee Sentinel Journal* recalled, "it seemed

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is a selection of narratives detailing the individual experiences reporters had with their initial military training (a sort of truncated basic training course that the U.S. military set up to introduce media members to military life). For a sample of embedded reporters' accounts of initial military training, see John Koopman, *McCoy's Marines: Darkside To Baghdad* (Minneapolis, MN: Motorbooks International, 2005), 64-66; Oliver L North, *War Stories: Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2005), 16-17; Oliver Poole, *Black Knights: On the Bloody Road to Baghdad* (London, United Kingdom: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 6-10; and the account in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq - an Oral History* (United States: The Lyons Press, 2005), 113. For period reports detailing the topic, see Harry Levins, "Strange Bedfellows: Military/Media/Military; Pentagon is 'Embedding' more than 500 reporters with Troops", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 16, 2003; Levon Sevunts, "War games are no game for reporters. Boot camp revived memories: Training aims, in part, to help journalists stay alive in any new hostilities abroad", *The Gazette* (Montreal, Quebec), December 17, 2002; Thom Shanker, "Threats and Responses: The News Media; Pentagon Says It Will Give Journalists Access to Frontline War Units", *The New York Times*, December 28, 2002. Also see the period news piece by embedded reporter Oliver Poole, "Reporters' battles to reach the front line may not be over: The US is preparing journalists for the campaign. But winning the media war may be much harder than defeating Saddam", *The Daily Telegraph*, February 15, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of this manual see United States Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 600-4: Soldier's Handbook (Basic Initial Entry Training), <<https://archive.org/details/milmanual-tradoc-pamphlet-600-4-soldiers-handbook-basic-initial-entry->> (31 August 2016).

horribly real to me, as if a soldier's life hung in the balance, with my novice hands spelling the difference between life and death."<sup>3</sup> Even though these were only simulations and not the *real thing*, the lessons were not lost on the reporters; they would be exposed to the same dangers as the soldiers they would cover. The media boot camps prepared the embedded media for the realities of the undertaking they had agreed to; facing an enemy armed with very real weapons. In other words, they "taught people how to survive on the battlefield," according to John Koopman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.<sup>4</sup>

Walter C. Rodgers, the CNN correspondent made famous by his live coverage of the 2003 armoured blitzkrieg into Iraq, recounted his experiences by describing another aspect of the frightening military preparation program for embedded journalists. He highlighted, in vivid detail, the intense briefings that the Army provided, especially concerning the threat posed by chemical and biological weapons. Even a veteran war correspondent like Rodgers was clearly unsettled by the scare lectures graphically detailing the gruesome effects of poison gas and biological agents -- the same videos and slide shows used to motivate young recruits to take their training seriously. His concerns for his safety were also influenced by the fact that "American news organizations spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on courses, training their employees on how to recognize and survive the dangers of chemical or biological attack." Although Rodgers and the journalists with whom he trained felt that all of this preparation was presented in an overly-dramatic fashion, he nonetheless understood that the "army course was taught by soldiers whose sole purpose was to keep themselves and us alive." In fact, they were being

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<sup>3</sup>Katherine M. Skiba, *Sister In The Band Of Brothers: Embedded with the 101st Airborne in Iraq* (University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1-3, 2.

<sup>4</sup>Koopman, 64.

prepared for the possibility that Saddam Hussein would use these types of deadly unconventional weapons.<sup>5</sup>

John Koopman, a *San Francisco Chronicle* staff writer, recounted the episode as a harrowing, although somewhat amusing experience, where the reporters on his course jokingly referred to their new-found skills as rudimentary at best: "We learned about nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. We had to learn to put on a gas mask, taken from a hip carrier, in nine seconds... I joked that I could put my mask on in *90 seconds*."<sup>6</sup> Skiba recalled her experience as a much more serious one, as it became clear that the true intent of the military training -- and especially the graphic and unsettling mock gas attacks followed by demonstrations on how to use huge injectors filled with anti-nerve agent antidotes, all backed by horrific images of the effects of nerve gas on the human body -- was conducted with hopes that the civilians allowed to join combat units in the invasion of Iraq came back "in one piece."<sup>7</sup>

These experiences were not unique, in a general sense, as all embedded reporters were *supposed* to take part in some form of military orientation before joining troops in the field.<sup>8</sup> Yet the lengths that these reporters went to in taking on such a dangerous assignment were remarkable. Many found the early orientation and indoctrination to be too stressful; just as any basic training course 's enrolment numbers dwindle by the day, the same held true with reporters being put to the test of military life for the first time. *Rolling Stone* reporter Evan Wright

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<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Rodgers, *Sleeping with Custer and the 7th Cavalry: An Embedded Reporter in Iraq* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 8, 9, 8-11.

<sup>6</sup>Koopman, 66-67.

<sup>7</sup>Skiba, 4.

<sup>8</sup> There were, of course, exceptions, like the experience of Chris Ayers of the *Times of London*, who's only military training was a crash course he received on the use of a gas mask and atropine injectors only hours before boarding a bus for the desert camp of his unit just days before the invasion began. See Chris Ayres, *War Reporting for Cowards: Between Iraq and a Hard Place* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2005), 170-176, 180; Also see *Detroit News* reporter John Bebow's account in Katovsky (ed.), 2. For a military perspective, from a deployed Public Affairs Officer, who reflected on the lack of training for many, see Colonel Guy Shields, "Media Gatekeeper and Troubleshooter", in Katovsky (ed.), 77.

recounted a story of the only other reporter assigned to join the elite Marine recon unit as he did, who, at the last minute, "suffered an acute attack of sanity" immediately following their chemical weapons briefing in Kuwait, "and left the embed program to fly home."<sup>9</sup> The very nature of the embedding program guaranteed that each of the reporters would experience at least some challenges that civilian life would not prepare them for, and many would endure experiences that no amount of training could prepare anyone for; especially involving the conditions present on the desert battlefield -- and their experiences with death, violence and destruction (explored in subsequent chapters).

The lengths to which the United States military went to prepare the embeds -- and likely to weed out individuals who were not fully committed to the task -- highlight that American military brass had no illusions regarding the risks of allowing civilian observers amongst their ranks in such a dangerous role, and on such a grand scale. It is clear that they only agreed to this program under the terms set out, which included a willingness to leave civilian life behind. "If we were going to put large numbers of reporters out there, I felt that it was important for us to give them some basic skills training," recalled Bryan Whitman, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Media Operations, and one of the chief architects of the embedding program. They especially didn't want reporters "to be a liability out there on the battlefield."<sup>10</sup> Whitman, along with a variety of military and Department of Defense (DoD) organizers indeed explained that the boot camp experience was a mutually beneficial arrangement that served to build confidence in the program from both the

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<sup>9</sup> Evan Wright, *Generation Kill* (United Kingdom: Bantam Press, 2004) , 15. Also see Colonel Guy Shields, "Media Gatekeeper and Troubleshooter", in Katovsky (ed.), 77.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan Whitman, "Managing the War: The Military", in Sylvester, J.L. and Huffman, S., Eds., *Reporting from the Front: The Media and the Military*, (United States: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 47.

perspectives the reporters, and of equal importance, the troops they would join in combat.<sup>11</sup>

### **Handing Out Assignments: "A subjective process based on objective criteria"**

Most embedded reporters were assigned to specific commands or units by military organizers from the United States military's Public Affairs Branch, although certain journalists were allowed to be matched with units -- or, in at least one case, with an individual -- of their choosing. Whitman claims that the DoD played no favourites when it came to assigning reporters to their units, as he felt that the news organizations would offer up the best people for the jobs, and work as partners in filling roles with the respective outlets based simply upon capabilities and interests.<sup>12</sup> Although his sentiments seemed to make sense, the reality of assigning hundreds of journalists -- from all over the world -- to cover the biggest military action since the 1991 Gulf War, from the front line, was a task that required much manoeuvring for both institutions. In a turn of phrase highlighting this challenge, the editors of *Reporting from the Front*, an oral history collection of media accounts from the Iraq War, remarked that "matching journalists to units was a subjective process based on objective criteria."<sup>13</sup>

Some embedding program participants were able to utilize considerable influence or notoriety to be paired to a chosen unit, or in at least one case, to a person of interest. Rick Atkinson, a well-known and well-connected individual, worked for a major news outlet (*The Washington Post*). He was able to choose his assignment, or, rather, successfully request it: an

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<sup>11</sup> For the military leaders' perspective on the boot camps, see Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 410-413; and for the DoD perspective, see Torie Clarke, *Lipstick on a Pig: Winning in the No-Spin Era by Someone Who Knows the Game* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 194, 194-197. For a survey of reporters' views on the boot camps, see Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson, "'How we Performed': Embedded Journalists' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Covering the Iraq War" in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2005 82, 310.

<sup>12</sup> As explored in the previous chapter "The genesis of the Embedding Program". See Sylvester and Huffman (eds.), 42-49.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 46.

assignment that would guarantee a front-row view of the commander of the United States Army's vital Air Mobile Division's operations; the type of assignment any reporter would jump at. "I was the only reporter shadowing the commander, Dave Petraeus," he recalled. He had known Petraeus casually since the 1990s. "My premise in requesting this assignment was that a division command post in combat afforded a good vantage point for looking down, into the operations of its subordinate brigades and battalions, as well as for looking up, into corps operations. I also knew that Petraeus was a compelling figure: smart, articulate, and driven."<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Atkinson was allowed to choose his own assignment speaks volumes about the new level of cooperation that the embedding program afforded the media, or at least the ones positioned to wield their eminence in support of cherry-picking their assignments.<sup>15</sup> It also highlights the value of Atkinson's account as a unique primary source -- as his experiences benefitted from the subjective aspects of the process. These experiences were shaped by his interactions with the command staff of a division of over 20,000 soldiers in battle; where he was privy to the highest levels of top-secret information during his time in Iraq, even though he was unable to share these anecdotes until after his embedding contract had expired, and his account was published.<sup>16</sup> He was also witness to the ways in which the construction of the enemy played a crucial role in the planning and execution of the battle, which we will explore below. This fascinating -- and rather unique -- assignment provided exceptional detail concerning the chain of command, battle planning, and the execution of tactics, operations, and indeed, strategy;

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<sup>14</sup> Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat in Iraq* (New York, NY, United States: Thorndike Press, 2004), 19. *USA Today* reporter Steve Komarow was also attached to an army headquarters assignment, and his account too offers an inside look at commanders at war. See "Wargaming with General William Wallace" in Katovsky (ed.), 79-85.

<sup>15</sup> Several former military members, ranking as high as generals, were also included in the embedding program, and allowed to accompany forces and observe their actions. As a prime example, see the account written by two former Marine Generals in Bing West, Ray L Smith, and Francis J. West, *The March up: Taking Baghdad with the United States Marines* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 2-5.

<sup>16</sup> Atkinson, 94, 105-106, 163.



perhaps offering justification for allowing such a distinguished -- and trusted -- journalist access to sensitive information.

The fact that an embed was representing a major media outlet didn't guarantee a *good* assignment, although it didn't hinder the selection process, either. CNN's Walter C. Rodgers sought out the *best* assignment he could find -- in terms of delivering live TV reports for an international audience with an insatiable appetite for the dramatic. Indeed, some assignments were "sexier" than others, and riding alongside the fast-moving armoured cavalry was clearly a better career move than being stuck reporting on an outfit expected to see less action. Rodgers took these factors into consideration in his lobbying efforts, and was chosen to join the unit that would spearhead the assault on Iraq and lead the charge to Baghdad: Custer's infamous Seventh Cavalry. He credits a good deal of luck to his fortunes, although his position as CNN's most experienced embedded reporter surely influenced his placement -- just as Atkinson's connections and prestige influenced his.<sup>17</sup> Although Rodgers found himself in an enviable assignment, his access to planning and command was much more limited than Atkinson's, highlighting a unique perspective found travelling within a critical formation that would see sustained and intense combat.<sup>18</sup>

Big-media reporters' experiences were contrasted by stories that highlighted how individual reporters -- with a little luck and an ample stock of dedication -- could parlay their way into a position that suited their goals. Many embeds have recounted fascinating stories of jockeying for position with regard to the assignment that would shape their vantage point, and

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<sup>17</sup>Rodgers, 1-6.

<sup>18</sup> This factor provides an example of the varying access that embeds were privy to; accounts ranging from the strategic perspective (Atkinson at the division level, detailed above), down through operational (Rodgers at the battalion level), on down to the tactical, small unit level (like Wright's experience with a platoon and rifle squad, detailed below, for example). See Rodgers 16-17. For further evidence of this, see Koopman, 90-91.

indeed their lives following individual, intimate, and extremely violent experiences with war. Evan Wright, a left-leaning *Rolling Stone* reporter from Los Angeles, had been coincidentally told to report to the 1st Marine Reconnaissance Battalion, a hard-core, elite infantry unit that was bound to see sustained and dangerous combat.<sup>19</sup> Although "the battalion had planned for me to spend the invasion riding with the support company in the rear," he writes, he made a deal with the unit's commander for placement within a rifle platoon. "In exchange for handing over my satellite phone -- severing all contact with the outside world -- First Recon's commander... [allowed] me to move in with Bravo Second Platoon, and ride with its Team One."<sup>20</sup> This course of events would influence one of the most detailed and provocative first-hand accounts of the Iraq War; and indeed provide this study with an indispensable source for examining the combat experience in Iraq, from the ground up.<sup>21</sup>

Smaller news outlets were less likely to be assigned to units of their choice. In fact, most embedded reporters lacking prestige, power, or connections were forced to take what they could get. Katherine Skiba represented the *Milwaukee Sentinel Journal*, a more modest-sized city paper, with a geographically limited subscriber base, that she had worked at for twenty years. The paper had simply been offered four positions in the embedding program; one from each service (Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Army), and left to sort the details out themselves with their personnel -- highlighting another way in which an assignment to a specific unit could be

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<sup>19</sup>See David Carr, "A Nation at War: Journalists; War News from MTV and People Magazine", *The New York Times*, March 27, 2003, for commentary on the military's rationale for embedding left-leaning publications' reporters within military units. An excerpt reads "Evan Wright, a contributing editor for Rolling Stone, joined troops in the Persian Gulf about three weeks ago. Stu Zakim, a spokesman for the magazine, said Pentagon planners were aware not only of the magazine's long history of liberalism but also of its young readership. 'They recognize the interesting logic of giving Rolling Stone access, considering that we're not exactly supportive of President Bush in anything he does,' Mr. Zakim said."

<sup>20</sup> Wright, 19.

<sup>21</sup>Evan Wright's first-hand account *Generation Kill*, was made into a critically-acclaimed HBO TV series, and serves as a prime example of a first-hand account of the brutal realities of war, and the socio-cultural effects it had on soldiers, civilians and witnesses on both sides (and serves as a critical source in subsequent discussions).

consummated. Since Skiba had completed the embed boot camp and had ambitions of reporting from the front lines, she asked to be assigned to the army, and was selected by her editor for the role. "The whole process was like an endurance race," she explained, in stark contrast to the experiences of the reporters representing the larger, more powerful news media outlets.<sup>22</sup> "First you lobby to get into boot-camp; next you try to finagle from Pentagon types a spot in a good unit, and finally, after you've gotten your unit, you introduce yourself all over again."<sup>23</sup>

### **Joining the Unit**

Embedded journalists found themselves joining units with pre-established identities forged out of the complicated group dynamics and social composition of military formations. The close bonds and camaraderie that develop over months and years amongst soldiers through intense training -- and the minutia of military life -- produce a hierarchy of authority quite foreign to outsiders.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, many journalists found this phenomenon quite intimidating; joining a group of young soldiers would present enormous challenges that all embedded reporters would need to overcome by breaching the barriers that exist between soldiers and civilians. The extent to which they were successful in overcoming these barriers varied, and would (in some cases) dictate the level of access they had to the most intimate details of life in combat; representing examples of the types of nuanced experiences that the embedding program provided. They would be subjected to many of the same socio-cultural experiences that any new recruit would be, and this process was critical to the reporters' task, as observing these structures,

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<sup>22</sup> For further accounts of the assignment process, see Ayers, 118, 177, North, 14-16; Poole, 29-41; and the multiple accounts found in the oral history collection by Katovsky (ed.) 3, 13, 22, 30, 43, 87, 365.

<sup>23</sup> Skiba, 36.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion on military group dynamics, see Guy L. Siebold, "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion", in *Armed Forces & Society*, January 2007 33: 286-295.

and in effect becoming part of them, has helped open up the surreptitious world of combat to the current study.<sup>25</sup>

The military's culture was omnipresent in embedded reporters' experiences. For instance, Atkinson recalled his indoctrination into the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne (Air Assault) Division as one fraught with pomp and circumstance; an experience that provided a lasting and powerful reminder of the special position he would be allowed to hold during the war with such a prestigious unit.

Atkinson and other embeds were paraded around the sprawling and impressive Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where the famed unit is based, and treated to a tour of monuments and shown videos highlighting the unit's prestige. Handouts, including a divisional briefing document detailed the division's weaponry and capabilities, and introduced the unit's salutation, "air assault!"<sup>26</sup> Just to make clear that the reporters had become one with the unit and were no longer privy to the comforts of the civilian world, a veteran public-affairs officer quipped facetiously that "if you have a particular brand of cappuccino you prefer, if you'd rather have a room with a morning view rather than an evening view, just let us know and we'll see if we can accommodate you."<sup>27</sup>

These types of experiences assured the assembled reporters that they had indeed left the normality and comfort of the civilian world to join the ranks of the United States military.<sup>28</sup> In fact, many embeds were given an honorary rank equivalent to major,<sup>29</sup> perhaps highlighting the

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<sup>25</sup> The variety of units and individuals that the embedding program introduce us to, via the accounts of these reporters, is valuable in terms of understanding the human elements of combat experiences. For detailed commentary on the people that embeds have profiled, and the ways that they interact amongst themselves and their units, see Ayers, 180-190, Poole, 41-44; and especially David Zucchini and Mark Bowden, *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad* (Grand Rapids, MI, United States: Grove Press / Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004), 1-18, 76-78.

<sup>26</sup>Atkinson, 13-14.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Colonel Guy Shields, a senior Public affairs Officer, shared his experiences with explaining these facts to newly-embedded journalists -- many of whom quit on the spot. See Katovsky (ed.) 77; and Skiba, 117.

<sup>29</sup> The honorary rank of Major has been bestowed upon war correspondents as a U.S. military tradition since at least the Civil War. See Mitchel Roth and James Stuart Olson, *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism* (United

lengths to which the military went to provide embeds with access to operations and planning; and in some cases, welcoming them as one of their own.<sup>30</sup> In fact, for various reasons, several embeds shed civilian clothes in favour of a military uniform.<sup>31</sup>

Although the military proved welcoming to some, many reporters found themselves assigned arbitrarily, or even had to manoeuvre themselves through several units or formations just to get a chance to cover the type of forces that interested them most. These accounts of the delicate process of being accepted provide a clear contrast in group dynamics to the experiences of Atkinson and others, as some had to wear a uniform, not only to fit in, but to avoid being mistaken for a target.<sup>32</sup> Many reporters lived with the smallest units and observed and recorded the history of the war from the bottom up; that is, from the perspective of the fighting soldiers who risked their lives on a daily basis and lived amongst the death and squalor, recording the events as they occurred. The story of *earning* the respect of the reporters' subjects, not by fitting in with them in terms of class, education, or common ideals, but because they were willing to risk their lives in order to tell the stories of these young soldiers, is common, and the sentiment that embeds shared the dangers with the fighters they covered was one way that reporters earned the trust of the troops; this, in turn, provided the nuanced and intimate details shared in this study.<sup>33</sup>

Fitting into a new group -- especially one that was full of young soldiers sometimes far removed from the norms of civilian life -- was a challenge that most embedded reporters faced.

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States: Greenwood Press, 1997), 84. The act of bestowing a major's rank in Iraq is detailed by Atkins., 12; and Ayers, 191.

<sup>30</sup> For further examples, see Ayers, 180-190; Poole, 41-44; and Zucchini, 1-18, 76-78;

<sup>31</sup> Atkinson, 97, 109, 136; Ayers, 204-205;

<sup>32</sup> Ayers, 202-206.

<sup>33</sup> Ayers shared a similar story, where he quotes the general in command of the Marine division he was attached to as saying, "if you're crazy enough to be here, you're welcome." Ayers, 183. Wright also describes the soldiers he covered as suspicious at first, but quite inviting once they recognized he shared their plight. See Wright, 20, 18-22.

Evan Wright found it quite tricky to fit in with his new group, where he was initially quartered with the officers of 1st Recon, which isolated him from the enlisted personnel due to the very real and complicated group dynamics of this elite infantry unit -- circumstances far from unique to this particular formation. Indeed, the chasm between the classes in military culture can seem like a canyon, as has been the case with armies for generations. The officer class is usually separated from the enlisted soldiers, who commonly resent their leaders for a multitude of reasons; including strategic and tactical decision making that affects their lives on a daily basis while in combat.<sup>34</sup> Although this topic is discussed in detail in a later chapter, its effects on the embeds' experiences with joining their units were profound. As reporters began to realize that "the men who are most trusted within a platoon are often the enlisted team leaders... [who] often have more training and experience than the officers commanding them," many sought these troops out as a conduit to best understand the units they travelled with; and indeed to find the best vantage point that would allow them to circumvent this dynamic. This allowed numerous embeds an opportunity to acquire the best possible viewpoint for observing the socio-cultural combat experience in the Iraq War -- one seldom found elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

Other social issues were at play as scores of embedded journalists entered the exclusive world of military units and their associated group dynamics. Katharine Skiba's experiences with joining her unit were initially influenced by the types of gender constructions that female service members have faced for decades (a topic for later discussion as well). "The military's eagle eyes were upon the journalists from the moment we landed... A welcome party had come out in full

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the phenomenon of class divisions between officers and enlisted personnel in historical context, see Ian F W Beckett and Steven J Corvi, *Haig's Generals* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2006), 1-11; And for an academic look at the sociology behind class divisions in military formations see Stephen Peter Rosen "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters", *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring, 1995), 5-31.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, 17-27, 19. Also see Zucchini, 165-167; Poole, 6, 43.

dress uniform (something we'd never see again...) I imagined them looking at me as they ran through a mental checklist: Is she fit? is she fleet? Is her gear in trim? Is she able to carry her bags without assistance?"<sup>36</sup> Although she was welcomed into the 101st, as Atkinson was, she was assigned to a subordinate unit, far from the division's command center. She worked tirelessly to make friends, and became close with several individuals who she credits with helping her tell a fascinating and intimate story. One of the friends she made early on was the unit chaplain, a Polish-American Catholic priest, who survived the Solidarity era in Communist Poland. He quickly framed the mission by reflecting upon a popular sentiment: "Saddam Hussein was 'just acting like a Communist, like Mao and Stalin and the others.'"<sup>37</sup>

### **Views of the 'Other'**

The war in Iraq came at a time when the past conflict with Saddam Hussein had become an ever-present footnote on Middle East politics. Long had the conflict continued to simmer following the 1991 Gulf War, where America's thorough routing of the Iraqi military had also left the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein intact.<sup>38</sup> Some in the U.S. claimed justification for attacking Iraq following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 (also referred to as "9/11". After all, the pariah Saddam Hussein had remained, in the eyes of influential Washington policymakers and many military brass alike, the ever-present villain in the drama of Mideast

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<sup>36</sup>Skiba, 15.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>38</sup> The lasting effects of the 1991 Gulf War are discussed in several academic accounts. One perspective is that the Gulf War, far from instituting a new regional order, contributed to an imbalance in the region that led to further instability due to a "crumbling social fabric in Iraq, Kurdish fighting in the north, an intensification of the Kurdish war in Turkey, 'impoverishment' of the Gulf dynasties, rising militarization of the region, and a reversal of the democratization trends of the beginning of the decade." See Alain Gresh, "The Legacy of Desert Storm: A European Perspective", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 26 No. 4, Summer, 1997, 70-77; Other perspectives highlight the strategic military and political atmosphere that lingered post-1991, and intensified in the years leading up to the 2003 invasion. See Thomas Donnelly, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2004), 1-29.

politics, and his history of oppressing his own people would be used by his adversaries in an attempt to invoke the core liberal ideals of American identity. Indeed, various scholars from multiple disciplines have pointed to this phenomenon in their studies of post 9/11 media atmosphere, as their criticism of the media's handling of the run-up to war in Iraq depicts a deliberate and wholly irresponsible mass media, focused on the spectacle of the conflict as opposed to getting the story right.<sup>39</sup> This sense was heightened to the extreme as the panic and jingoism immediately following the 9/11 terror attacks reached fever pitch in the weeks and months preceding the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. It was a peculiar situation indeed for many,<sup>40</sup> contemplating a headlong charge into a sovereign nation, although it seemed easy to justify this to many on the hawkish side of the equation as a direct response to such a massive blow to American pride and prestige.<sup>41</sup> In essence, although the shadowy terrorist figures thought responsible for the attacks on New York and DC had seemingly been dispatched with relative ease in Afghanistan, there was still the Iraq question -- or rather, the Saddam Hussein question -- left to be tidied up.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Paul Rutherford, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Marketing the War Against Iraq* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2004); and David Dudge and Danny Schechter, *The War in Iraq and Why the Media Failed Us* (United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 11-19.

<sup>40</sup> It must be noted here that a large anti-war movement emerged in the United States and around the world in opposition to the rationale for the Iraq War. See Dudge and Schechter 64-65, 71-75; and for a discussion on the ways in which this movement was marginalized, see Frank E. Dardis, "Marginalization Devices in U.S. Press Coverage of Iraq War Protest: A Content Analysis", *Mass Communication and Society*, 9:2 (2006), 117-135.

<sup>41</sup> For a stark example of this, see the open letter sent to President Bush immediately following 9/11 by the Project for a New American Century, a pressure group made up of ultra-conservative political and military practitioners, "Lead the World to Victory", in Micah L Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster International, 2003), 222-225. Also see *Detroit News* reporter John Bebow's account in Katovsky (ed.), 3.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed discussion of the post 9/11 media environment and its relation to the Iraq War, see James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 232-244, (and especially 223-244 of Chapter 10, "After 9/11"); and Douglas Kellner, "9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation" in David Miller, ed., *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 144-156; and Micah L Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster International, 2003), 213-240, a collection of period speeches, essays and documents in a chapter entitled "The Impact of September 11th".



## The Shadow of 9/11 and the Influence of 'WMD'

It is clear that the Iraq War took place in an atmosphere shaped by fresh memories of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The political and social climate that existed in the weeks and months following the event were major factors that would influence a pervasive sense amongst military members that the coming war in Iraq represented some form of a counter attack. The United States put on a full-court-press to convince the world that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had been stockpiling chemical and biological weapons, sought a nuclear weapon, and was a general threat via terrorism and these weapons of mass destruction, or *WMD*.<sup>43</sup> The spectre of another round of attacks loomed large at the time, and influenced the soldiers who would participate in the invasion and subsequent occupation -- and the embedded journalists, to varying degrees. Their views of the enemy, the Iraqi people, and their mission were all shaped by this reality. When we consider the plethora of firsthand accounts that have emerged from the embedded media, it is apparent that the way the war was justified became systemic: Military leaders, from generals to sergeants, used the idea that Saddam's Iraq had some type of connection to the September 11 attacks to help justify their mission to topple the Hussein regime, and, indeed, the actions they would take on the battlefield.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the very idea that

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<sup>43</sup> In fact the official stance of the U.S. government reflected this reality. See Frank Columbus, ed., *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 19-24, where the infamous "Axis of Evil" is further defined and the threat posed by Hussein's Iraq linked to 9/11; Also see Robert Keegan and William Kristol, "What to Do About Iraq", a position piece from the *Weekly Standard* (January 20, 2002), defining the neo-conservative world-view, which aligned with the so-called "Bush Doctrine" as it pertained to Iraq, found in Micah L Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster International, 2003), 243-250; and George W. Bush's speech to a military audience on June 1, 2002, "Remarks at West Point: 'New Threats Require New Thinking'", also in Sifry and Cerf, 268-272.

<sup>44</sup> This sentiment, detailed below utilizing firsthand accounts directly from embeds, is represented in the period editorial "Iraq's lethal mix: terrorism and poison: Solid proof shows that Saddam Hussein is not disarming. How much more evidence will the United Nations need before saying enough is enough?", *Ottawa Citizen*, February 6, 2003.

Saddam<sup>45</sup> had the capability to supply and/or utilize deadly unconventional weapons heightened the sense of urgency throughout the invasion force, offering motivation to the soldiers who would need to make life and death decisions, for themselves, their friends, and indeed, the Iraqis -- combatants or otherwise.<sup>46</sup>

While the idea of liberating Iraqis from tyranny influenced many within the military, the September 11 attacks remained a focal point for motivating the troops; evidence of which is available in multiple examples from embedded reporters' accounts.<sup>47</sup> Rick Atkinson described a powerful pre-invasion speech delivered by Lieutenant General William S. Wallace, commander of all army forces in Iraq, who told his troops that they needed to "remember September 11." He linked Iraq to the September 11 terrorist attacks and their supposed stockpiles of WMD to a threat against America, and drove home his point by saying, "I want my family to be safe, I want

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<sup>45</sup> Denoting the President of the Republic of Iraq (1979-2003), Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti, simply as "Saddam," is not used by mistake here. In fact, the construction of this individual as the chief Iraqi enemy of America led to the name "Saddam" becoming synonymous with the issues he was a party to. The roots of the use of his given name as a pejorative can be traced to the lead-up to the 1991 Gulf War, where the U.S. press used it frequently when referring to the Iraqi leader, and even the President of the U.S. adopted the term. This phenomenon can be likened to the simplified use of "Hitler" in popular history, as Hussein was the target of comparisons to the Nazi dictator in the lead-up to the 1991 war. See "Saddam's Next Target", 200-203, "The Hitler Analogy", 210-213, and the January 16, 1991 speech by President George HW Bush, "The Liberation of Kuwait has Begun", 311-314, especially 312, where Bush repeatedly refers to "Saddam" after using his full name in the opening remarks, all in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, eds., *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York, NY: Random House, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Sociologist/historian James Gibson offers a related line of discussion regarding the ways in which the perception of the mission, and indeed, the construction of the enemy -- especially the threat that enemy in seen to pose -- influences the warrior and justifies his/her actions. See James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), Chapter 4, "Who is the Enemy and What Does He Want", 65-80, 65-66, and references to this phenomenon on 290-296, 298-299.

<sup>47</sup> Several accounts verify that the link between terrorism and Saddam Hussein was a key factor in defining the mission in Iraq. See Katovsky (ed.), 3, 129; Koopman, 51, 67; Rodgers, 7-9; Poole, 17-18; Wright, 6; North, 2, 30, 251, 295-296.

your family to be safe.”<sup>48</sup> If there was one sure-fire way to motivate troops to fight, it was to highlight their direct role in protecting their families back home with their actions.<sup>49</sup>

The link between Saddam Hussein’s forces and terrorists was clearly being instilled in the minds of the soldiers tasked with invading Iraq, and this link, however flimsy in retrospect, was enough to strike a chord in the minds of the reporters covering the war as well. The constant threat of incoming missiles, possibly armed with chemical or biological warheads, definitely added to this atmosphere. As incoming missile alerts repeatedly sounded, embedded reporters joined the troops in hurriedly donning gas masks and running for cover as the point was reinforced to the soldiers, and the reporters along for the ride: Iraq was a threat to them, and even their families back home.<sup>50</sup>

Embeds were clearly influenced by the perceived threat that Saddam's deadly arsenal posed.<sup>51</sup> During their initial training, they had received pre-deployment indoctrination, complete with briefings by medical personnel accompanied by terrible images of WMD victims that had been shared with the troops. The army also offered immunizations and trained the reporters on the proper procedures for surviving chemical weapons attacks (as discussed above). This experience triggered frank discussions amongst the rattled scribes concerning the “probability that Saddam Hussein would attack with sarin gas, botulinum toxin, or mustard gas.” It is telling that so many embedded reporters' accounts relay the thought that it was likely that the forces engaged in battle would likely be exposed to a WMD attack. According to Atkinson, one officer put the odds of finding chemical or biological weapons in Iraq at “one

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<sup>48</sup>Atkinson, 110-111.

<sup>49</sup> See Gibson's *Warrior Dreams*, 65-69.

<sup>50</sup> Atkinson, 110-111.

<sup>51</sup> The mention of the possible use of WMD is detailed in an array of embedded media accounts. See North, 11, 17, 28, 37, 168; Wright, 35-36, 102; Poole, 6-9; Koopman, 66, 97, 114-115; Katovsky (ed.), 34, 38, 125, 318-319.

hundred percent."<sup>52</sup>

Fears of gas attacks heightened anxieties and brought the issue of mortality to the fore. This caused journalists to probe the question of why soldiers were willing to fight, and in some cases, die, for their cause. Atkinson cited a telling quote by one Sergeant Marshall, who would later end up a fatality in a military operation: "I am not a politician or a policy maker, just an old soldier. Any doubt on my part could get someone killed."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the greatest motivation for a soldier to kill, and risk one's life in combat, is the age old ideal that a soldier is only a tool in the grand scheme of things, and can only affect the future by doing one's job, without thinking too much as to why they've been ordered to do so. According to many embeds, this point was reinforced by the leaders the troops leading the charge into Iraq would follow; and considering the daily WMD alerts, their job was to respond to the September 11 attacks by eliminating the threat to America by Saddam Hussein.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, several embedded reporters have reflected on the powerful motivation that a link between terrorism, Saddam, and WMD provided the invasion force. Katherine Skiba highlighted that many of the young soldiers that she covered actually joined the forces in response to the September 11 attacks. "Most humbling to me were the soldiers at [Fort] Benning, some of them eighteen or nineteen years old, who told me they joined the military after [the terror attacks of September 11, 2001], because of [them]. It made me feel as though everything I had done in my entire life was trivial by comparison."<sup>55</sup> The effects and influence of the terror attacks of

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<sup>52</sup>Atkinson, 15, 51. Also see Rodgers, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup>Atkinson, 2.

<sup>54</sup>Of course, some embeds did question the mission's justification: "I had been swept up in the adventure without ever quite shucking my unease at what we were doing." Atkinson, 4; This sentiment is reflected in *CNN* reporter Water Rodgers' accounts as well. Rodgers, an experienced Middle East reporter, was amazed by the simplistic justification used to motivate the troops he covered. See Rodgers, 27, 25-28.

<sup>55</sup>Skiba, 12.

September 11, 2001 were ubiquitous, in Skiba's estimation. When she explained to her family that she would join the troops in the invasion of Iraq, the younger ones were thrilled. "I detected in them a 'United we stand' patriotism and pride, suspecting it came from having their innocence shattered at [9/11]. To them, everything Army was 'awesome'... It was a far cry from how I felt coming of age during Vietnam."<sup>56</sup> She also recalled the care packages from the community sent with the young soldiers, each containing "a penny minted in 2001," as a "reminder" of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 attacks; each complete with a little note declaring that America represented a "shining beacon of freedom."<sup>57</sup>

Not all soldiers or reporters bought the official, dominant narrative, of course. Wright detailed the jaded sentiment that the elite Marines he was attached to repeatedly displayed. After all, as Marine recon, these soldiers were the first to see action in Afghanistan in October 2001, and many -- especially the experienced combat veterans in the unit -- repeatedly questioned the mission that had "fallen on their shoulders," as one that represented "just another campaign in a war without end."<sup>58</sup> But responding to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 as the primary justification for the Iraq intervention was an easy way to explain the actions soldiers had to take. Clearly, it provided a coping mechanism, at least, for many. Matthew Green, a reporter from Reuters, recalled how the marines he travelled with in the war justified their part in it: "To prevent another [9/11] was one of the stock answers that Marines would give when asked about why they were going to war. Saddam might help plan another one, right?"<sup>59</sup>

### **Construction of the Enemy**

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>57</sup> Skiba, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Green, "Are We Nearly There?", from Reuters, Stephen Jukes, and Peter Millership, *Under Fire: Untold Stories from the Front Line of the Iraq War* (Harlow, United Kingdom: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2004), 66.

The enemy was a somewhat known commodity for most embedded reporters and the soldiers they covered. Saddam Hussein and his army had been the target of a prior successful information warfare campaign, one that painted the leader as a madman and tyrant, and his army simply as thugs and murderers.<sup>60</sup> The notion of a link between Iraq and the September 11 terror attacks clearly built upon this construction and allowed for a branding of the soldiers' foes as legitimate enemies of America. These enemies were not considered professional, respectable combat opponents, but a mix of inept regime loyalists and terrorists. The way in which the enemy was viewed, and indeed constructed, was important to understanding the motivation to fight, and, in turn, the acceptable ways of treating that opponent.<sup>61</sup> Embedded reporters witnessed this phenomenon, and their insights into soldiers' perception of the enemy, and even their own, helped define the essence of this conflict -- and in some cases, the ways decisions were made on the battlefield -- factors that had ramifications for thousands of American soldiers in the following years, not to mention the scores of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire.<sup>62</sup>

### **'Saddam's Army'**

Dominant perceptions of the enemy were rooted in America's lopsided victory in the 1991 Gulf War, when most of the Iraqi army had either surrendered or had been easily

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<sup>60</sup> The origins of Saddam Hussein and his cohorts' reputation as "thugs" and "murderers" can be found in a range of sources from the 1991 Gulf War. These constructions carried through to the 2003 war. See an editorial following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, where Hussein is deemed a "certified thug", Mark Shields, "What Are The Boys Fighting For?" *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1990; and President George W Bush's speech on the eve of the invasion in 2003, "The Tyrant will Soon Be gone", where he states that "we will not be intimidated by thugs and killers", in Sifry and Cerf (eds., 2004), 503-506.

<sup>61</sup>For an in-depth discussion on this phenomenon see Nico Carpentier, "Dichotomised discourses of war. The construction of the self and the enemy in the 2003 Iraqi War" in *Discourse Theory and Cultural Analysis: Media, Arts and Literature*, Nico Carpentier, Erik Spinoy, eds. (Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press, 2008), 29-54.

<sup>62</sup> For a survey of embedded accounts reflecting the influence that views of Saddam and his army had, see Katovsky (ed.), 127, 214, 344, 367; Koopman, 52-54; North, 104-105; Poole, 42-44; Rodgers, 30, 34-38; and Wright, 3.

destroyed.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, period news reports from early 2003 propagated a view of the Iraqi army as one that would act as it did in 1991. "At first blush, this enemy looked the same as the one faced in 1991: outgunned and overwhelmed. In that war, an estimated 100,000 Iraqi soldiers died, compared with only 148 U.S. combat deaths," a report from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* declared. "After 12 years of isolation and deprivation under the dictatorship of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi army would surrender in droves, U.S. military officials said, especially when faced with an even more technologically superior force than they faced the first time."<sup>64</sup> According to multiple accounts from embedded reporters, there was a popular belief amongst officers, soldiers and reporters alike that Hussein's best forces were made up of unprofessional and inept regime loyalists, and that the remaining bulk were unwilling recruits, or simply religious fanatics or terrorists. These forces would be easily destroyed, or would run or surrender, went the conventional wisdom.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, many reporters, and their military handlers, had been "laughing and joking about how quickly the Iraqis would be annihilated."<sup>66</sup>

Surveying embedded reporters' firsthand accounts, it becomes clear that U.S. military views of Saddam Hussein's army were constructions that influenced the ways in which the forces opposing them would act. The Iraqi army was considered a rag-tag assortment of dishevelled soldiers who had little loyalty to the regime and would be cast aside easily, and an enemy that represented an easy target, one whose war-fighting capabilities were constantly

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<sup>63</sup>Martin Walker, *The Iraq War: As Witnessed by the Correspondents and Photographers of United Press International* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2004), ix; also see Williamson Murray, Robert H Scales, and Brig. Gen. Robert H. Scales, *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-14, 45-88.

<sup>64</sup> Cameron McWhirter, "Special Report: The Road to Baghdad", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 13, 2003.

<sup>65</sup>The idea that the coming battle wouldn't be a "fair fight" due to the type of enemy the Iraqi defenders represented is promulgated by Ayers, 265; Katovsky (ed.) 127; Poole, 42-44; Rodgers, 25, 27; West, 60; and Wright, 3, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Poole, 14.

questioned.<sup>67</sup> This assessment, which it should be noted was the prevailing sentiment found in period news reports on the topic,<sup>68</sup> stands in contrast to what embedded reporters encountered on the battlefield, where in a great many cases Iraqi soldiers would offer spirited defences of their homeland (detailed below).

Although the prevailing attitude of reporters covering the invasion and the troops that would prosecute it was one of optimism (to say the least), the realities of warfare -- and the dangers of dismissing an enemy force on its home terrain -- were not lost on some.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, a debate raged in the United States regarding how many troops were required to defeat the Iraqi army and successfully overthrow Saddam. The debate included many former American generals and military experts, some who claimed that the idea that the Iraqis would simply surrender or be killed-off easily was quite foolish, irrespective of the quality of the Iraqi soldiers they would face. This debate, detailed in a *New York Post* article from April 2, 2003<sup>70</sup> - - as early reports of resistance to the invasion surfaced -- highlighted how the American war plan may have included too few troops. The old adage that *plans never survive first contact with an enemy* came to Atkinson's mind, while he witnessed this firsthand, on the Iraqi battlefield: "What did an eight-digit grid coordinate tell you about an enemy's willingness to die

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<sup>67</sup> The views on the state of the Iraqi army in 2003 are detailed by embedded reporters in a way that highlights a belief that their lack of equipment, stores, training and leadership was an indicator of their expected effectiveness in opposition to the invasion. For examples of this see Ayers, 255, 275-276, 239; Katovsky, 127; Koopman, 53, 156-157, 297; West, 60-64, 120-123, 181-186; Wright, 7, 32, 203, 307; and Zucchini, 143-146.

<sup>68</sup> For period news reports reflecting the sentiment that Iraq's army was expected to be easily overcome, see Jonathan S. Landay, "Deserter says Saddam's army is set to surrender", *Knight Ridder*, February 22, 2003; "Unconditional surrender only option: Rumsfeld" (Editorial) *Canberra Times* (Australia), n.a., April 4, 2003; David Sharrock, "Saddam's sorry army of deserters", *Daily Mail*, March 20, 2003; and "Iraq's Conscript Army On Verge Of Surrendering As Attack Begins", n.a., *Hull Daily Mail*, March 20, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Indeed, a report published just ten days prior to the invasion asked; "Have US planners underestimated the power, determination and commitment of Iraq's army? To fight and die for Saddam won't appeal to many Iraqis. Preventing Iraq from becoming an 'American colony' might," and ended by warning that "Saddam and his coterie are wealthy men. If they become engaged in guerrilla warfare they will be the most de-luxe guerrilla group of all time." See Amir Taheri, "Saddam Hussein, Ted Lapidus, and the Iraqi order of battle", *The Jerusalem Post*, March 7, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Niles Lathem, "War Boss Raps Armchair Gens.", *New York Post*, April 2, 2003.



for his cause? What did it tell you about how 24 million Iraqis would react to an American invasion?" The answers he received from the officers planning the assault seem like they would not have been very reassuring, even if somewhat objective in their tone. "From a systems perspective, I can tell you what the Iraqis have, what they're doing, where they are, and, probably, where they're going,' Lieutenant Colonel Reyes told [him]. 'What I can't tell you is what's in their heads. Are they willing to fight?'" One officer actually "pointed out that he had little personalized sense of the Iraqi enemy," even though they believed that they would likely not stand and face the juggernaut of the American army in combat. This was due entirely to the perceptions of weakness they had created in their own(misguided) assessments. "I can see Saddam poisoning the water and blaming it on us. I can see him torching the oil wells, or setting fire to oil trenches."<sup>71</sup> Hussein's reputation informed the construction based upon fears of facing unconventional tactics -- as opposed to conventional resistance -- like instances where Saddam's army would blow up dams, or pose as American soldiers. It is astounding that such an intelligence estimate of the opposing army took shape by utilizing beliefs about Saddam Hussein's past strategies<sup>72</sup> -- which should be noted, were mostly proven to be military blunders during the first Gulf War in 1991<sup>73</sup> -- instead of objectively planning to face a capable, determined enemy defending its home territory. The influence of this construction would become apparent in the coming days, months, and indeed years, when a determined, capable

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<sup>71</sup>Atkinson, 106.

<sup>72</sup>For evidence of this estimate of the Iraqi enemy as one that reached down from the highest levels, see "Letter to Senator Bob Graham" from CIA Director George Tenet", in Sifry and Cerf (eds., 2004), 367-369, where the expectations of Saddam's use of unconventional defence is detailed, without mention of any expectation of conventional military opposition to the invasion. Also see Atkinson 104-107; and North, 54, for examples of those same expectations reaching battlefield commanders during the invasion.

<sup>73</sup> See Norman Cigar, "Iraq's Strategic Mindset and the Gulf War: Blueprint for Defeat." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 15.1 (1992): 1-29; Benigo Ofra, "How does Saddam hold on." *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2000): 90.; and Kevin M. Woods and Mark E. Stout. "Saddam's Perceptions and Misperceptions: The Case of 'Desert Storm'." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33.1 (2010): 5-41.

and dedicated insurgency rose against the occupation forces.<sup>74</sup>

The construction of the enemy in Saddam's image was not limited to military commanders tasked with planning and executing battle plans. It was, in effect, based upon a widespread perception that had trickled down from the highest levels. Indeed, Hussein's past and expected strategies had become a focal point for estimating what the invasion forces would face -- built exclusively upon the enduring stigma attached to this singular individual; the leader of Iraq, who was to be feared, and confronted.<sup>75</sup> Walter Rodgers, travelling with the Seventh Cavalry, expressed the views of the enemy held by the soldiers he covered through a narration of a discussion between a young Captain and his troops:

"So it's him versus us. This is a dictator, a tyrant who gasses his own people and oppresses them. We are ready to liberate the people of Iraq." I kept my mouth shut, but having worked the Muslim world for years, I felt my first twinges of skepticism... "That's a conscription force up there;" Captain Lyle continued, the implication being the Iraqi soldiers would surrender en masse or welcome the liberating American army or at least not stand and fight. "We are the greatest army this earth has ever seen. All they want is to see an American tank to surrender to. It's payback time. We are going to liberate those people and remove that tyrant." I wanted to believe him. His men did.<sup>76</sup>

This sentiment is echoed in Oliver Poole's pre-invasion conversations with the troops he was assigned to, although a distinct contrast in the views of the enemy was apparent between

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<sup>74</sup> See period news reports that highlight that the resistance to the invasion was unexpected, and the Iraqis will to resist underestimated: "U.S. admits it underestimated the strength of Iraqi resistance" *Canadian Press*, n.a., July 24, 2003; and Bob Roberts, "Coalition misjudged resistance", *The Mirror*, April 19, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> An excellent discussion of Saddam Hussein as a singular representative of the "enemy" can be found in Andrew Hoskins, *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), Chapter 5, "The Real Saddam?", 106-122; and an example of the endemic nature of this construction's influence at the highest levels can be found in Senator John McCain "Iraq's Disarmament is Impossible Without Regime Change", October 8, 2002, in Sifry and Cerf (eds., 2004), 370-374. Also see a period report, "Singular focus on Saddam poses risks in war on terror", n.a., *USA TODAY*, February 14, 2003.

<sup>76</sup>Rodgers, 27.

the officers who were tasked with motivating the soldiers, and the older veteran troops who had experienced war first-hand. The colonel in command of Poole's unit described the coming battle in terms of America's overwhelming superiority in all aspects of waging war; and indeed, based his assessments of the Iraqi army on the same types of preconceived notions that other officers were using in other units. Speaking of the Iraqis, the colonel said, "I hope they realize we come to liberate them from the control of an evil, evil man... and it would be beneficial if some of the regular army capitulates," reasoning that, "If they do fight, they will suffer... it will not be a fair fight." In contrast, one of the colonel's veteran soldiers explained how even though he was confident in his soldiers' ability to defeat Saddam's army, the idea that they had run in the first war, and would do so again, was foolhardy, and dangerous: "Make no mistake, they fought -- and I'm sure they'll fight again." In contrast, the leadership continually used the political atmosphere and the construction of the enemy to frame the coming victory. "One day down the road you can look back and say you took part in protecting America, and destroying an evil person," the colonel announced in a rally in front of his troops. "So let's get on with this... And you will all be heroes."<sup>77</sup>

### **Battlefield Realities, 'Shock and Awe'**

When the time came to test the theory that the Iraqi army would either surrender or run, the perception of the enemy changed quickly; instead of surrendering, the Iraqis fought spirited defences of their territory. In fact, the embeds, and the troops with whom they were attached, faced some of the most fanatical resistance they could have imagined. In a description of one battle on the road to Baghdad that he witnessed firsthand, Rodgers explained that the Iraqis attacked "from all around us. The Iraqis were firing on us from the right and left side of the road while in front and behind us, the 7th Cavalry was shooting back at them." The fear and

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<sup>77</sup>Poole, 42, 42-43, 62. Also see North, 40-41.

anxiety of facing a determined adversary quickly replaced the earlier constructions of a cowardly enemy, as “four hundred to five hundred soldiers [were] shooting mortars, RPGs, machine guns, and rifles at us.” he recounted vividly. “The soldiers in their tanks and other vehicles were shooting at waves of Iraqis charging us from out in those fields. It was the first but not the last time that we encountered seemingly fearless Iraqi soldiers making suicidal charges.” The atmosphere amongst the troops, who had just days before been reassured by their leaders that they would not face much resistance from an enemy who had been constructed in intelligence estimates-- and within their own fantasies -- changed quickly as well. “It was unreal ... unimaginable,” Sgt. Paul Wheatley, who commanded one of the Abrams tanks somewhere in the night ahead of us, later said of the ambush. ‘You’re constantly paranoid. You are paranoid about every turn, every person, every building, and it’s a little nerve-racking at times... we were trapped in the middle of it, helpless.’<sup>78</sup>

Poole also described the shock that his unit faced when the Iraqi army stood and fought for one of their objectives, an Iraqi airbase on the way to Baghdad. “What happened to the expected capitulations?” he asked the colonel at the time. “Things shaped up just like our worst-case analysis,” he responded. “As it would turn out,” Poole stated, “not one Iraqi unit would capitulate before Baghdad had fallen.”<sup>79</sup> Although this may be somewhat hyperbolic on the part of Poole, and perhaps only in reference to the unit he covered, the point is not lost: the Iraqis didn’t run, or surrender in most cases. They fought and either died or escaped to fight another day; many in a protracted and bloody insurgency (that endured).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Rodgers, 64, 62-65.

<sup>79</sup> Poole, 93.

<sup>80</sup> For a discussion on the legacy of the Iraqi resistance, and its connection to the ongoing conflict in Iraq, see Liz Sly, “The hidden hand behind the Islamic State militants? Saddam Hussein’s”, *Washington Post*, April 4, 2015; and Ben Hubbard and Eric Schmitt, “Military Skill and Terrorist Technique Fuel Success of ISIS”, *New York Times*, August 27, 2014.

After a few days of combat, the troops had "taken measure of the enemy," according to Bing West. Although they neither surrendered nor fled, and "weren't lacking in courage," it was the fact that they were "lacking in teamwork, leadership, tactics and marksmanship" that confirmed some of the earlier assessments that they were not up to par with the invading forces they would resist; especially in the opening rounds of the war.<sup>81</sup> The rationale explaining the enemy's motivation began to change, as suicidal and fanatical defences became the norm: "The Iraqis did not need daring. They were motivated, and they were brave. They didn't give an inch. Iraqi soldiers were making these suicidal charges because many had been told their families would be executed if they did not."<sup>82</sup> Indeed, West reiterated Rodgers' point: that the Iraqis were brainwashed to believe that the Americans would offer no quarter in battle, influencing such spirited, yet fanatical resistance (perhaps offering anecdotal insights into the Iraqis' constructions of their enemy).<sup>83</sup> So, in effect, one construction of the enemy basically morphed into another, as inept cowards became desperate fanatics.

### **Facing Fanatics: "Terrorists" and Guerrilla Warfare**

Early in the invasion an unconventional enemy force appeared, the dedication and effectiveness of which was a shock to many. The *Fedayeen Saddam*,<sup>84</sup> a group of loyal volunteers conducted guerrilla style attacks and suicide bombings, which -- amongst many military officers -- lent credence to the perception that the Iraqi army and terrorism were linked, and a common enemy existed. The tactics of these fighters, many of them foreigners, actually influenced a clear response by coalition forces exemplified by a change in the rules of

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<sup>81</sup>West, 120-121, 120, 121.

<sup>82</sup>Rodgers, 64-65.

<sup>83</sup>West, 122.

<sup>84</sup> See Murray and Scales, 84-85; Donnelly, 58-62.

engagement, allowing American forces to engage opposing forces -- of any kind -- more freely.<sup>85</sup> The guerrilla strikes had profound effects on tactics, strategy, and indeed, morale -- not to mention the catastrophic effects on innocent civilians mistakenly targeted due to relaxed standards. These factors also influenced and the ways in which the soldiers coped and responded to their battlefield experiences --important topics discussed in later chapters.

The perception of the enemy, and the constructions that followed, changed rapidly in the Iraq War, due mainly to unexpected resistance, which embedded reporters witnessed firsthand. Indeed, as the initial battles took place, the overarching belief that the Iraqis would either run or surrender faded rapidly, as previously discussed. This was due in part to the spirited resistance put forth by regular Iraqi army units, but also a product of the emergence of a guerrilla force, utilizing asymmetric tactics; namely challenging and harassing the invasion force.<sup>86</sup> Rick Atkinson captured just how much the atmosphere had changed amongst commanders regarding the composition and capabilities of the enemy in his accounts of several of General Petraeus' conversations with his subordinate commanders. "What I want to emphasize is that this is a serious friggin' enemy. They've been fighting big-time here. They don't stop until they're killed." The idea that the defenders would not resist had disappeared, and the reality that this could become a protracted engagement began to surface. "Petraeus said, 'the plan has changed two or three times in the past twenty-four or thirty-six hours as [headquarters] has reassessed things.'" Although the United States Army was able to adapt and confront the new challenges of asymmetric warfare it faced, the fact remains that they had underestimated their adversary's

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<sup>85</sup> For detailed accounts of what role Rules of Engagement played see Atkinson, 161-165, 204; Poole, 96; John Simpson, *The Wars Against Saddam: Taking the Hard Road to Baghdad* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 290; West, 64, and Wright, 32-33, 255. Also see a period report on the issue at "Iraq: Main Brief", *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* (Minnesota), March 31, 2003.

<sup>86</sup> For a description of asymmetric warfare and tactics see Thornton, Rod, *Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the 21st Century* (New York: Polity, 2007), especially Chapter 1 "What is Asymmetric Warfare?", 1-25.

resolve and capabilities. This grew out of their problematic construction of the enemy, a fact that would haunt them for years to come. "We're in a long war here, as I think you realize. I want to keep our guys from getting killed in large numbers. That's the bottom line. I hope that this is the dying gasp of a regime on the ropes, as it's being cast in some quarters. But I'm not so sure." These words highlighted the fact that the enemy was not the one the U.S. Army had expected, but was a determined foe. Even the term *Fedayeen* became problematic to commanders, "because it ostensibly invested those fighters with too much dignity." The emergence of this unexpected resistance took a toll on Petraeus. "'This thing is turning to shit,' he said. 'The [3rd Infantry Division] is in danger of running out of food and water... the corps commander sounds tired.'"<sup>87</sup> The enemy had indeed resisted the advance, and not only with suicidal, or futile attacks. This enemy had stalled the American advance by attacking weakly defended supply columns, which had forced the generals to re-deploy assets to protect their supply lines.<sup>88</sup> Classic insurgency tactics had emerged, and instead of being used to trap and destroy the conventional enemy to the front – that was initially expected to surrender – major coalition forces would have to be diverted to face this threat.<sup>89</sup> The fact that the United States Army, a massive and powerful entity, relied on these constructions of the enemy to launch the invasion of Iraq is telling, especially when the accounts of embedded reporters are considered.

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<sup>87</sup>Atkinson, 173, 164, 165.

<sup>88</sup> The emergence of this effective resistance became a focal point for criticism of the war plan. See Tom Clonan, "Flagging campaign requires good news: US encounters with Iraqi troops have proven to be hard-fought affairs" *The Irish Times*, March 27, 2003; Bob Roberts, "Advance stalls as the diehards dig in" *The Mirror*, March 24, 2003"; David Williams, "Urban guerillas stall the advance; Fake surrenders and soldiers disguised as civilians put British troops to the test in battle for the south" *Daily Mail*, March 25, 2003.

<sup>89</sup>Atkinson, 163-166. Atkinson's narrative is a unique and detailed first-person account that highlights that top U.S. field commanders were completely surprised by the resistance they faced. Generals are quoted as viewing the opposition as "more aggressive than anticipated," and "incomprehensible." They also detail the effective attacks on their supply lines and an assessment that the war could become a protracted, bloody campaign, like Vietnam. See 164-172.

The opposition didn't always face off against the overwhelming firepower of the invasion force, although their actions still played a prominent role in defining the enemy, as the "other"; sentiments which permeated the troops' tight-knit communities. The Marines, accompanied by Bing West, met little resistance initially, although early experiences with the enemy they would face coloured their beliefs, and indeed, their actions. West told a story of the Marines taking over an oil facility early on, where Saddam's troops, described as irregular, fanatical, and ruthless, had come earlier, and demanded that the workers sabotage the equipment. "They had cut [a] man's head off to make an example." This brutal scene, which included a blood-smeared room and a terrified group of engineers and workers, further informed the perception of the enemy that the Marines West was travelling with would continuously identified.<sup>90</sup> "They had seen enough to know that "somewhere out in the dust and wind" the enemy was laying in wait, "talking about how they would kill Marines." Indeed, West described how many of the senior enlisted leaders -- the tough and experienced Marine sergeants -- had begun to prepare their troops to face this type of fanatical and determined enemy once they "had seen the ambulance race up and down the convoy... carrying Marines wounded in skirmishes." After all, they had learned, the "*Fedayeen* were lurking."<sup>91</sup>

It is clear that these forces were more feared than a conventional enemy. Was it due to their better equipment, leadership, and training (the hallmarks of a capable enemy); or was this anxiety the product of a constructed enemy, employing unconventional tactics that could appear at anytime, anywhere? Indeed, the very idea that the enemy was an unknown and ruthless one played a role in how units across Iraq -- in those early days -- prepared for battle. An adjustment

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<sup>90</sup>West, 24, 24-26.

<sup>91</sup> West, 60, 60-62. West explores the concept of facing fanatics, and the effects on the Marines, throughout his narrative. See West, 120-122, 143, 150, 164, 181, 186, 182. For a similar account, see Luke Baker, "Heavy Metal Warriors" in Reuters, 6-7.



took place very rapidly, from the idea of facing a cowardly and incoherent conventional army to one that was built upon facing a determined and fanatical foe, who could do real damage to the invasion forces, no matter how well armed, led or trained they were.<sup>92</sup>

In a fascinating account of this phenomenon, Oliver Poole, the British reporter embedded within an American cavalry unit, described how this emerging threat continually challenged the Americans' rules of engagement. Poole found by speaking with leaders from his unit, that this was not by accident; it was seen as very much part of the plan put into action against the invasion. In a stark and damning reminder regarding how the construction of the enemy influenced the course of the war, Poole recounted just how seriously perceptions of the enemy, and predictions of how that enemy would act, had affected tactics. "American intelligence officers had received information before the invasion was launched that Iraqi soldiers were carrying civilian clothes in their kit bags," he explained. "At the time this was seen as an indication that they were poised to desert at the first possible opportunity," but it became rapidly apparent that they had been "waiting for the order to shed their fatigues to make it harder for the United States military to identify them." He confirmed that "this was not the kind of enemy that the Americans had been warned to expect." It was not one that "seemed to care about the distinction between combatants and civilians on which the American rules of engagement had been based," and it "was becoming clear that this enemy simply wanted to kill the soldiers who were invading their country, and saw no apparent need to appear civilized about how they managed to do it."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> For a survey of embedded media accounts of facing fanatics, and the influences and effects this had on the troops, see Katovsky (ed.) 67; Koopman, 191, 244; North, 80, 105; 232; Poole, 96; Reuters, Jukes and Millership (ed.) 7-9; Wright, 249; and Zucchini, 174.

<sup>93</sup> Poole 96, 95-97.

Once the resistance to the invasion became widespread, the terms used to describe it changed. Even though these descriptions were usually negative and derogatory, they could be justified, in some instances. Suicide bombings became an effective tactic against the thinly-stretched American forces and the asymmetric nature of the battle became even more apparent. Fear, anxiety, and anger arose within the ranks due to these surprise attacks, and embedded reporters witnessed the results; and chronicled the responses to them. These responses included the widespread employment of roadblocks, with many nervous soldiers repeatedly misidentifying targets, resulting in extensive civilian casualties and numerous friendly fire incidents (again, after the rules of engagement were loosened).<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, this new arrangement also led to mounting civilian casualties and further influenced widespread resistance by capable and determined adversaries; committed and organized insurgents who clearly had been omitted from previous constructions.

The experiences of these reporters while travelling and living with the soldiers they covered were often remarkable, and they offer the types of nuanced stories that allow for a deeper understanding of the Iraq War, especially from the perspective of the troops that faced such extreme challenges while serving there. These accounts of training and indoctrination, the influence of 9/11, and the ways in which the military planned and executed an invasion based upon these views, are rather telling; they are examples of a plan rife with holes, and one that would provide the conditions for a long and brutal war that continues to this day(perhaps due in part to some of the decisions detailed above).

In the chapter that follows, we will follow along with this fascinating and diverse group of combat reporters -- participant observers, all -- embedded within the largest armed force to see

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<sup>94</sup> See Wright, 215-216; Poole, 96; and Atkinson, 204.

combat since 1991. Their stories offer multiple perspectives on a variety of topics, including life in combat and the conditions the troops faced; the types of death, violence and destruction that they witnessed; and further to the study of war and society, issues pertaining to race, class and gender; like masculinity and the construction of heroes and cowards, racism, and class divisions amongst soldiers and their leaders.

## **6. BATTLEFIELD CONDITIONS**

The multitude of first-hand narratives about the Iraq War by embedded reporters offer a rich source base and paint a panoramic portrait of the conflict. Exploring those sources collectively yields a deeper understanding of the conflict itself. Although the program clearly curtailed what the press could report at the time, and limited the reporters' depth of wartime coverage by dictating its terms, an assessment cannot be limited to reporting during the invasion, but must also include the eye-witness accounts that emerged very soon *after* the fact. Participant observers were then free of official and environmental restrictions and shared much fuller accounts of life in a combat zone.

Reporting during the initial stages of the Iraq War undoubtedly highlighted the limits of the U.S. military's new public affairs doctrine and inevitably influenced debates regarding constraints and restrictions on the flow of information, and the types of topics that emerged.<sup>1</sup> However, the program also produced a valuable resource for understanding what the battle for Iraq was really like -- on the ground -- for the troops, the reporters, and the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. The intrinsic value of the embedding program, therefore, is not limited to what was reported while the program was being implemented and employed; a rich mother lode of information can also be gleaned from the accounts of a plethora of reporters that were attached to a variety of combat units, and accessed an enormous battlefield spread across a wide area for a

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<sup>1</sup> For period news pieces that offer early commentary on the limited value of war-time embedded reporting in Iraq see Howard Kurtz, "Media Weigh Costs, Fruits of 'Embedding'; News Outlets Stretch Budgets for Chance to Witness Iraq War From Front Lines", *Washington Post*, March 11, 2003, where one journalist was quoted as saying "you're completely under the control of the U.S. military. You can't get out. You can't necessarily file in a timely manner."; and Ron Harris and Andrew Cutraro "Up Close, Personal; Imperfect", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 27, 2003. These initial appraisals argued that embedded journalists got a firsthand look at war and developed helpful relationships with the troops, but no single reporter was able to see the big picture (a common refrain in academic criticism as well).

sustained period. Their accounts of combat must be included in the emerging history of the Iraq War, as they shared the perspective of the troops on the ground, and thus provided details from within the sand storms and amongst the chaotic, blood-drenched epoch -- representing the "worm's-eye view."<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses specifically on perspectives of combat experiences pertaining to such issues as environmental conditions on the battlefield; combat stress, including emotional reactions to violence like fear, euphoria, and regret; and the role of camaraderie – critical to addressing the conditions troops faced on the battlefields of the invasion of Iraq in March-April 2003.<sup>3</sup>

These eyewitness accounts allow for a deeper understanding of what being on the ground, in the heat, in the sand, amongst the snakes and scorpions, was really like. In contrast to traditional sources used in conventional military histories -- namely official military records and first-person accounts from veterans, which offer complications to historical analysis related to access, proximity, and objectivity<sup>4</sup> -- embeds filled a void in this case as key observers of those combat operations. Their stories indeed represented the first drafts of history, even though they require further historical analysis involving more rigorous academic methodology. In this vein,

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<sup>2</sup> A very early and related reference to this type of point-of-view reporting can be found in Severeid, Eric. "Worm's-Eye-View. When Bombs Fall, the Victims Are Usually Steadfast but Their Reactions Are Unpredictable ", in *Current History and Forum*, vol. 52, no. 5, 17, 1940. The author recounts his experiences with air attacks during the Battle of Britain, and offers commentary related to the effects that war can have on the individual, and groups. Another example of how the worm's-eye view phenomenon can be explained is within post-war film genre, where "The last of the common post-war cinema themes treated in Britain were the 'worm's eye view' pictures--stories of little people's war, such as forgotten units and the like--such as *Worm's Eye View* (Pc. Byron, 1951), *Those People Next Door* 1952, *Don't Panic Chaps* (Pc. ACT/Hammer, 1959) or *Desert Mice* (Pc. Artna, 1951). This again was a major theme of the post war continental cinema as well as a significant one in the USA which, unlike in Britain, it was treated in the serious rather than in the comedy mode." See Pronay, Nicholas. "The British Post-bellum Cinema: A survey of the films relating to World War II made in Britain between 1945 and 1960." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8.1 (1988): 39-54.

<sup>3</sup> This chapter follows what one historian calls the "experience of war" school, which she correctly advises must not represent the totality of the effort -- which this in fact does not, as the following chapters on death, violence and destruction and race, class and gender attest. See Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), xii.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed commentary regarding the challenges posed by various types of source material used in various military histories, see Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 27-64.

we take the worm's-eye view of the fierce combat that occurred during the invasion of Iraq, where thousands of troops were joined by hundreds of journalists, many of whom have since contributed to oral history collections and written their own battlefield memoirs. Invaluable first-person accounts -- addressing many of the important anecdotes that escaped the immediate news cycle during the war, for multiple reasons -- emerge as we consult these primary sources to present the worm's-eye view of the invasion of Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

### **Life in the Desert**

Embedded reporters were subjected to the same environmental conditions that the soldiers they covered were, and their accounts offer insights into the realities of the modern battlefield -- especially desert warfare. Experiences with scorching hot days and freezing nights; sleeping in the desert or in cramped vehicles; the presence of insects and animals; the effects of sandstorms; the lack of personal hygiene; an acute lack of sleep; and other adverse conditions are prevalent in the accounts of embeds. Upon returning home from Iraq, their memoirs and contributions to collected oral histories built upon the limited insights contained in news reports of the day, and provided the basis for a deeper exploration of these experiences. Such details add significantly to a rich mosaic of Iraq War discourse; specifically, how conditions affected the reporters and soldiers, as well as morale itself, and how they influenced the soldiers to "get the job done." In effect, embedded journalists were stuck with the soldiers, dealing with the same conditions for extended periods of time, and in turn, gained intimate details of the life of a

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<sup>5</sup> The value of battlefield memoirs -- and the limitations with and challenges of using them -- are also discussed by Black, a noted war and society scholar, where he describes the utility of these personal accounts when put in "able hands" and used in "recovering the experience of conflict," especially those memoirs written by journalists, who are "obliged by standards" that mitigate some of the challenges of personal bias that affect other sources. See Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 42-47, 43, 46. John Keegan also points to the value of the battlefield memoir in *The Face of Battle*. See John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1976), pp 32-35. It should also be noted that this line of thought is critical to this entire study and the methodological processes and overall related discourse of "new military history" and war and society is discussed at length in previous chapters. Also see John Keegan's introduction to North's embedded battlefield memoir *The March Up*, ix-xi.

modern soldier in a combat zone. Indeed, Katherine Skiba poignantly remarked that immediately following her arrival in the desert, the comforts of civilian life, including "space and privacy [became] faded memories."<sup>6</sup>

Postwar accounts by embeds capture the unrelenting misery of life in the desert during the Iraq invasion. Most reporters had been made aware in advance of these factors, as the troops had been, and had prepared for them.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the subject is often tackled right away in the opening pages of their accounts of the war. The vast majority of embeds' narratives repeatedly mention the unique emotions that soldiers experienced when forced to live, fight and sometimes die in this desert -- a place far from home, both literally and figuratively. As this reality set in for the embeds -- that they would be stuck in relative discomfort for an unknown duration -- the true nature of the task of covering the invasion of Iraq became a test of will. A great many reporters shared in this experience of being stuck with the troops in the heat and filth of the desert, and if the boot camps and gas masks hadn't convinced them of the intimate relationship they would develop with the troops and the battlefield, the desert war's environment did.<sup>8</sup>

This relationship, in addition to the unknown -- not knowing where they were going, or when the discomfort would end -- offered insights into the mindset of soldiers on the ground, and the toll battlefield conditions took on morale. After all, they were, as one dramatic account

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<sup>6</sup>Skiba, 93.

<sup>7</sup>See Michael Wilson, "You Need Outerwear to Go 'Over There'", *The New York Times*, March 2, 2003, where he reported that "New York reporters, whose idea of roughing it is a bodega beer run in the snow, found themselves downloading, straight-faced, bizarre shopping lists of wildly exotic-sounding gear ('excavation tool,' 'polypropylene bottoms,' 'water purification tablets,' 'laundry detergent'), then hitting the streets with corporate credit cards and setting in motion a minor economic boom." For military personnel's perspective on preparing for the desert, see "Crews ready for sand, Saddam and scorpions", n.a., *Newsquest Regional Press - This is Wiltshire*, February 13, 2003.

<sup>8</sup>For a survey of embeds' accounts of dealing with the influences of environmental conditions on their experiences, see Atkinson, 30-34, 52, 57, 74, 79, 157, 160, 172, 208, 273, 280-282, 301; Ayers, 215, 228, 241, 242, 247, 255, 257, 262, 279; Katovsky (ed.), 26, 28, 30, 35, 45, 49, 51, 65, 77, 128, 135, 153, 144; Koopman 80-83, 111, 129, 132, 133, 198, 254, 271; North, , x, 23, 145, 213, 219; Poole, 29-39; Reuters (ed.), 1-5, 8, 37, 55, 87, 127, 134, 149, 172, 191; Rodgers, 16, 19-20, 72, 76-82, 83; Skiba, 45, 55, 66, 78, 92-94, 102, 152; West, 1, 58, 61, 62, 69, 75, 82, 89, 110-113, 119, 145, 146; and Wright, 1, 4 16, 30, 60, 143, 163, 181-182, 187, 222.

argued, all “stuck in some god-awful... faraway country, on the front lines of an invasion; shivering, lonely and waiting to die.”<sup>9</sup>Skiba put the conditions of the desert battlefield in a less dramatic frame. She found them "primitive, with MREs for meals, showers maybe once every twelve days, and, at the outset, possibly not even tents. And we were reminded to check our boots every morning for scorpions."<sup>10</sup> The ways in which the combat environment affected individuals on the battlefield were important and oft-neglected insights in wartime coverage that memoirists could be much more vivid in their descriptions of because they weren't facing deadline pressures and space restrictions.<sup>11</sup>

### **Cramped Quarters and a Profound Lack of Sleep**

Embedded reporters pointed first and foremost to the lack of sleep that was constant in their battlefield experiences. During the invasion, most soldiers and embeds “hadn't slept for weeks.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, sleep proved a rarity for soldiers and journalists alike in the invasion of Iraq. Walter Rodgers recalled after the war that the lack of sleep sometimes contributed to soldiers ignoring their surroundings, and reacting only to gunfire or orders. In one instance, he witnessed a crowd of "about a thousand scrawny Iraqi men from [a] village curiously staring at us. I don't think any of us had slept, and with dawn came the dull, thudding headache from another

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<sup>9</sup> Ayers, 241

<sup>10</sup>Skiba, 45.

<sup>11</sup> This is the case with many conflicts of the past -- and indeed, related historiography and literature -- where the minutia of the combat experience was retold with the hellish conditions of the battlefield used as a focal point for the combat experience (which we do here for the Iraq War). A prime example is the way in which the Vietnam War was represented in literature in the years following the conflict. For commentary on this topic, see Bercovitch, Sacvan, and Cyrus RK Patell. *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 7, Prose Writing, 1940-1990*. Vol. 7. Cambridge University Press, 1994, especially "War and the Novel: From World War II to Vietnam", 130-133. Trench warfare in WWI is a topic that also examines the conditions that affected troops at war, as found in Ellis, John, *Eye-deep in hell: Trench warfare in World War I*. JHU Press, 1989. Other examples include the frozen nightmare of the Eastern Front in the Second World War. See Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), especially "Life, Hardship and Death at the Front: Physical Hardship", 7, 21-26, 33-35. Also see Bryan Perrett, *Canopy of War: Jungle Warfare, from the Earliest Days of Forest Fighting to the Battlefields of Vietnam* (London, United Kingdom: Patrick Stephens, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Ayers, 228.



uncomfortable night... and while they paid attention to us... [we] were disinterested in them. We were weary and suffering from yet another night without sleep."<sup>13</sup> Bing West, the retired general, Vietnam veteran, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs during the Reagan Administration, who rode along with the Marines, detailed how the high-tempo of operations (that is, intense combat) resulted in an uncomfortable situation, on several levels, in the opening pages of his Iraq War battlefield memoir. "At three in the morning it was freezing, pitch black, and smelly" inside the vehicle he shared with a group of Marines, but the young troops still had to function and fulfill their duties -- like rotating on one hour intervals on perimeter watch for weeks on end. He painted a graphic picture of the cramped quarters, the extreme swings in temperature, and general lack of any normal personal hygiene; factors that only added to the fact that "the troops were [constantly] desperate for sleep."<sup>14</sup>

Evan Wright, the *Rolling Stone* reporter attached to the elite Marine recon, recounted how the troops dealt with the lack of sleep. "Adding to the natural stimulation that everyone feels at starting an invasion," the Marines with whom he was deployed alongside resorted to "eating Nescafe instant coffee crystals straight from foil packets and popping ephedra and other over-the-counter go pills" for the mission they knew would not relent at night, or at any other time of day.<sup>15</sup> Skiba recounted similar experiences with the coping mechanisms the troops used to defy the natural sleep-cycle. "How did they cope? Farrell's much-ridiculed vice was gulping down freeze-dried Taster's Choice coffee and washing it down with water."<sup>16</sup>

Embeds explained in rich detail the challenges of being crammed into military vehicles amongst the troops they covered, as their bodies and equipment were added to the copious

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<sup>13</sup> Rodgers, 72.

<sup>14</sup> West, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Skiba, 153.

amounts of military hardware the troops had to make room for. "Despite the imposing size Humvees appear to have when you see civilian versions on the streets," Wright recalled, "there's barely any room inside." In fact, Wright detailed the misery that sharing such accommodations with several Marines, "bulked up with their helmets, vests, MOPP suits and rubber boots" imposed on him.<sup>17</sup> The appeal of reporting from the front had to compete with the discomfort of being squished into vehicles "designed by some sadist without knees or feet." North agreed -- which was actually quite dangerous to one's health. In fact, North actually resorted to jogging alongside the truck he travelled in order to "prevent a potentially lethal blood clot."<sup>18</sup>

Wright rode in a Humvee that resembled the proverbial *sardine can*, when his account is considered:

[The truck was] crammed with boxes of military food rations, several five-gallon cans of water, extra diesel fuel, more than 300 grenades, a few-thousand rounds of rifle and machine-gun ammunition, special smoke and thermite incendiary grenades, several pounds of C-4 plastic explosives, claymore mines, a bale of concertina wire, cammie nets, a spare tire, extra parts, fluids and filters for the engine, a tool set, bolt cutters, map books, bags of ropes, a fire extinguisher, five rucksacks of personal gear, chemlights, several hundred extra batteries for the portable radios, shovels, a pickax, a sledgehammer, and, suspended by parachute cord from the rear interior roof, an AT-4 antitank missile, which continually [banged] against the back of [his] helmet.<sup>19</sup>

Such tales of cramped quarters shared between embeds and troops are important in more ways than one: first, they reveal the minutiae of combat life and ever-present discomfort that these reporters and troops faced; second, they highlight the unique perspective of a civilian reporter who took on the vantage point of a participant observer in a most practical way; and

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<sup>17</sup> Wright, 51.

<sup>18</sup> North, 219. In fact, at least one reporter died during the invasion due to the cramped conditions. See Howard Kurtz, "Story of a Lifetime; NBC's David Bloom Dies in the Field, Doing the Work He Loved", *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, 51.

third, they shed light on the value of the perspectives provided by post-war accounts such as *Generation Kill*, which offered information that would clearly have violated the "ground rules" all embeds agreed to, especially those related to operational security, considering the details he revealed about weapons and the stores each vehicle carried (and indeed the capabilities -- and weaknesses -- of the vehicles themselves).<sup>20</sup>

Speaking to the variety that embedded reporters' accounts provided, Skiba shared her version of cramped quarters from the perspective of her assignment with the helicopter-riding 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, even though the challenges of sleeping in a helicopter were minimal in relation to a fully-loaded Humvee. Skiba, early on, had the luxury of sleeping in a Boeing CH-47 Chinook, the huge, dual rotor transport helicopters that could carry over forty soldiers fully equipped. She shared that "bird" with five soldiers, and when informed she would share a Sikorsky UH-60 Blackhawk -- a much smaller utility chopper -- with four male soldiers, she quipped, "compared to the Boeing Hilton, the Sikorsky Hotel was tiny."<sup>21</sup> Sleep deprivation also factors prominently into an account by a reporter who wrote a piece reflecting on his embedded experience at the ten-year anniversary of the invasion. A lack of shut-eye only magnified the sensations he experienced while "sitting on a metal seat, hunched forward, lurching back and forth, bouncing, vibrating, jostling over desert landscape riding in the back of a military Humvee."<sup>22</sup> Many other embeds shared their stories of the profound lack of sleep and cramped quarters to which embeds were subjected in the invasion of Iraq while accompanying the troops. Walter Rodgers, of CNN, said

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<sup>20</sup> Wright goes into further detail about the Marine recon version of the HMMVW, the ubiquitous utility vehicle of the US military. He shares intimate details of the limitations these trucks forced on their occupants, as they lacked any armor and were woefully lacking in their ability to survive fire in any combat scenario. Wright likened the situation to "entering a Formula One race in demolition derby cars." See Wright, 50-52.

<sup>21</sup>Skiba 151.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Coronado, "A front-row seat for 'Shock and Awe'", Orange County Register, March 19, 2013.

that it was "the most physically discomfoting ride any of us would ever experience... It was miserable."<sup>23</sup>

### **Hot, Cold, and Hot Again**

Weather also factored prominently into experiences in desert warfare, as the climate in Iraq in March and April changed rapidly from one extreme to another. "Desert weather is variable and can be troublesome for all concerned," read a wartime *National Geographic* article, alluding to the peaks and valleys in wind, temperature, and precipitation inherent in the terrain.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, *National Geographic* had its own embed in Iraq, who "experienced sandstorms, sleeplessness, sniper fire, and a suicide attack with his Marine hosts while documenting their stories" (perhaps speaking to the extent of the program and the sheer volume of media embedded during the invasion).<sup>25</sup>

The heat was terrible during the day, according to Katherine Skiba, and had her "wilting - - dripping in sweat, actually -- and trying to cover ground in the desert wearing a three-pound helmet and twenty-two-pound flak jacket." Skiba remembered her thoughts of how "some of the infantry guys had loads of one hundred pounds or more," and how she had sent the Public Affairs Officer responsible for assigning her to an outfit that used helicopters to carry their gear a personal thank-you.<sup>26</sup> Oliver Poole's experience with the heat -- and the cold -- echoes Skiba's. He recalled how daytime temperatures were almost unbearably high, but "at night it became so cold that some of the men would sleep in woolly hats." He reflected on his own discomfort, and related his personal feeling on the matter by explaining that "the soldiers had been living with

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<sup>23</sup> Rodgers, 16.

<sup>24</sup>*National Geographic EXPLORER* television producer Gary Scurka was embedded with the 1st U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. See Brian Handwerk, "Geography Shapes Nature of War in Iraq", *National Geographic News*, March 27, 2003.

<sup>25</sup>Brian Handwerk, "National Geographic TV Reporter Embedded in Iraq", *National Geographic News*, April 10, 2003.

<sup>26</sup>Skiba, 102, 102.

variations of these conditions on and off for nine months" since first being deployed in advance of the invasion.<sup>27</sup> Other reporters described the night time temperatures as "bitter cold."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, "as the sun goes down, the desert turns suddenly cold," an embedded report during the war explained. "The men's faces have turned green and yellow from a combination of claustrophobia, constant movement and lack of sleep."<sup>29</sup>

### ***Sharqis, Shamals, and Sandpaper Wind***

One environmental factor that made headlines back home was the prevalence of and effects of sandstorms. Even before the operation began on March 19, 2003, a major sandstorm "tore across southern Iraq... blanketing allied troops in the Kuwaiti desert with sand and raising the spectre of a near-blind invasion." Embedded reports advised that visibility was reduced dramatically, and that many soldiers were reported lost during the storms. In fact, the invasion took place at "the height of Iraq's two-month sandstorm season, when strong winds called [*sharqis*] blow in from Saudi Arabia and whip the parched earth into the air, often at speeds exceeding 100 kilometres an hour. For the troops on the ground, the sand penetrated everything and even made breathing difficult." To add to the effect, "temperatures [dropped] considerably lower than the average March temperature of 25C during these storms, which can last as long as two or three days, but are usually comparable in length to thunderstorms"<sup>30</sup>

The troops would deal with this issue throughout the invasion, and embedded reporters have since shared their accounts of this challenging environmental concern, thus substantiating

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<sup>27</sup> Poole, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Atkinson, 157.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Foreman, "Advancing Troops to Get a Piece of Republican Guard", *The New York Post*, March 23, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Breaun, "Sandstorms complicate military tactics: High winds likely to ground paratroops", *National Post*, March 20, 2003. For other period news reports on sandstorms, see Keith Dovkants, "Sandstorms drive invasion force under cover", *The Evening Standard*, March 19, 2003; Michael Evans, "Sandstorms rival heat to threaten military machines", *The Times*, March 15, 2003; and Andy Geller, "Troops Weather Desert Storms", *The New York Post*, March 18, 2003.

embedded reporter Mathew Fisher's wartime description: "Inside our light-armoured vehicle, we felt almost as if we were in a small boat as the heavy gusts of wind shook the 14-tonne LAV. There were six of us crammed inside, along with extra ammunition, personal belongings, military equipment, radios and communications gear. After several hours, the wind subsided, then the sandstorm became a hailstorm, with thunder and lightning, which turned the desert floor into a silky mud almost bogging down the eight-wheel-drive vehicles of the U.S. Marine Corps."<sup>31</sup>

Approximately one week in to "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM," a major sandstorm brewed up by high winds threatened to stall the advance of the coalition. Again, the weather made headlines around the world, and spurred a major debate in the United States over the progress of the invasion.<sup>32</sup> Bing West recounted his experiences with the storm in his post-war battlefield memoir: "The wind made the dust so thick, it was impossible to open one's eyes without goggles. The world consisted of a stinging, howling wind and dust in the ears, mouth and nostrils and around the rim of the goggles. It was like trying to see underwater in a flashflood [sic]." West recounted that the sandstorms were "a perfect time to attack" for the defenders, as "the weather had wiped out their day and night optics, and had helped throw their column of vehicles into disarray," perhaps lending credence to the pessimistic wartime reports.<sup>33</sup> Mirroring West's experiences, Koopman said after the war that "sand and dust and dirt got into every crevice, every weapon, food and water." The troops put up camouflage netting over their

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<sup>31</sup> See Matthew Fisher, "Convoy rides out storm of biblical dimensions: Crossing the desert: Marines' first taste of combat lingers as Baghdad nears", *National Post*, March 26, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Scott Stinson, "Sandstorms stall coalition troops", *National Post*, March 26, 2003. This story is a compilation of reports from embedded media on the massive sandstorms that influenced an "operational pause" in the invasion, which in turn generated much speculation -- and alarm -- within the media discourse at the time. See also Michael R. Gordon, "Slower Pace, Not a Pause", *The New York Times*, March 31, 2003; Barry Cooper, "'Operational pause' in Iraq a smart move", *Calgary Herald*, March 30, 2003; and Michael Seamark "Bush denies battle pause", *Daily Mail*, March 31, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> West, 58.

vehicles, to conceal their positions, but the reporter "couldn't figure how anyone could see them in the swirling sand" anyway. During sandstorms, "it's God-awful. At 50 miles an hour, the wind whips up the fine dust and darkens the sun. The air is orange. Breathing is hard." Indeed, at one point he had "heard someone on the radio call it the 'mother of all sandstorms.' Saddam said it was evidence that God didn't want Americans in Iraq." In a commentary on the extreme conditions and discomfort they caused, he "[began to] believe that was true."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Katherine Skiba dedicated an entire chapter to recounting her experiences with the sandstorms, entitled "Sandblasted." Her accounts of the sandstorms' effects on her -- and the troops with whom she lived -- offer intimate details of what life was like on the front lines of the invasion of Iraq. As one soldier put it, "soldiers eat dirt, wear dirt, and sleep in dirt." Recognizing the young soldier had described a universal condition in wartime Iraq, the reporter took note. "The storm was much too severe for me to commit her slogan to paper, so I vowed to remember it."<sup>35</sup>

### **The Omnipresent Threat: Snakes, Scorpions, and other Desert Critters**

The heat, sand, and weather weren't the only concerns for the troops and embedded reporters deployed to Iraq in March-April 2003. "Besides us, the only living and breathing inhabitants" in the desert, noted Skiba, "seemed to be pesky bees, beetles, flies, and spiders. They were everywhere." Nuisance insects weren't the only critters sharing the desert with the troops, as "there were snakes and scorpions in residence too."<sup>36</sup> Desert conditions and the threat posed by these creatures was nothing new, as Second World War veteran James Wilson wrote to his local newspaper in an Op-Ed just prior to the invasion. His observations, published on March 4, 2003, offered a warning to anyone who would travel and fight in the desert environment of Iraq. "I spent two-and-a-half years as a soldier in Iraq and Iran between 1942 and 1945," Wilson

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<sup>34</sup>Koopman, 111, 134, 137.

<sup>35</sup>Skiba, 78, 70-90. Skiba detailed the effects of sandstorms throughout her account. See 85, 134, 196, 214.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 94.

declared. "On both sides of the Shatt-al-Arab River, which is made up of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, there are channels of stagnant water in which mosquitoes breed. Cerebral spinal meningitis and malaria were quite common when I was there, followed by typhoid, typhus and sand-fly fever." Conditions in the desert were not to be taken lightly he argued, and the insects that were omnipresent were more than a nuisance. "We had swarms of biting insects and flies. I had poisoned hands from mosquitoes, and sand-fly fever -- all this in a summer temperature of 45 Degrees C (120 Degrees F)."<sup>37</sup> Wilson's warnings were prescient. A period report from Iraq verified these fears, as "sand flies [were] active during warm weather, and soon after U.S. troops arrived in Iraq in late March," they "started seeing soldiers basically eaten alive," said the *USA Today* report. "They'd get a hundred, in some cases 1,000, bites in a single night."<sup>38</sup> John Koopman's experience was in line with this; at one point, he stated sand flies were "eating [him] alive."<sup>39</sup>

Embedded accounts speak to the presence of insects, snakes and other dangerous fauna in several ways. Fears of such threats were pervasive before the war. "I'd been informed that Iraq [had] forty-six varieties of poisonous snakes. I'd been cautioned about exotic diseases that I'd never heard of before," Skiba recounted.<sup>40</sup> Mathew Fisher, the *National Post's* embed, summed up how remarkably used to the conditions the troops and scribes became. In fact, they had ranked the various challenges to their comfort in order of effect, and sometimes even convinced themselves that one environmental effect lessened the burden of another: "At least the storm

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<sup>37</sup>James Wilson, "Major Health Risks In Iraq", from Features; General; Letters, *Derby Evening Telegraph*, March 4, 2003.

<sup>38</sup>Anita Manning, "Skin lesions afflict troops in Iraq", *USA Today*, December 5, 2003.

<sup>39</sup>Koopman, 136.

<sup>40</sup>Skiba, 66.



caused the temperature to drop and got rid of the insects that [had] been bothering [them] for days," his report read.<sup>41</sup>

### **A Lack of Privacy, Comfort, and Basic Hygiene**

In addition to various desert species, soldiers and embeds also had to adjust to the local fine, dust-like sand, which "[seeped] into [the troops'] tents, their weapons, their eyes. But even that irritant [became] routine after weeks in the desert," according to one wartime report. Indeed after days, weeks, and even months in the desert, "every trooper [seemed] to have his own trick for taking what they [called] a bath. Some [tucked] two bottles of drinking water into their sleeping bags at night, hoping they [would] be warm enough by morning to wash the bare essentials. Some [warmed] the bottles on the engines of their Bradley armored vehicles. Most, however, just [used] baby wipes."<sup>42</sup> John Koopman, in his post-war account, spoke to this lack of personal hygiene, and detailed the ways in which the Marines he joined in battle attempted personal hygiene in the desert environment. Nobody "had a shower for a couple weeks. Fingernails [were] cracked and caked with dirt. The only relief [was] the occasional baby wipe bath."<sup>43</sup> North, the former Marine colonel, called it "the road trip from hell." He credited the filthy state of himself and the troops to the combination of heat and sand; "It [was] one hundred degrees Fahrenheit in the shade and -- you guessed it -- there [was] no shade." He continued with his reflection on the desert war: "Grit [coated] everything and it [caked] on our clothing where the sweat [soaked] through."<sup>44</sup> The refrain was common. "The temperature was rising and already sapping strength," Reuters correspondent Sean Maguire explained after the war. "There was

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<sup>41</sup>Matthew Fisher, "Convoy rides out storm of biblical dimensions: Crossing the desert: Marines' first taste of combat lingers as Baghdad nears", *National Post*, March 26, 2003.

<sup>42</sup>Juan O. Tamayo, "Soldiers in training adapt to isolated life at base in Kuwait", *San Jose Mercury News*, February 4, 2003.

<sup>43</sup>Koopman, 129.

<sup>44</sup>North, 213. North also recalled his first shower since the invasion began, on April 17: "It was the first real cleansing either of us had in twenty-nine days and it may well be the best shower I've ever taken", 214.

neither water nor time for showers or laundry," and "the few clothes [he] possessed were stiff with sweat and smelled like a biology experiment." As one soldier put it, embeds had to suffer like the troops: "In the military you have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable," he was told.<sup>45</sup>

The ceaselessly harsh environment drove one embed to lament that he felt like he had "lived like an animal" in Iraq, a description applicable to soldier and journalist alike.<sup>46</sup> The mutual experiences offered up in these accounts offered a window into the nature of the war in the desert, and highlighted how embeds were forced to integrate into military life, where they shared the most intimate experiences and feelings with the young men and women they covered, who at first were complete strangers, and later, in most cases, became close confidants. The reporters, by necessity, became used to the combat lifestyle in the desert environment, and the type of physical -- and emotional -- punishment that went with it. Some embeds had recognized these facts, and found themselves missing the comforts of civilian society. "After a week spent in a Humvee with three Marines, I was desperate to talk to a civilian," Ayers said after the war.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the embeds had been "eating the same meals, breathing the same dust, sharing [the same] fears, frustrations and euphoria" as the troops they covered, which in turn produced the types of "worm's eye-view" perspectives that only an insider could later share.<sup>48</sup>

### **Camaraderie**

Living together under such trying conditions influenced a spirit of camaraderie amongst embeds and troops in a variety of ways. Reporters naturally became part of the group they joined in battle. In many instances, strong bonds formed between these chroniclers of the war and their

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<sup>45</sup>Reuters, 149.

<sup>46</sup>Ayers

<sup>47</sup>Ayers, 242, 247.

<sup>48</sup>North, x.

subjects. The effect this equation had on objectivity is impossible to quantify -- and is not the primary aim of this study centred upon shared experiences on the battlefield -- although many individual stories of camaraderie and a general bias towards an individual's unit clearly existed.<sup>49</sup> The process in which embedded reporters became part of the group with whom they lived and reported on is explained in numerous post-war embedded accounts.

Chris Ayers, in his battlefield memoir *War Reporting for Cowards*, detailed how his initial integration into his assigned Marine unit was influenced at first by long-standing stereotypes, including the widely held notion that "the only reporters [the Marines] had ever seen, after all, were in the movies; and most of them were scumbags." This stereotype, and the basic mistrust of outsiders he detailed -- especially a continuation of a deep-seated scepticism toward the news media still lingering from the Vietnam era -- influenced how the young troops with whom he had been embedded regarded him. In effect, the young combat soldiers he covered initially didn't trust him with the intimate details of their lives in battle. "Likewise, the only Marines we'd ever seen were also in the movies; and they were mostly scumbags, too," he explained.<sup>50</sup> His observations underscored the enduring adversarial relationship amongst the

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<sup>49</sup> A 2005 academic study polled over 100 formerly-embedded journalists, and included questions related to objectivity. It was found that, although a clear bond developed between soldiers and embeds, the majority of embeds found that their obligation as journalists outweighed their natural biases in their wartime reporting. See Fahmy, Shahira, and Thomas J. Johnson. "'How we performed': Embedded journalists' attitudes and perceptions towards covering the Iraq War." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82.2 (2005): 301-317. For further academic commentary on bias, objectivity, and the role that proximity played in embeds' reports, see Aday, Sean, Steven Livingston, and Maeve Hebert. "Embedding the truth: A cross-cultural analysis of objectivity and television coverage of the Iraq War." *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10.1 (2005): 3-21; and Lewis, Justin Matthew Wren, et al. "Too close for comfort? The role of embedded reporting in the 2003 Iraq War: summary report." (2004). For period news reports on the topic, see Zoe Heller, "'Embedded' reporters are far too close to the action", *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), April 1, 2003; and Ken Dilanian, "Seeking the inside story in an Iraq war: Unprecedented access for reporters may lead to bias, or to more truth and less anti-U.S. sentiment", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 2003.

<sup>50</sup>Ayers, 201.

military and the media, where journalists were commonly seen as un-trustworthy and dishonest by the troops, and vice-versa.<sup>51</sup>

This atmosphere of mistrust was not at all unique to Ayers' experience. Even though this atmosphere of mistrust -- or standoffishness, in many cases -- was pervasive in the early days of the relationships between reporters and soldiers during the invasion, several embeds have recounted a deep sense of camaraderie forged in the fires of battle.<sup>52</sup> If the initial realities of the media-military group dynamic were tense, the relationships forged in combat changed this drastically. In fact, reporters had to prove themselves worthy of trust and confidence, and once they had, they gained access to the people, places and events so critical to this study of the worm's-eye view of the invasion of Iraq. Their embedded experiences provided intimate observations of a secret society -- one that was off-limits to those who hadn't carried the same load, per se. Koopman shared an apt description of this phenomenon, when recounting his early attempts to prove himself to the troops in the unit he was assigned to, therefore gaining their trust and the access he so desired as a reporter. He detailed his struggles with keeping up while carrying much less gear than the troops he followed, and he explained his desire to quit, and simply walk away, but he forced himself to carry on, as he "[didn't] want the Marines to see [him] like that." In fact, he recounted how some of his most revealing conversations with the

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<sup>51</sup>As discussed in detail in previous chapters, the Vietnam War was a critical turning point in the media-military relationship. For commentary on the enduring distrust of the media by the military, see Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations: The US Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2008), 69, 78, 81, 178. Also, for the media point of view, see Atkinson, 41; and Rodgers 21-22.

<sup>52</sup> Three important accounts detailing the bonds shaped by common struggles amongst troops and reporters can be found by consulting Reuters (ed.) 7, 37-48; and Wright, 17, 24, 26, 55, 98, 99, 158, 272, 300. Wright, especially, details how his relationship with the Marines he covered changed drastically due to the fact that he was eventually considered just another part of the group

troops took place as they shared the pain and toil of the desert deployment, many times while "huffing and puffing" alongside one another.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, a prime example of just how close embeds were able to get to the culture of combat was offered by Reuters correspondent Andrew Gray, in his reflection entitled "Too Close for Comfort?" Gray explained the value in fitting in with the troops, and how that was achieved only through sharing a common reality fraught with danger and harsh conditions. He spoke of how he was privy to a "unique scrutiny" that only existed because "several soldiers had come to know [him] well enough to trust [him] with the details." This aspect was critical to several stories that Gray reported on, and he detailed how the embedding program -- though far from perfect -- was a valuable program that allowed reporters to see the minutia of combat, and to tell the stories that "could otherwise be covered up," as it "opened up the front lines on an unprecedented scale." Indeed, the troops sometimes even mistook his intentions, as they considered Gray "one of [them]." In his estimation, "that was [a] problem. We weren't one of them. We were journalists along to report on what they did. But if we shunned offers of friendship and help, we risked being seen as aloof and untrustworthy."<sup>54</sup>

The troops themselves readily acknowledged the fact that they were ordered by their commanders to accept the reporters into the group. A captain, for example, explained that he had "been told to look after" the embedded reporter in his unit, "without trying to hide his disappointment."<sup>55</sup> In effect, embeds were under the protection of the troops they covered, and if they were to survive the war, they'd have to listen and defer to the experienced soldiers, and join

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<sup>53</sup>Koopman, 101, 101-102. In fact, Koopman became close to several members of the unit, which he credits for gaining access to a wide range of topics including command decisions, combat operations, and the day-to-day life of "grunts." They eventually gave him the nickname "paperboy." See 141.

<sup>54</sup>Andrew Gray, "Too Close for Comfort?" in Reuters, Stephen Jukes, and Peter Millership, *Under Fire: Untold Stories from the Front Line of the Iraq War* (Harlow, United Kingdom: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2004), 48, 47, 46-48.

<sup>55</sup>Ayers, 207.

their group. Relying on each other for survival cemented bonds. In fact, one embed worried that he "could become too close to the men who were, after all, protecting us, transporting us, feeding us and living with us for weeks on end through highly stressful times." He wondered, during the war, "would we end up being too soft on them?"<sup>56</sup>

Embeds typically adapted to combat culture, and indeed, were influenced by the gruff troops and conditions they shared. After a few days in the field, Ayers began to notice changes in his otherwise-calm demeanour – he was, as he explained, a proper, educated Englishman before he entered the war zone. "The Marines, it seemed, had already changed me: I wanted to rip someone's head off."<sup>57</sup> The feelings grew even more intense when the shooting started, as Ayers conversed with Marines who had annihilated an Iraqi unit. "Buck, Hustler and Murphy laughed. I wanted to vomit. But, to be honest, I was glad the Iraqis were dead. It meant they couldn't kill me."<sup>58</sup> The age-old soldier's justification for killing -- "better him than me" -- had clearly changed this journalist's perception of life and death, via the experience of battle that combat veterans know all-too-well. Eye-witness accounts of war highlighted how combat experiences changed some embeds' very moral fibre, and led them to accept a world of death and carnage only found in armed conflict:

*'Shoot him, said a voice in my head. Just shoot him. I felt disgusted with myself. The Iraqi was probably terrified; we'd probably just turned his family into 'arms and legs and pink mist', as the faceless infantry commander had boasted. What I should have been thinking was, Interview him; get out and interview him. But I was more interested in staying alive than staying objective. The trouble was, I felt like a Marine. I was about as neutral as Murphy's trigger-finger.*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gray, in Reuters (ed.), 46.

<sup>57</sup>Ayers, 211.

<sup>58</sup>Ayers, 221.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 226.

Ayers had succumbed to the emotions that soldiers faced on a daily basis in the Iraq invasion -- influenced by life-and-death decisions, split-second reactions, and life-altering confrontations -- that rarely saw the light of day. The intrinsic value of the embedding program -- viewed from this limited socio-cultural perspective -- shines through, as stories like these seldom found their way into the news reports that made it through the official ground rules.<sup>60</sup>

The issues of group dynamics dealt with above re-appeared, in many forms, in the plethora of postwar memoirs and oral histories published soon after the invasion. Once the soldiers and reporters faced this common reality fraught with harsh conditions and danger, they tended to share a common experience, no matter the assignment for the reporter. There is an "acknowledgment of the transformations that take place in combat," Wright explained. Individuals "[weren't] really the same people anymore once they [entered] the battlefield."<sup>61</sup>This is often referred to as the "band of brothers"<sup>62</sup> phenomenon, an issue exemplified repeatedly in the embedded press accounts that appeared post-deployment.<sup>63</sup> Rick Atkinson, who covered the war from the commanders' perspective, for instance, offered a unique point of view, which was singularly enlightening. His experiences with group dynamics, combat culture, and especially with camaraderie were profound, considering his interactions were with the top brass, and especially General Petraeus and other commanders of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, where his accounts provided blow-by-blow narration of battles from within the Tactical Operations Center of the division commander; a type of *bird's-eye view* of the battlefield. This unique perspective

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<sup>60</sup> For a survey of embeds' views on objectivity and how it was affected by the embedding program, see Atkinson, 109; Ayers 181; Koopman, 65, 221-223; North, 74; Rueters (ed.) 46; Rodgers xii, 15, 66, 79; and Skiba, xiii, 103, 154, 199.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, 300.

<sup>62</sup> See Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience with World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially Chapter 7, "Appeals of Battle: Comradeship" 263-299, and 264, 273. Also see Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25, 56, 77-79, 88.

<sup>63</sup> For a few pertinent examples of this Atkinson, 24; Skiba, 112, 154; and Wright, 24-26, 55, 98-99.

allowed for an inside look into the culture of command, where life-and-death decisions were made by the highest authority.<sup>64</sup>

As camaraderie was a direct product of combat action, shared experiences with sometimes brutal, violent battlefield scenarios influenced a kinship between reporters and the soldiers with whom they experienced such horrors. Many journalists espoused a great deal of admiration for the troops that protected them -- while making tremendous sacrifices, which was one factor that indeed separated the reporters from the combatants -- and a sizable number conveyed feelings of pride in belonging to the group that eventually accepted them as one of their own. Of course, issues of objectivity do come into play, especially when utilizing these sources for purposes other than studying the combat experience. If this study's goals were to evaluate the embedding program in terms of its effectiveness in bringing timely and accurate news reports to the public, we may draw very different conclusions from these sources.

However, when one attempts to paint a picture of modern warfare, especially focusing on combat from the worm's-eye view during the Iraq invasion, these sources are indispensable, and the loss of journalistic objectivity is offset by their inherent value as insider accounts of intimate detail.

"Fifteen Marines and two reporters crammed into a tin can on tracks," one reporter described the dynamic. "Over the weeks that the group travelled together, it evolved into a mutually supportive micro-community that sublimated differences in rank, nationality and ideology... We drove [together] through night and day." If a group of "reporters and troops, two very different breeds, could tolerate each other through that," the journalist reflected, "I realized we could survive all the way to Baghdad."<sup>65</sup>

### **Combat Stress, Fear and Anxiety**

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<sup>64</sup>See Atkinson, 210-214, 213. This topic, especially the class structures inherent in the military chain of command and the societal structures dictated by it are discussed further in later chapters.

<sup>65</sup> Maguire, in Reuters, 142.



Survival was the first and foremost mission for all involved, and the dynamic of trying to survive together is one that shapes the unit mentality and influences the band-of-brothers group dynamic.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the embedded reporters became participant-observers due to their proximity to the troops they accompanied. In effect, they were not just reporters -- or casual observers for that matter -- due to the very fact that they were riding alongside the troops that were targeted by the enemy. This dynamic supported their role as witnesses, and providers of intimate detail from within military units at war.<sup>67</sup> Many of the types of intimate details found in their accounts would not suit short or long-form journalistic pieces -- or TV news reports for that matter. For example, emotional reactions to combat like fear, anxiety, and combat stress, were shared experiences that these reporters had with the troops, and their memoirs offer the perspective of the soldiers they covered -- and the emotions they shared -- in addition to their own. These types of shared experiences are not new, as Linderman's *The World Within War* and Bourke's *An Intimate History of Killing*<sup>68</sup> have demonstrated; however, the types of accounts studied here allow us to paint a clearer picture concerning the realities of the modern battlefield than the wartime coverage could have hoped to, especially concerning the effects that witnessing violent episodes had on soldiers and the embedded journalists travelling alongside them.<sup>69</sup>

"Will I be afraid? Yes. Fear affects everyone in combat," wrote Chris Hedges, the veteran war reporter, recalling his firsthand experiences with combat. "You may fear dying. You

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<sup>66</sup>King, 25; Linderman 271.

<sup>67</sup> The value of the participant observer study must be weighed against the challenges of using this methodology. See Labaree, Robert V. "The risk of 'going observationalist': negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer." *Qualitative Research* 2.1 (2002): 97-122: "A common assumption made about participant observation is that being an insider offers a distinct advantage in terms of accessing and understanding the culture. However, these advantages are not absolute and the insider must be aware of ethical and methodological dilemmas associated with entering the field, positioning and disclosure, shared relationships and disengagement."

<sup>68</sup>Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> For examples of accounts regarding the emotional toll of combat experienced in the Iraq invasion, see Koopman, 132; Reuters eds., 65-66, 38-39; and West, 10, 44, 178, 181, 123-124.

may fear being afraid in front of your comrades. You may fear unknown weapons. You may fear causing grief to your family if you die," a passage in *What Every Person Should Know About War* goes.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, most embeds found the experience of combat terrifying. One pertinent example of an embedded reporter who shared his most intimate fears and anxieties in his post-war memoir was Chris Ayers. Coincidentally, his narrative followed Hedges's warnings to a tee. He first questioned the value of the embedding program -- to him, personally -- when he was informed that during combat operations, he would not be allowed to communicate with anyone outside the Marine unit he was attached to, including his editors. "The embedding system suddenly seemed very flawed" he explains. "I would be joining the front lines with no gun, no training and no means to send stories. It was as though I were tagging along just for the opportunity to get shot -- or worse."<sup>71</sup>

The anxiety and fear that soldiers felt in battle were shared by embedded reporters, who had time after leaving the combat zones to reflect on these complex experiences in their postwar accounts. "I worried about the northern front, or the lack of it. I worried about being captured. I wondered what it would feel like to be blown up, or beheaded," Ayers recounted.<sup>72</sup> The trepidation present in his account offers insight into the realities that face soldiers in combat zones, and also highlights just how intimate an experience embedding was. The fear of the unknown was palpable in combat situations, and Ayers relayed his feelings of dread on one night in particular. "The nights were turning out to be a lot worse than the days. I kept wondering what was lurking behind the berm to our right," he described. He pointed to the vehicle's communications radio as a source for information, and a source that influenced a fear of the

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<sup>70</sup>See Chris Hedges, *What Every Person Should Know about War* (New York: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 2003), 76. He also addresses isolation, anxiety, depression and other emotions in his work.

<sup>71</sup>Ayers, 204. This example also speaks to the value of post-war accounts which were free of limitations imposed by the situation at the time, in Iraq.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 216.

unknown. "Reports over the Humvee's radio were getting more horrifying as the night progressed." The chance he could die became very real to him, as did the emotional reactions that the battlefield experience instilled. "These hellish dispatches were all delivered by the same disembodied bass monotone – like a voice from the underworld, coming out of the darkness."<sup>73</sup>

Embeds routinely faced a myriad of uncertainties in this conflict, as danger hid around each bend, and, like the troops they covered, the dawn of a new day never guaranteed an end to the fear and anxiety they endured during their time in the combat environment. Fear of the unknown may seem like enough to drive a reporter to reconsider his or her decision to embark on such a dangerous journey, never mind the young soldiers given no choice but to fight. Yet that fear paled in comparison to the experience of actual combat and its aftermath.<sup>74</sup> Ayers recounted a major engagement that he observed from within the Marine lines, during a thunderstorm. American casualties had been reported, and a chemical attack alert had sounded “forcing us to clamp gas masks to our mud-drenched faces.” He relayed the feelings that prevailed as reports on the radio informed the troops that they had made “‘contact’”. This time the attack was serious. “The dark shapes moving towards us weren't customized pickup trucks: they were Republican Guard tanks. A dozen of them had been spotted by an artillery unit to the south, which had fired a few rounds of white phosphorus above our heads, so the forward observers could see what was ahead.” With an armoured attack imminent against the thin-skinned vehicles in Ayers’ unit, the fear of death gave off an ominous vibe. “The shapes were grunting south with only one purpose: to kill.” He wished that the Marines knew what they were doing, as he knew firsthand the results of this ferocious combat -- the grotesque, bloody results of which he had witnessed firsthand

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<sup>73</sup>Ayers, 239-240.

<sup>74</sup> See Linderman, 13-19.

earlier in the day when he saw the mutilated corpses of Iraqi soldiers. Just as news of air support had come over the radio, bad news greeted the elated Marines with Ayers by their side: “It would take them thirty 'mikes' to get there. There was no doubt about it: we were dead.” With the very real possibility, or indeed, the perceived *likelihood* of violent death only moments away, Ayers thought about home, his family, and the types of things that soldiers facing death have recounted for millennia: “So what do you do when you think you have less than thirty minutes to live?” he asked himself. “Perhaps I'd make a few phone calls: thank-yous, goodbyes, good-riddances -- that kind of thing,” he thought. But then it dawned on him, as it must have for others faced with dying in a far-off land, in the middle of the night, distant from loved ones. He wasn't involved in some horrible auto accident, or wasn't succumbing to some terrible disease; he was “with three Marines in the back of a Humvee, in a mudstorm so thick" he could barely his hand in front of his face."I couldn't use my phone. Death, it seemed, was not going to happen on my terms.”<sup>75</sup>

As Ayers considered the things he wished he could say to his parents and his girlfriend, and the consequences his death would have on his grandparents – just as Hedges warned -- Murphy, one of the Marines with whom he travelled, began his own lament about missing his father. “We ain't seen each other in a while,” he said.<sup>76</sup> The soldiers were thinking the same types of things as the reporter amongst them, verifying that the human response to fear and anxiety in combat scenarios is powerful enough to bridge the gap between a soldier and a civilian when they are faced with the same experiences in battle.

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<sup>75</sup>Ayers, 251-252. Also see Linderman, 13-19, as Ayers' accounts line up with that study's findings on the ways in which individuals cope with combat stress, and sometimes reconcile their impending deaths with an acceptance of their fate (a fatalistic symptom of combat stress according to that study, that Ayers confirms).

<sup>76</sup>Ayers, 253.

The aftermath of battle had its own effects, especially following the age-old *baptism of fire*. "Immediately, after the battle, there was a brief sense of euphoria among them" noted one wartime account of post-battle emotion amongst the troops. "They were pleased to have passed an infantryman's first test, which is to see whether he panics under fire." Even though "the anecdotal evidence" suggested these soldiers had indeed passed this first test, what followed for some was "the trauma of reliving the fight. For several, it [produced] graphic memories." The adrenaline that kicked in during battle soon faded, and one particular young soldier -- only 18-years-old by this embed's account -- "ran over an Iraqi during the fighting," and was deeply affected by the action in the following hours and days. Indeed, the act of killing and the very essence of combat influenced various emotional reactions as the troops "said they were shocked when they saw the damage their weapons inflicted on the Iraqi soldiers."<sup>77</sup> Importantly, these are again the same types of anecdotes found in other studies of combat experiences.<sup>78</sup>

The emotional toll that combat took on soldiers has been studied in-depth. These studies offer a baseline for comparison to the experiences embedded reporters shared from their view of the Iraq invasion.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, pioneering war and society narratives, like those introduced in earlier chapters -- and cited here -- deal with many of the issues that this study contributes to the field, from a new perspective; namely, the emotional, physical, and mental effects of violent combat action on individuals. These types of ground-up studies, especially Joanna Bourke's *An Intimate History of Killing*, capture much of the essence of battle and serve as examples for this kind of inquiry, even though this work strives to paint a mosaic of the battlefield that also includes the

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<sup>77</sup>Matthew Fisher, "Convoy rides out storm of biblical dimensions: Crossing the desert: Marines' first taste of combat lingers as Baghdad nears", *National Post*, March 26, 2003.

<sup>78</sup>Linderman, 3-21, 26

<sup>79</sup> See the classic studies by Grinker, Roy R., and John Spiegel. "Men Under Stress." *AJN The American Journal of Nursing* 45.10 (1945); and Lazarus, Richard S. "Psychological stress and the coping process." (1966); and a more recent study, Solomon, Zahava. *Combat stress reaction: The enduring toll of war*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2013.

experiential history toward which Bourke was so critical.<sup>80</sup> Although the source material used in those works and the original source base utilized here differs, one constant remains; the effects of battle are harsh and unforgiving, and the lessons that the emotional reaction to violence in combat are important to understand if we are to bring the warrior experience to the critical intersection of war and society (or, ergo, the battlefield experience to the history of specific conflicts).

The experiential piece forwarded in this chapter indeed confirms that fear is the great unifier in terms of its place amongst belligerents and observers of combat alike. Indeed, the accounts of embedded reports served to verify this constant, and the battlefields of Iraq offered multiple examples of its continued place in the combat environment.<sup>81</sup> Koopman recounted one intense battle where the unit he was with came under intense and accurate fire. His description of the battle offered insight into the various ways in which the soldiers he covered dealt with fear. "For the first time in the war, I [thought] I might die," he confessed. The soldiers in his vehicle felt the same way. "Norcross' hands were shaking" as he drove wildly, scraping against an armoured vehicle in the same column. They drove behind a tank, where they sat and hid. The soldiers on top of the armoured vehicle they were hiding behind influenced an internal discussion in the reporter's head; *not all troops dealt with combat the same way*. "I [looked] up and saw two Marines sitting atop the Amtrack," a type of armoured vehicle. They were "calmly firing their M-16s into the buildings. Like a couple of duck hunters, they [seemed] neither afraid, nor desirous for cover." It seemed these Marines had "a serene, internal calm. The violence, the threat of

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<sup>80</sup>Bourke criticizes past histories for ignoring the effects of killing while focusing upon the combat experiences with environmental conditions and camaraderie, for example. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), xiv.

<sup>81</sup> For other examples of post-war embedded reporters' accounts of the role fear played in battle, see Koopman 132, 164, 180-182, 187; Reuters, 5, 38-39, 65; Skiba, 66; and Wright, 97, 100, 152-153, 284, 294, 253.

death all around them, [seemed] to mean nothing." Koopman had other feelings. "I [felt] completely exposed," and he asked himself, "What the hell am I doing here?"<sup>82</sup>

Battlefield emotion, according to Wright, is "the excitement, the fear, the feelings of power and the erotic-tinged thrill that come from confronting the extreme physical and emotional challenges posed by death, which is, of course, what war is all about."<sup>83</sup> Mathew Green, the Reuters correspondent, confirms this phenomenon. "I feel a lightness, in my stomach, a giddiness as if I've just swerved my car to avoid an oncoming vehicle. Time seems to move in slow motion, reality wobbles... I run for cover behind what looks like the safest bet -- a pair of military ambulances -- big red crosses emblazoned on their tan sides. At least I'll be first in the line if I get hit."<sup>84</sup> His personal and intimate account of a pitched battle conveyed the emotional reactions that soldiers and reporters shared; and it highlighted some of the contrasts between the observer and the belligerent. The soldiers were mostly all scared, just like he was, he explained, But "gripping [a] weapon obviously [made them] feel better." Although they acted "nonchalant," they looked worried. "[We were] all scared, but in some ways it's a lot easier to be reporter in a situation like [that] than one of the troops -- all you have to do is hide." The baptism of fire provided an adrenaline rush for the troops, but "flickers of bravado [eroded] their fear."<sup>85</sup> Oliver North, the former Marine Colonel and Fox News embed's firsthand account of emotion on the Iraq battlefield also offered evidence of how two factors could play into the fear a soldier felt. "I'm not ashamed to say that [I was] afraid," he admits. In one passage that offered a link to the

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<sup>82</sup>Koopman, 180, 181, 180-182. Koopman describes the emotion of battle and relays its paralyzing effect; one that numbs the body and takes over. See 184-186. It is important to note here that, even though he reflects a solitary battle, his narrative based on two different sets of troops – one beset by fear that actually ran and hid, and one that seemed unafraid and heroic – offers a contrast that is important to understanding which story angle would make the headlines during the war, and which would be lost to history had Koopman not (later) published his memoir. These issues of heroism and cowardice are detailed further in subsequent chapters.

<sup>83</sup> Wright, 2.

<sup>84</sup>Reuters 61

<sup>85</sup> Reuters, 62, 63, 64.

experiential and emotional perspective on combat experiences that Bourke deemed critical, North explains how all of these factors combine: "None of us [could] see even ten feet in front of us," during one particularly violent sand storm. The very sound of the storm, added to the fear of sudden death at the hands of enemy fire, he said, was simply "unnerving," clearly a diluted sentiment and grand understatement.<sup>86</sup>

Soldiers coped with fear in many ways, and their reactions to combat, according to Wright, also influenced bizarre, physical reactions in some cases. One soldier in particular seemed "neither giddy, as [were] some of the others," after one intense firefight. "Nor [did he seem] terrified. But he [looked] a lot older, suddenly." Wright relayed that the feeling of giddiness was a type of euphoric emotion that often emerged as the tide of battle turned in the Marines' favour – for both embedded reporters and the troops. "I [felt] relief every time I [saw] another round burning through the sky. Each one, I [imagined], [upped] the odds of surviving," he recalled.<sup>87</sup> The stress of perceived imminent death sometimes influences bizarre reactions, such as "one of the combat-stress reactions not discussed" much, according to Wright: singing. "A lot of Marines," according to the scribe, "when waiting for minutes or hours in a position where they expect an ambush or other trouble, [got] a song stuck in their heads. Often they [would] singit or chant the words almost as if... saying Hail Marys."<sup>88</sup>

It is clear that embedded reporters experienced many of the same things the troops had, even if they were new to the culture of combat. They had gone through the same types of training and indoctrination back home; they had been influenced by the 9/11 attacks and the construction of the enemy; and they had encountered the hardships of battlefield conditions while dealing with the emotional tolls of the combat environment. "The Pentagon told us we

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<sup>86</sup> North, 96, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Wright 98, 113.

<sup>88</sup>Wright 153



would be given no special treatment, and it was true to its word," one embed wrote. "We ate, slept, and worked with the troops, dug our own sleeping holes in the dirt, fetched our own food and shared the dangers of war."<sup>89</sup> Those experiences would include the bloody realities of the violent actions they had witnessed, and their experiences with death, violence and destruction that followed those combat actions -- the topics for the following chapter -- would leave an indelible mark on them.

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<sup>89</sup> Reuters, 141.

## **7. DEATH, VIOLENCE & DESTRUCTION**

Violence on a massive scale, witnessed by scores of journalists attached to fighting units, left a profound mark on the embedded reporters. Reflections on the death, bloodshed and destruction that took place during the invasion provide a multitude of intimate details that or could not be included in the daily – and sometimes hourly or immediate – wartime coverage. The detailed and nuanced accounts in the post-deployment accounts of embedded media members are a first-hand view of the toll the fighting took on soldiers and civilians alike. These sources are used here to supplement the limited -- and overtly generalized -- wartime coverage.<sup>1</sup>

During the war, there was very little reported on friendly casualties, as the significant restrictions placed on reports of coalition casualties were key to the ground rules. The social and cultural effects of these casualties were profound, especially on the survivors of the violent incidents that resulted in so many of these incidents. The causes of such casualties, the reactions of soldiers who witnessed their comrades being injured or killed, and circumstances and conditions that produced an environment where such tragedies occurred on a regular basis, will be explored here.

America's enemies in the Iraq War, likewise, suffered serious and sustained casualties at the hands of the invading armies. Surreal and often grotesque scenes of the effects of allied firepower remained a constant for embeds, as defenders were repeatedly found strewn across the battlefield in the aftermath of assaults and in some cases their violent deaths were witnessed by

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<sup>1</sup>Wartime coverage was immediately criticized during the early days of the invasion, as limits on what was reported were obvious to some. See Charlie McCollum, "TV news offers dazzling shots, little insight into big picture", *San Jose Mercury News*, March 23, 2003; Alessandra Stanley, "Show of Awe: A Thrill Ride, But No Blood", *The New York Times*, March 23, 2003; Cesar G. Soriano and Peter Johnson, "In their own words Conflict constantly tests media boundaries", *USA TODAY*, March 24, 2003.

reporters and soldiers. The impact of these events on soldiers doing the killing, and journalists reporting on it, warrants deeper examination. So, too, does the contrast between actual battlefield experiences and the conditioning that military personnel and reporters underwent before going to war. These are essential components to understanding the war, particularly in its invasion phase of early 2003. Only by comprehending the collective frontline actions of soldiers and journalists can the war's successes and failures be fully assessed.

Violence shaped the civilian population in a multitude of ways, and the war's enormous civilian death toll -- the "collateral damage," as the high command termed it -- had profound effects on both the troops and the reporters in their midst. Another humanitarian consideration and major aspect of the war's impact on the civilian population was the destruction of villages, towns, and cities in Southern Iraq, where the allied armies fought fierce battles for control of the urban areas and countryside where the Iraqi people lived and worked. The toll that fighting took on civilian lives, both directly and indirectly, and the profoundly disruptive effects of the invasion on their homes and communities -- in cities, towns and villages swept through by Coalition forces -- is a final crucial element to the story of the Iraq War's human costs, as seen through the eyes of those writing the first historical accounts of it.

Here, an examination of first-hand accounts of the death, violence and destruction that defined the struggle for Iraq in the invasion phase of March-April 2003 emerges with greater clarity. The postwar, eye-witness perspective of embedded reporters offers contrasts to -- and supplements of -- wartime reporting. Individual battlefield occurrences -- the so-called "worm's-eye view" of the widespread carnage -- often escaped wartime reports, as a result of restrictions inherent in the military's ground rules. Yet, with the passage of time, these accounts have been

made available through war memoirs and personal reflections found in oral history collections, and greatly enhance our understanding of the varied meanings of the Iraq War.

## **Friendly Casualties**

A wartime report from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* noted that, “despite 21st-century high-tech weaponry and 'Star Wars' telecommunications, despite elaborate command centers in Qatar, Tampa and Washington, ordinary troops on the ground would still be risking their lives.”<sup>2</sup> This war, like others before it, would not be a bloodless video game, as the mythology surrounding the 1991 Gulf War had most Americans believing. The experiences of reporters and soldiers with the deaths of and injuries to their friends and comrades were profound. The reaction to “friendly casualties” (instances of American or allied soldiers being killed or wounded) varies; sometimes soldiers expressed grief, other times they expressed anger, anxiety and fear. Some troops seemed indifferent, perhaps exposing a type of coping mechanism where a focus on the mission at hand became their way of accepting the bloody realities of combat. One thing is certain: the post-war accounts of embeds offer multiple examples of how friendly casualties happened, how they were dealt with, and the varied reactions of soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

The construction of the enemy that proved a vital component of pre-war training, and the conditions of the desert battlefield, also influenced the ways in which soldiers would prepare for

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<sup>2</sup> Cameron McWhirter, "SPECIAL REPORT: The Road to Baghdad", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 13, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The post war accounts captured in embeds' memoirs and in collected oral histories offer unique perspectives on the combat experience from the invasion of Iraq. Some offer detailed and intimate narratives on the pitched battles that led to friendly casualties, while other focus on the human cost and emotion involved. Others yet refer to individuals and put names to events where people the reporters had come to know -- and befriend in many cases -- suffered the fate of becoming combat casualties. For a wide range of examples of first-hand narratives on witnessing friendly casualties in post-deployment sources, see Atkinson, 38, 42, 60, 90, 126, 131, 192, 238, 247, 252, 297-298; Katovsky ed., 49-51, 55, 68, 86, 82, 120, 142, 145, 367; Koopman, 132, 137, 151, 166, 170-172, 186, 189, 245, 276; North, 58, 78, 96-97; Poole, 17, 189, 204; Reuters ed., 69, 133, 137-138, 142; Skiba, 182, 222; West, 3, 37, 39, 47, 62, 81, 159-160, 166, 169, 196, 205; Wright, 49, 50-51, 68, 82, 86, 120, 142, 145, 367; Zucchini, 210-211, 164-165.

the death and destruction of combat. Mathew Fisher, embedded with U.S. troops and reporting from Iraq for the Toronto-based *National Post*, summed up this atmosphere during the early days of the invasion. "What now motivates most of the Marines to go on in the fight -- which inevitably leads to Baghdad -- is the knowledge that other Marines have fallen, and anger at how Saddam Hussein's forces are treating U.S. prisoners of war," he reported. "This gives them an extra incentive to press on, although they also are spurred by the appalling weather and the frequent orders to climb into the cumbersome nuclear-biological chemical warfare suits they must wear whenever there's an alert."<sup>4</sup>

Individual assignments influenced the amount of death, violence and destruction reporters witnessed. Where the construction of the enemy and battlefield conditions were prevalent in the vast majority of embeds' accounts, their experiences with direct combat and its human (and material) toll varied in intensity -- depending on which troops they covered. For instance, Chris Ayers' experience with witnessing friendly casualties represented the minority in terms of direct exposure to violence; after all, he was attached to an artillery unit, where most of the fighting was done at long range -- a perspective that stood in contrast with those reporters who travelled alongside forward elements, like Evan Wright, who witnessed prolonged battles from the front lines with the Marine infantry.

Nevertheless, narratives such as Ayers' offer graphic and impactful perspectives as well, especially when addressing the effects of witnessing battles indirectly, where news of friendly casualties trickled in like some sort of macabre drama. News of injuries and deaths had almost become routine, he noted, as regular evening reports heard over the ominous radio chatter of the

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<sup>4</sup>Matthew Fisher, "Convoy rides out storm of biblical dimensions: Crossing the desert: Marines' first taste of combat lingers as Baghdad nears", *National Post*, March 26, 2003.

invasion's military communications network often included deadpan announcements like one that explained that “a Marine from a nearby infantry unit had one of his legs blown off.”<sup>5</sup> This type of repeated reminder of the dangers that embeds faced alongside troops help in understanding some of the effects of combat deployments, even if in an indirect way.

The deaths of friendly soldiers in combat, recounted by reporters after the war, can inform several important issues, particularly the limits placed on reporting at the time by official restrictions and journalistic ethics, further confirming the value of post-deployment accounts. Gordon Dillow, columnist for the *Orange County Register*, explained the complications inherent in reporting friendly casualties during the war: "There were limits to what your editors were going to find sufficiently tasteful or acceptable for a newspaper-reading public." He offered the example of watching a soldier in his unit die, and the return fire that killed the enemy who had shot him. "On the day after we crossed the border at about 9:00 A.M. on March 20th, our Lieutenant got hit. I saw the guys that shot him get killed. Did it affect me? I gotta say, I was desperate to get a story." Dillow further explained how the immediate news cycle influenced his reaction to the event. Like the troops, he had a job to do. "We were running up against deadlines. There's an eleven-hour time difference and this was in the morning, which meant it was getting late in the evening back home, and we wanted to get a story back." For Dillow, the rapid news cycle posed serious challenges to detail, and indeed, accuracy. "In fact, in the first story I filed, I didn't even know that the Lieutenant had been killed; I'd heard that there had been a medivac chopper called in, but it hadn't been announced that he was dead."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ayers, 262.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Dillow, "My Marines", in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson eds., *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003), 49.

Like countless other embeds, Dillow later discovered that much more information about the war had become accessible after he returned to the United States than had been available during his wartime reporting. Once he returned from the battlefield, he recounted in detail the events that led to the death of the young officer; details that he was not able to include during the war, including the name and rank of the casualty. "Lieutenant Shane Childers was just standing by the side of a paved road when this civilian vehicle [started] coming down the road," Dillow explained. "It [pulled] up next to the Marines and all of a sudden a guy sticks an AK-47 out and starts shooting and hits the Lieutenant in his stomach, just below his protective vest."<sup>7</sup> His subsequent account offered intimate details of the event, which mirrored countless other postwar battlefield memoirs that finally allowed embedded reporters to put names and background stories to the statistics that sanitized many wartime reports.

Although limited in certain details, wartime reports remain key to understanding the embedding experience, as well as individual events. The work of Oliver Poole, the British reporter who covered Marines for the *Daily Telegraph*, offered an opportunity to contrast and compare wartime reporting to post-war accounts. Poole's battlefield memoir served as an important source to this exploration of the embedded experience, and his wartime reporting is easily accessible. In the invasion phase of 2003, facing limits inherent in reporting on friendly casualties, Poole offered general information, but still provided some first-hand perspective, when detailing a combat experience. "One soldier was hit in the stomach as the others ran to the protection of the two Bradley armoured personnel carriers," he wrote in March of 2003. "An accompanying Abrams opened fire. A team of medics rushed forward to the wounded soldier, whose squad leader had been using his own body to shield his comrade from further injuries," At

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 49-50, 48-51.

the time of the incident, Poole did not name names. The report indeed represented a detailed, harrowing account; however, it lacked personal attachment to the events, as the actors in this saga were actually individuals; human beings with names, as opposed to simply being identified as *one soldier*, or *squad leader*. Nevertheless, the report shed light upon a fierce battle and the response to friendly soldiers being hit: "As the paramedics struggled to rescue their casualty, more than 200 rounds were fired at them. It was only a small skirmish, a brief battle involving no more than 100 men and lasting no more than 30 minutes before the Iraqis were silenced in an overwhelming barrage of artillery and missile fire."<sup>8</sup>

Poole's memoir offered much more nuanced and intimate details of the casualties he witnessed. On one occasion, he had seen an explosion nearby, and he followed the screams for medics to the site of an American casualty. "One of the wounded had part of his left foot blown off," he recounted. "I could see a bloodied shoe with some of his toes still in it," the narrative explained, offering bloody descriptions of a traumatic experience. The shock of battle had emerged, as Poole descended into the realities of close combat. He realised then that the assignment he had taken on as an embed had very real consequences, not just in terms of danger and risk, but also on a personal, emotional level, as he would witness the same bloody combat as the soldiers with whom he travelled and lived. Most became close acquaintances; many became friends, who shared their deepest, most personal thoughts and fears with him. "As I stared, I realised I knew him. It was Gareth Stewart, the twenty-year-old who was in the same mortar crew as Nitai Schwartz. I remembered him saying he didn't want to be in the Gulf, that he didn't believe in the war."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Oliver Poole, "Americans shocked by counter-attack", *The Daily Telegraph*, March 24, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Poole, 204.



Wartime reports of friendly casualties were usually generalized in terms of their direct identification of the troops involved and the circumstances in which battle casualties occurred. Simply reporting the number of deaths and injuries left the context and details leading to friendly casualties absent from the vast majority of news reports at the time. An example was an article published on March 24, 2003, in the *Herald*, a newspaper in Glasgow, Scotland, reliant on wire reports during the intense and bloody fighting in and around *An Nasiriyah*, (a town that became synonymous with death, violence and destruction). "The march to Baghdad also left as many as nine U.S. Marines dead in fighting near An Nasiriyah, a southern city far from the allies' forward positions. A dozen US soldiers were also taken prisoner in the area" the report read. "Although U.S. leaders declared the invasion on target despite the bloody setbacks on the third day, any expectation that Iraqi defenders would simply melt away was gone."<sup>10</sup>

Many reports from the battlefield offered compelling accounts of the battle for Nasiriyah, although they lacked intimate details of the desperate, bloody combat there. For instance, the chaotic nature of the battle is absent from the straightforward reports of combat found in the news items of the day, as Marines and Iraqi defenders clashed in one of the deadliest battles in which American forces had engaged in decades.<sup>11</sup> "The fiercest fighting yet in the battle for Iraq

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<sup>10</sup>"A bloody battle for Iraqi capital", n.a., *Evening Herald*, March 24, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> For a (chronological) survey of wartime reports from embedded journalists on the battle for An Nasiriyah, which took place March 23 - April 2, 2003, see Helen Puttick, "Stiff Iraqi resistance slows the allies' dash to capital", *The Herald* (Glasgow), March 22, 2003; S. Thorne Harper "TROOPS SURGE INLAND, CAPTURE KEY TARGETS" *Knight Ridder*, March 22, 2003; Jonathan Foreman with the V Corps on the Baghdad Highway, Niles Latham in D.C. and John Lehmann in New York, "BLOODY ROAD TO NASIRIYAH - 10 MARINES SLAIN AS AMERICANS SEIZE KEY CITY", *The New York Post*, March 24, 2003; David J. Lynch, "In Nasiriyah, a surreal battle" *USA TODAY*, March 28, 2003; Ian Bruce, "It was more like a scene from the Somme than Lawrence of Arabia" *The Herald* (Glasgow), March 29, 2003; Michael Seamark, "We take it in turns to be sacrificed, say U.S. Marines in 'turkey-shoot' hell", *DAILY MAIL* (London), March 29, 2003; Dennis O'Brien, "Marine units fight each other, 31 injured" *Hamilton Spectator*, March 29, 2003; Mark Johnson, "Wounded Iraqi civilians caught in horrors of war; At Army hospital, they tell of being caught in the cross fire", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 2003. And for reports from non-embedded sources, see Larry Kaplow and Craig Nelson, "Firefights, ambushes slow down U.S. forces; 21 Americans killed, captured as Iraqis mount counterattacks", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 24, 2003; Bradley Graham and Jonathan Weisman, "Display of 5 POWs Draws Firm Rebuke;

flared yesterday near this city on the Euphrates River,” an article in the *Hamilton Spectator* by an embedded journalist reported. “By ambush and faked surrender, Iraqi forces killed, wounded and captured Americans -- and some of them, alive and dead, were exhibited on Iraqi television.” In introducing the events that led to one of the most infamous incidents of the war – namely the Jessica Lynch prisoner of war story<sup>12</sup> – the report concluded that “In the end, the Americans triumphed, knocking out eight tanks, some anti-aircraft batteries, some artillery and infantry. But victory came at a cost: as many as nine dead and an undisclosed number of wounded.”<sup>13</sup> The report, in keeping with the narratives available in the others cited above, was hasty, general, and indeed, inaccurate; the battle for Nasiriyah actually raged for another ten days with scores more Americans killed and maimed, in addition to countless opposition fighters, and civilians.

Evan Wright's battlefield memoir, *Generation Kill* (published in 2005), offered a compelling comparison to wartime reports of the battle for Nasiriyah, and included a more detailed picture of the desperate, bloody combat there. In an example of the value of addressing multiple perspectives, Wright explained how the fog of war and localized experiences with fighting offered wide disparities in battlefield reporting. "It's a situation common in combat," Wright opined. "Two different sets of Marines operating in the same city a couple of kilometers

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U.S. Warns Iraq on Televised Images” *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2003; Kevin Simpson, “Casualties, POWs mark the 'toughest day' so far Bush: Goals are being met, 'war has just begun””, *The Denver Post*, March 24, 2003. For an academic account of the battle based on soldiers’ accounts, see Gary Livingston, *An Nasiriyah: The Fight for the Bridges* (Caisson Press, 2003). For an after action report from the U.S. Marines, see Rod Andrew, *The Battle of An-Nasiriyah*, (Government Printing Office, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> For chronological, period news reports on the Jessica Lynch saga, see Louie Gilot “‘Country girl' counted among captured troops”, *El Paso Times* (El Paso, TX), March 25, 2003; Tamara Jones, “Hope in a Hollow for a Girl Who Dreamed; West Virginia Town Prays for the Return of Missing U.S. Soldier”, *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2003; Colin Freeze, “A wrong turn, an ambush, a missing teen; A 19-year-old army-supply clerk is among the soldiers unaccounted for in Nasiriyah” *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2003; Alan Hamilton and David Charter, “Saving Private Jessica”, *The Times* (London), April 3, 2003; Laura Parker , “Rescued soldier doing well after first surgery” *USA TODAY*, April 4, 2003; “Out of Iraq: The Rescue of Pfc. Jessica Lynch”, *The New York Times*, n.a., April 4, 2003; Philip Gailey, “Pvt. Lynch: Casualty of war and media hype”, *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), June 22, 2003; “Saving Pfc. Lynch a myth that we wanted to believe” *Hamilton Spectator*, n.a., June 30, 2003.

<sup>13</sup>Ellen Knickmeyer, “U.S. runs into stiffening resistance; Nine Americans dead after false surrender by Iraqi troops starts 'very sharp engagement'”, *Hamilton Spectator*, March 24, 2003.

apart reporting radically different conditions." In fact, Wright had seen firsthand the troops he travelled with relaxing outside the city, when a "shell-shocked" Marine from another unit wandered by, telling of the casualties his unit had taken nearby. "Despite some reports of light resistance in Nasiriyah," he wrote, the Marines' "situation [was] so tenuous, they [hadn't] yet retrieved the dead Marines still lying shot up" on the battlefield.<sup>14</sup>

In the detailed and intimate narrative on combat *Generation Kill* -- a postwar memoir that detailed the Nasiriyah episode -- Wright introduced a Marine named Corporal Trevor Darnold. The young Marine from Idaho had joined up after watching *GI Joe* cartoons and left his first child, born only weeks before the invasion back home. Darnold was driving one of the unarmoured, over-laden Humvees at high speed in the middle of an ambush when he exclaimed he was hit. The other Marines, so focused on the "enemy fire coming at the Humvee from both sides of the street," hesitated at first to render first aid. As Darnold exclaimed again that he'd been hit, Wright witnessed a shocking and remarkable scene unfold. As Corporal Redman tried to open a field dressing to stop the bleeding, "the white bandages immediately flutter away in the wind." Another Marine, identified by Wright as Kocher, "who's pumping 203 grenades at muzzle flashes he sees in alleys and windows," in a feat of heroism and extreme danger, "climbs over the roll bar to get to Darnold's left arm. While hanging onto the roll bar, with the vehicle now careening half out of control and Redman's .50-cal blasting inches over his head, Kocher ties off Darnold's arm with a tourniquet." As Darnold had kept driving, he had remained "simultaneously firing his M-4 rifle out the side of the Humvee," and a couple weeks later, when "they gave

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<sup>14</sup> Wright, 107, 106-107.

Darnold the option of going home or rejoining Kocher's team in Baghdad... He [went] to Baghdad."<sup>15</sup>

Reflecting on the battle, and the Marines' harrowing escape with Wright in tow, the embedded reporter summed up the feeling shared by those who experienced it: "All the Humvees in Bravo Company are riddled with bullet holes, but Darnold is the only Marine who was hit. Counting the dozens of rounds that sliced through sheet metal, tires and rucksacks, the men can't believe they made it." Wright described the battle as "like one of those cheesy action movies in which the bad guys fire thousands of rounds that narrowly miss the hero." The after-effects of the experience lingered, as the Marines limped away, with their "shot-up Humvee making grinding and flapping sounds." When the men finally stopped and had a second to let the experience sink in, they "jump out and embrace each other." Even the most battle-hardened, elite troops amongst the young Marines were shocked by the episode; so, too, was the embedded reporter who had survived to tell the tale.<sup>16</sup>

Even though names were absent due to an official policy of not naming names of casualties during the invasion phase, and intimate details were often left out of most wartime casualty reports, some immediate news stories did provide value in terms of explaining the human aspects of combat. In certain instances, the eye-witness nature of the embedded report shone through. On April 6, 2003, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published an article headlined, "I owe these heroes my life." In it, Ron Martz, embedded with the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division, wrote of an intense combat experience that appeared in the newspaper while

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, 136-137.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, 136-143, 143.

the battle still raged on the other side of the globe. He offered details of how American troops from his unit had saved his life, at great peril to their own.

Had they not been there, I most likely would not be now typing this... Less than 30 minutes after the two soldiers joined me, both were wounded by bullets that could have hit me... The soldier behind me was hit in the left wrist and the left eye by a bullet that struck the side of the armored personnel carrier and shattered... A bullet hit the soldier to my immediate left in the right arm, just a few inches from my left arm. The bullet broke his arm, entered his body just below his armpit and came out his back... I know their names, but their families may not have been notified yet.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to wartime reporting, not only were names put to statistics after the war, but the gory details of bloodshed and the raw emotions from witnessing comrades being wounded or killed are prevalent in many embedded reporters' post-war accounts. John Koopman described an incident in his memoir in a more descriptive way than would have made the evening news, or even the more detailed newspapers. Recounting how one Marine had died, "when an RPG [slammed] into his Humvee, "Koopman retraced a traumatic experience in detail. Conveying the atmosphere surrounding the death and how the news reached the Marines in nearby units, Koopman explained. "Word is, the rocket hit him in the chest and knocked him clear out of the vehicle. There wasn't much left of him."<sup>18</sup>Dillow offered similar details of witnessing such an incident. "He was alive for a few minutes. The corpsman came over and started working on him trying to save him, but all he said was, 'I got shot in the gut,' and then he died. As far as anybody knows, he was the first ground combat casualty of the war." Further to the intimate details of the incident, Dillow recounted how the troops reacted, as "it was a shock to the Marines. They

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<sup>17</sup> Ron Martz, "I owe these heroes my life", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 6, 2003. For further examples of Martz's work, see NPR's "War Diaries: Ron Martz" <<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/wardiaries/rmartz/>> (6 January 2017). The site is an invaluable source for primary materials related to the Iraq War. See "War Diaries", *National Public Radio*, n.d.<<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/wardiaries/archives.html>>.

<sup>18</sup>Koopman, 151.

immediately lit up this vehicle with an unbelievable amount of firepower." He described the atmosphere that had emerged for troops engaged in bloody combat, where the rules of civilian life had long been forgotten. "The Marines' policy is -- and I don't want this to sound worse than I intend it to be -- if they take one round coming in, they're going to send a hundred rounds back." In 2003, Dillow "wrote about how some of the guys seemed to revel in the combat adrenaline... but other guys were sobered by it." His account at the time was limited by what details he could include, but also by his choice not to share the deep emotions and personal details that the soldiers he respected felt when they witnessed their friends and comrades killed in combat, while the battle still raged. Such intimate types of details required time and attention -- or distance from the event -- to emerge, Dillow argued, and often would only reveal themselves in the aftermath of the battles. "I remember talking to the young corpsman who tried to help Lieutenant Childers. I don't know if 'traumatized' is the right word or not, but he was deeply affected by it. I mean, his job [was] to try to save people, and he couldn't save the Lieutenant, who he knew pretty well and was in his platoon." Verifying the value of postwar accounts, the young medic told him "later that he realized that he just hated war; he hated being in it; he hated everything about it."<sup>19</sup>

Another point of view -- one containing a sharp departure from the infantry experience offered by a substantial number of post-war accounts by embedded reporters -- came from Rick Atkinson, who reported from within the command centres of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. After learning of the death of a 101<sup>st</sup> soldier, Atkinson lamented that "in a political democracy, every soldier's death is a public event. Every soldier's death ought to provoke the hard question: Why

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<sup>19</sup>Gordon Dillow, "My Marines", in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson eds., *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003, 49-50, 48-51.

did he die?"<sup>20</sup> Atkinson detailed the prevailing attitudes about friendly casualties in the command centre and among senior officers, many of whom felt regret and guilt due to their perceived and sometimes very real culpability in the deaths and injuries of their troops.<sup>21</sup> Later sections of this study address this phenomenon of culpability from the embedded reporters' perspective utilizing their firsthand accounts to detail the ubiquitous mistakes and questionable leadership involved in many such incidents during the invasion.

As battles raged, and casualties mounted among American forces deployed in the invasion of Iraq, the value of "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM" was invoked as a noble cause by military leaders that guaranteed these friendly casualties were not in vain. As was the case for many soldiers who had fallen, hasty memorial services honoured their sacrifices. One such ceremony was recounted by Ron Martz, in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* Home Edition of April 12, 2003: "With the sound of artillery rumbling in the background, soldiers of the Fort Stewart-based Task Force 1-64 paused Friday to remember a fallen comrade."<sup>22</sup>

Even though the invasion took place in an atmosphere coloured by the rhetoric of a noble crusade in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the mounting toll of American casualties began to influence questions about the value of the mission, and its fundamental rationale, amongst the troops. Seeing friends and comrades die or be maimed has undermined morale in conflicts throughout history, and the Iraq invasion was no different. In fact, the embeds' post-war accounts detailed plummeting morale amongst troops as the realities of combat losses to a determined enemy -- and due to human error -- took hold amongst many of the young soldiers

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<sup>20</sup> Atkinson, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Atkinson, 231.

<sup>22</sup> Ron Martz, "Boots, helmet, rifle: A farewell." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 12, 2003.

doing the fighting.<sup>23</sup> The effect of all of this, though, only added to the related combat stress that the act of killing had on the troops, whether their targets were legitimate enemy forces, or far worse for morale, innocent civilians -- especially children.

## **Enemy Casualties**

Wartime coverage mainly used body counts mixed with limited details of the engagements that resulted in the "enemy" being killed in Iraq, which served to gloss over carnage on a personal level. Even though gruesome images and graphic narratives concerning enemy soldiers' deaths on the battlefield found their way into news stories, once again, a generalized and sanitized view of that carnage surfaced. A typical example is Ron Martz's story headlined, "Fanatical Iraqis meet doom," published in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on March 24, 2003. "Charlie Company soldiers," Martz reported, "led task force elements in killing an estimated 100 to 150 Iraqi soldiers and destroying 15 trucks." Yet Martz failed to provide further details, reducing these soldiers as simple statistics. In the same battle, "thirteen Iraqis were taken prisoner," and "no Americans were injured in the fight."<sup>24</sup> This brief synopsis, while not wholly representative of all wartime reporting, casts light on the brevity of many news stories about battlefield casualties sustained by the defenders.

Kit Roane, an embedded reporter who covered the invasion for the *New York Daily News*, wrote on March 28, 2003 that the battlefield resembled "a desert littered with death, devastation - and herds of camels." His story included a familiar scene for those in the invasion force. "As the Marines pushed north out of Nassiriya [sic], they passed the bodies of Iraqis they had slain during skirmishes in blinding sandstorms." As was a frequent sight, "they passed the

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<sup>23</sup> A discussion later takes place in this study on the effects of poor decision-making, bad luck, and poor leadership which offer further, intimate examples of the toll that combat took on the troops.

<sup>24</sup> Ron Martz, "DESERT BATTLE: Fanatical Iraqis meet doom." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 24, 2003.



wreckage of Iraqi vehicles that were destroyed in battle... and as their convoy rumbled toward Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's capital, they were accompanied for a time by hundreds of camels, which threaded through the tanks and armored personnel carriers. Delighted Marines popped their heads out of their vehicles and snapped pictures." These types of scenes were welcomed by the troops tasked with the terrible job of killing their enemies *en masse*. "At one point, in the roadside near Qal At Sukkar, the convoy came upon two wounded Iraqi soldiers. They were a rare sight for the Marines, who have seen more camels than live Iraqis since crossing into the country. Their firefights have been mostly with phantoms obscured by swirling sands." Nearby, the Marines "inspected the charred husk of what was once a bus. Four dead men lay beside it. Another 16 were inside... They were among the 60 or so Iraqi corpses that Marines encountered by the roadside during a three-day push out of Nassiriya, where Marines suffered as many as 10 fatalities during ambushes on Saturday." The effects of their assault were readily apparent, although the camels and the friendly troops remained the focus as "memories of that fierce fight were still fresh."The aftermath of their actions was framed through their lens: "As they moved through the desert, the Marines were wary and jumpy," as the constant threat of ambush and chemical attack wore the troops down, and added to the stress of viewing their handy-work up close. "Gas! Gas! Gas!" the Marines yelled as the vehicles ground to a halt, and up and down the convoy soldiers scrambled into their chemical weapons gear. Twenty-five minutes later, another order made its way down the convoy and relieved Marines pulled off their masks. It was a false alarm."<sup>25</sup>

The battles for Iraq were often one-sided, as Coalition forces advanced rapidly into Iraq utilizing a major firepower advantage. Hostile forces that resisted, or were unlucky enough to be caught between Coalition forces and their objectives, met a gruesome fate, and intimate details of

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<sup>25</sup> Kit R. Roane, "It's a road of death - and camels", *New York Daily News*, March 28, 2003.

enemy casualties are an area that represents an opportunity to address the value of the embedding program in-depth. Embedded reporters repeatedly reflected upon enemy casualties in postwar accounts, and their stories offer a variety of reactions to the carnage that was wrought upon Iraqi soldiers and any other defenders.<sup>26</sup> From the unique perspective from within a command centre, Atkinson explained that “the division’s commanders had reported prolonged, ferocious combat, with nearly a thousand Iraqis believed killed in the Euphrates valley around Najaf.”<sup>27</sup> Although his embedded experience was uniquely limited to the *bird’s eye view* of command, he still witnessed combat from a distance. He detailed one instance where he watched infantrymen work their way through an objective, as “Kiowas, followed by two Apaches, swooped over the target, guns chattering.” He described the one-sided fight that he observed alongside the commanders who had set this all in motion, as “all sixty of the 101<sup>st</sup>’s artillery tubes and eighteen MLRS launchers had joined the fight, while the Kiowas alone put two hundred rockets and ten thousand .50-caliber rounds into” the target area, where the estimated enemy death count was 373, which, by the embed’s estimation was nothing but “a silly wild-ass guess.” As a scene reminiscent of the Vietnam War classic *Apocalypse Now* (1979) emerged in this firsthand account, no estimate of civilian casualties was given, although the toll on the enemy that the American forces were engaged with “was commensurate with annihilation.”<sup>28</sup>

Atkinson’s experience was quite different from the embedded reporters that accompanied rifle companies and frontline units into battle. Gordon Dillow, of the *Orange County Register*, saw extensive combat while attached to infantry Marines, and explained the limitations of

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<sup>26</sup> For a survey of embedded reporters’ accounts of their experiences with enemy casualties, see Ayers, 221, 227, 229-30, 235, 245-46, 254, 255; Katovsky ed., 5-6, 139, 342, 49, 354, 199, 214, 27, 81, 33-38; Koopman, 132, 158, 170, 196, 259, 260; North, 188; Poole, 190-193; Reuters eds., 48, 140-143; Rodgers 66, 79-80, 82, 85, 137, 152; West, 62, 96, 122-124, 158, 226, 242; Wright, 104-109, 112-113, 212-213, 249, 255, 268; and Zucchini, 144-145.

<sup>27</sup> Atkinson, 167-168.

<sup>28</sup> Atkinson, 231.

wartime reporting. He had “refrained from describing dead Iraqis. It's the same way that TV news won't air certain images that are too graphic, even if there's a certain news value to them,” he recounted.<sup>29</sup> This assessment again pointed to the value of “after-action” accounts. Chris Ayers witnessed the gruesome aftermath of battle on many occasions, and he detailed his emotions when witnessing the “smoldering remains of a Republican Guard tank. Then another, and another.” He explained how he “tried not to look, fearing the charred and twisted human remains inside.” This very human emotion, tied to fear -- and also coloured by regret and guilt -- was not uncommon in embedded media accounts written post-war.

Ayers offered deep, emotional and honest reflections while describing his emotional state during the war. He admitted to the fear and anxiety he felt in combat, especially when witnessing the ramifications to the actions of the Marines he was attached to as they became evident. “‘We killed a lot of motherfuckers,’ reiterated the radio” in contrast to when reporting friendly casualties in a monotone. “‘We keep expecting to see some infantry, but all we’re seeing are body parts.’ I wanted to look,” Ayers explained, “but that way insanity beckoned. So I kept my eyes fixed straight ahead.” His account explained how the combat experience was one that changed his outlook on life. “It’s easy to ignore the destitute and bleeding when you’re at home on the sofa” compared to witnessing things like a young Iraqi soldier “lying bleeding on the tarmac next to a green motorcycle.” Ayers intimated his feelings, explaining: “I was grateful I wasn’t embedded with *them*.” He clearly felt remorse after witnessing such death and destruction, which left him wondering “how many [they had] killed. Hundreds? Thousands?”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Dillow, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Ayers, , 221, 227, 229, 230, 235; 220-237

Even though most news coverage depicted the war in generalized and body count-focused reporting, a minority of journalists shared some intimate details from the troops on the winning side. Such was the case with Ron Martz's work published in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*:

'It's the first time I've ever shot at [people] when I knew they were shooting at me,' said England, whose tank blew a large hole in the house and destroyed the gun. For many of the troops in this, their first combat action, it seemed like little more than an extension of their lengthy training. 'I wasn't sure how I'd feel out going out there and shooting anybody. But with the training they give us, I didn't feel scared or remorseful. I just did the job they sent me here to do,' said Sgt. Christopher Freeman, 32, of Clayton, Calif.<sup>31</sup>

So in effect, stories of killing were available during the war, but the details that sought to humanize enemy forces were fleeting, a prime example being a previously cited account that focused on the camels as they mingled with twisted and bloody enemy corpses and the burning Iraqi countryside after a destructive engagement. A similar approach could be found in much of the coverage of civilian casualties in Iraq. Despite bearing the brunt of the fighting, ordinary Iraqi civilians received minimal wartime attention incommensurate of their suffering.

### **Civilian Casualties**

Martz provided some of the most in-depth and intimate wartime reporting, as his article entitled "Journalists join battle --- to save lives," published on March 28, 2003, highlighted. In this story, he recalled the horrors of witnessing civilian casualties. "The roof of the armored personnel carrier was slick with blood," he reported. "In places, it came over the sides in a cascade of dark red. The blood was from two civilians who had been caught up in a short, vicious firefight at a key intersection." This first-person account of this ugly scene provided

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<sup>31</sup> Ron Martz, "DESERT BATTLE: Fanatical Iraqis meet doom." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 24, 2003.

readers with a great deal of graphic detail; a technique absent from most news at the time: "Now a third wounded civilian was being lifted to the roof for transport to a nearby aid station," he recounted. "'Hold the drip bag,' 1st Sgt. Jose Mercado shouted at me over the din of tank and small-arms fire and the wind whipping the dust into a thick orange cloud. 'You have to go with him. I don't have anyone else.'"<sup>32</sup>

The Iraq War shared a common thread with all armed conflicts in that innocent civilians frequently bore the brunt of the fighting. Embedded reporters witnessed a variety of instances in which Iraqi civilians were caught in the crossfire. Embedded reporters' narratives contain a multitude of insights into the war's cost, and shed light on the reaction to "collateral damage" by the reporters and soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Atkinson's memoir highlighted how the high command went to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties. He also documented several cases where their measures failed, and innocents were injured or killed.<sup>34</sup> He noted the humanitarian toll on the refugees who were the innocent victims of the war, and his heart-breaking tale of one such instance offered an inside look at what the invasion of Iraq produced, on both sides:

An Iraqi pushing a cart loaded with a battered suitcase and a propane tank hurried past us, fleeing the gunfire. His wife and two small children in dirty robes held hands at his side. Their eyes were wide with fear, and no one looked back, as if afraid of turning into pillars of salt. The man sobbed great, heaving sobs, and all the agony of war was etched in his face. Lieutenant Joe stopped him momentarily, then waved him on. "He's worried about his kids, that they're going to die," Joe told me. Watching them recede down the highway,

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<sup>32</sup>Ron Martz, "Journalists join battle --- to save lives", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 28, 2003. This report was based upon a harrowing experience that Martz later recounted in an oral history collection for PBS, where he defended his journalistic integrity in helping American soldier render first aid to Iraqi civilians, and to friendly casualties. See "War Diaries: Ron Martz", n.d., *National Public Radio* <<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/wardiaries/rmartz/>> (6 January 2017).

<sup>33</sup> For a survey of post-war firsthand accounts of experiences with civilian casualties, see Atkinson, 174, 186, 216; Ayers, 232, 235, 246; Katovsky ed., 16-19, 33, 50, 132, 336; Koopman, 173, 247; North, 105, 109; Reuters ed., 27, 30-31, 129, 145-146, 48, 45, 142-143; Rodgers, 68, 73; West, 46, 55, 62, 65, 170, 213; Wright, 95, 103, 129, 152, 159, 171, 174, 187, 197, 218, 260, 293, 190, 149, 175.

<sup>34</sup> Atkinson 212, 144, 151; 216, 222

I felt pity at their plight, and debased by the victor's pleasures the day had brought. But most of all I felt gratitude that the man had not been a suicide bomber, intent on sending us all to hell by detonating his propane tank.<sup>35</sup>

Embedded reporters were present at numerous events involving a tremendous loss of civilian Iraqi lives. Evan Wright, reporting for *Rolling Stone*, and travelling alongside elite recon Marines, witnessed several instances of civilian casualties, where the young troops sometimes were clearly too quick to open fire on perceived threats. He told a sad, graphic and sobering tale of the young troops' reactions and emotional responses when a child was brought forward to them; the same soldiers that had grievously wounded the boy. A "woman opened up this blanket and this boy about twelve years old, rolled out," he described. "He's got four entry wounds in his ribs and his stomach, and no exit wounds, which means the rounds zipped around inside of him. His older brother, about fourteen, was hobbling around, shot in the leg." Wright struggled with his role in all of this, as he was there to report on the war, but was shocked by what he saw. He questioned whether a particularly trigger-happy Marine may finally be held to account for his actions. "Being a reporter, I'm thinking in the back of my mind, 'This is gruesome. This is awesome. This is perfect. I've got everything now.' This is the honest truth. I was there when the shooting happened, and everyone knew that Trombley was the one who shot them." He explained the actions of the boys' mother, who "was gesticulating, gesturing, like she was talking to God...She was so distraught carrying this bundle that her robes had fallen open and her breasts spilled out. It was like some Biblical scene of grieving."<sup>36</sup>

Opening up in a postwar interview with the benefit of increased hindsight, Wright recalled how soldiers dealt with such a traumatic situation, where "the medic didn't think the boy

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>36</sup> Evan Wright, "Our Warrior Youth", in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson eds., *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003, 336-337.

was going to make it. When a medevac was requested, the commander denied it at first.” The Marines that Wright accompanied, acting on their guilt and to demonstrate some level of humanity, “came up with [a] plan. They put the boy on a stretcher and they carried him down to this tent where their commander was.” This was an act that forced the Marine commander to order treatment of the child, as “the boy was now technically in the care of the battalion physician.” Wright narrated the picture as the soldier who fired the shots arrived on the scene “and said, ‘I am responsible for this.’ Several Marines were angry at Trombley. Colbert was kneeling close to the woman, and started crying.” Wright’s account offered insight into how soldiers coped with the damage they inflicted on innocents. Many of the combatants made their feelings known to their comrade, who had shot the young boys. “The Marines were saying things like ‘Trombley, look at what you did.’”<sup>37</sup>

Despite limits placed on the scope and detail of wartime coverage, several news stories from 2003 described instances where civilians had been killed or wounded. One prime example was an incident that triggered heated debate back in the United States, as an embedded journalist had witnessed a family vehicle destroyed by American troops, reported on it, and was later criticized for his interpretation of the event. An excerpt from an April 2, 2003 article by *The Times* entitled "Family deaths at checkpoint fuel fury and mistrust." The article cited embedded reporters as sources and witnesses, which highlighted their freedom to report what they could:

"In light of recent terrorist attacks by the Iraqi regime, the soldiers exercised considerable restraint to avoid unnecessary loss of life," a statement by a military spokesperson concluded... In a markedly different and detailed version of events, William Branigin, a reporter for The Washington Post embedded with the 3rd Infantry Division, described a blue, four-wheel-drive Toyota that came "barrelling toward" the intersection checkpoint. Captain Ronny Johnson, who was within earshot of Mr. Branigin, radioed one of his forward platoons of M2 Bradley fighting

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 336-337, 335-339.

vehicles to alert it to this potential threat. "Fire a warning shot," Captain Johnson was reported as saying. Then, "with increasing urgency" he told the platoon to "shoot a 7.62mm machinegun round into its radiator." Finally, according to Mr. Branigin's report, he shouted: "Stop him, Red 1, stop him." About six shots of 25mm canon fire were then heard from one of the Bradley vehicles. As Captain Johnson peered at the vehicle through his binoculars, Mr. Branigin reported, he shouted at the platoon leader: "You just f\*\*\*\*\* killed a family because you didn't fire a warning shot!" The report quoted officers as saying that 15 civilians were in the vehicle. Captain Johnson's company reported that ten of them, including five children who appeared to be under five, were killed. However, later in his report, Mr. Branigin [wrote] that several soldiers "accepted the platoon leader's explanation to Captain Johnson on the military radio that he had, in fact, fired two warning shots, but that the driver failed to stop". A spokesman for The Washington Post said that the newspaper stood by the report.<sup>38</sup>

As was the case in so much of the coverage, the experience of witnessing innocent civilians suffering was often overshadowed by the engagements themselves and the soldiers' actions and reactions, which clearly assumed greater significance in the above account than the civilians killed in the vehicle.

In contrast to critiques of the embedding program by academics, a number of embedded reporters would later share graphic accounts of the civilian casualties they witnessed. Chantal Escoto, one of many female embedded reporters in Iraq, "saw children who were half burned by bombs," and being on the frontlines of combat affected her psychologically following the war.<sup>39</sup> Her experience was consistent with what many veterans went through, re-affirming that the embedded reporter's exposure to combat was similar to that of the individual soldier's. The effects of combat stress and the images of war assume a central place in the accounts examined in this study, and highlight the valuable insights these journalists have contributed to the

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<sup>38</sup> Tim Reid, "Family deaths at checkpoint fuel fury and mistrust" *The Times*, April 2, 2003.

<sup>39</sup>Chantal Escoto, "Where the Boys Are", in Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson eds., *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003, 132, 127-130.



historical record. Harrowing stories of women, children and innocents caught in the vortex of war have been ubiquitous in post-war accounts, and offer a deeper, more nuanced version of events that resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe for the local inhabitants of a land ravaged by the invasion force.

## **Destruction**

During the battle for Baghdad in April 2003, an infantry officer was quoted by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* as saying, "we don't like to destroy things or hurt people, but that's the way this guy fights, and we have to deal with it."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as discussed previously, a major design feature of the embedding program was to highlight that the Coalition forces were not like their enemies; they were not a force that would wreak unnecessary and wonton destruction upon innocent civilians, and their operations sought to avoid crippling Iraqi infrastructure. After all, the catastrophic results of the 1991 Desert Storm air campaign have been considered overkill at the least and war crimes at worst. Indeed, the 1991 Gulf War bombing campaign triggered widespread criticism for its sheer ferocity and scope, as factories, power plants, oil refineries, bridges and the general infrastructure of Iraq were left destroyed in its wake, resulting in famine, poverty and a humanitarian crisis for the innocent people of Iraq.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ron Martz, "Street fighting slow, bloody", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 9, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> A variety of sources confirm that the Desert Storm air campaign was deeply criticized for its brutality, especially in regards to its effects on Iraqi infrastructure and the second-order effects on Iraqi civilians. For the most scathing indictment of the Gulf War's humanitarian impact, see Ramsey Clark ed., *War Crimes: A Report on United States War Crimes Against Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Maitsonneuve Press, 1992), 47-63, 83-94, where a variety of scholars make the case that the air campaign constituted a war crime due to its scope; For academic discourse on the subject from a variety of disciplines, see Alnasrawi, Abbas. "Iraq: economic consequences of the 1991 Gulf War and future outlook." *Third World Quarterly* 13.2 (1992): 335-352; Lewis, Michael W. "The law of aerial bombardment in the 1991 Gulf war." *American Journal of International Law* 97.3 (2003): 481-509; Lee, Ian, and Andy Haines. "Health costs of the Gulf war." *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 303.6797 (1991): 303; Lopez, George A. "The Gulf War: Not So Clean." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 47.7 (1991): 30-35; For an example of the topic's reach in popular media, see Barton Gellman and W. S. Writer, "Allied air war struck broadly in Iraq; officials acknowledge strategy went beyond purely military targets" *Washington Post* June 23, 1991; Randolph Ryan, "How U.S. targeted Iraqi society New reports indicate the Pentagon planned to destroy Iraq's capacity to care for the welfare of its people",

The American military made it abundantly clear that they would spare the Iraqi people from such devastation this time. Prior to the outbreak of war on March 19, 2003, an effort was made to convince the world that the nation would be aided in rebuilding under a new government, without having to start over again from scratch. Indeed, American troops would "take great care to achieve their military objective while minimizing the impact on, and reaching out to help, civilians," according to Victoria Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.<sup>42</sup> But as the invasion approached, many humanitarian organizations questioned the legitimacy of this claim.

Stories at the time addressed the matter. On January 9, 2003, Vivienne Walt, *USA TODAY* columnist, wrote, "U.S. military planners would probably try to minimize damage because they want to keep the country intact," and that "U.S. military analysts say any attack would target only the Iraqi military's top command and communications facilities in the hope of toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime." This was not just a humanitarian consideration, Walt noted; as "bomb damage to the city would only make reconstruction more difficult, Pentagon officials say. They say technological advancements since 1991 would minimize civilian damage." The military was steadfast in countering the claims that they would repeat the 1991 model, and would go to many lengths to counter Saddam's propaganda regarding their actions and impact on civilians. "Our planners have looked at a number of scenarios, including humanitarian needs," Walt quoted Pentagon spokesman, Lt. Col. David Lapan saying.

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*Toronto Star*, June 27, 1991; Subhy Haddad, "Flourishing country was reduced to rubble", *Calgary Herald*, January 17, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Victoria Clarke, *Lipstick on a Pig: Winning in the No-Spin Era by Someone Who Knows the Game* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 57.

"If we are going to hit infrastructure targets, there would be a consideration about the civilian impact."<sup>43</sup>

Despite a government public relations blitz emphasizing the positive effects the campaign would have on Iraq and its people, pre-war opposition was fierce. The U.S. military put on a full-court press, disputing claims they would ruin Iraq again. A Pentagon spokesperson was quoted in Walt's *USA TODAY* story arguing that "the U.S. military is in a much better position to avoid civilian casualties and infrastructure damage than it was in 1991," when Baghdad's electricity was cut off as soon as the bombing began, and "Allied warplanes carried out about 890 strikes against electrical power plants and oil installations." Walt's report highlighted a Pentagon claim that "precision-guided 'smart' bombs would pinpoint military targets without damaging the city's infrastructure," this time, as opposed to in 1991, when "smart bombs were used for [only] about 10% of strikes." The Pentagon spokesperson argued that in a new Iraq war, "about 80% of bombs dropped would probably be smart munitions." All this was predicated on the claim that the strategic objectives of the war would also be different this time. "In 1991, the goal was to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait; now, it would be to overthrow Saddam's government. Devastating his capital would only cause problems for a U.S.-backed successor government," according to Walt's report. The construction of the enemy also played a role, as "Saddam could be as big a danger to the city as U.S. bombs. U.S. intelligence officials said recently that if the Iraqi leader thought he was losing the war, he could destroy power plants, food stocks and oil fields and then blame the humanitarian disaster on the United States." Even though the case was

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<sup>43</sup> Vivienne Walt, "Relief groups expect worst in Baghdad", *USA TODAY*, January 9, 2003.

made repeatedly, the article said that humanitarian groups were still "skeptical that the Pentagon can minimize damage to the city's infrastructure."<sup>44</sup>

The military planners continued to prepare for a contingency centred upon of humanitarian disaster, of course, according to a *Washington Post* article that appeared on February 25, 2003:

In conversations in recent days, officials have described a U.S.-commanded military operation designed to minimize civilian casualties and limit harm to Iraq's infrastructure. Military targeting maps have been marked with such facilities as hospitals, schools and food depots. The goal would be to "avoid excessive damage to the civilian population," Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph J. Collins told reporters yesterday. "What all of us have been talking about here is not occupation. It's liberation and ultimately creating a democracy inside Iraq." U.S. planners hope a conflict would be over within weeks -- and, in some parts of Iraq, within days. The administration, which would expect to rule Iraq for a period of time after Hussein fell, would aim to begin relief and reconstruction in some parts of Iraq even as fighting continued elsewhere. The idea would be to provide such essentials as food, sanitation and electricity to minimize refugee flows and make sure that "Iraqis can immediately feel something has changed for the better," as one official put it... "The things that worry us most are the things that Saddam will do," a senior administration official said. "He has the capacity to create immense human suffering in Iraq."<sup>45</sup>

Even though great care would be taken to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe according to the military, news reports (like this one) repeated their concessions regarding the inevitability of casualties and damage to the civilian infrastructure.

The very nature of this strategy was based on a quick, bloodless campaign where the Iraqi population would cheer on the invaders. One such facet of the plan, that would supposedly limit damage, was "a lightning-strike strategy said to be favoured by civilian advisers to U.S. Defence

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Peter Slevin, "U.S. Plans Postwar Relief For Iraq; Food, Medicine Being Stockpiled in Region", *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2003.

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld," according to a news report from January 2003, six weeks before the war began.

This would involve a quick, decisive strike on Baghdad by a much lesser force of 80,000 troops with the aim of controlling the capital, overthrowing Saddam Hussein and expecting the Iraqi army and ruling elite to fall into line with a regime change... The plan would try to avoid any major engagement with the Republican Guard, other than that necessary to take the capital, at which point it is hoped the Iraqi army would concede defeat... The downside would be increased civilian and US casualties.<sup>46</sup>

However minimal the 2003 campaign's effects on the strategic infrastructure of Iraq was meant to be -- a theory itself that is debatable -- the impact of the invasion force on an actual firsthand level can be discerned through embedded reporters' accounts. Especially relevant and nuanced were the postwar accounts found in memoirs and collected oral histories, which once again served as complementary sources to wartime reports which lacked depth and scope on the subject.<sup>47</sup> Although wartime reports highlighted the toll on infrastructure almost immediately, they were superficial, as a *Globe and Mail* report from the Iraq-Jordan border highlighted, with its descriptions gleaned from Iraqi truck drivers detailing bombing targets such as communications towers and even cafes.<sup>48</sup> Once embedded reports stories in, the fighting's toll on Iraq became more apparent. "The concussive force of the tanks' rounds sucked everything off the sidewalks and into the middle of this village's narrow, dusty main road -- 'even people,'" said the captain of a tank company who fought his way through it. "The blasts shattered the plate glass

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<sup>46</sup>Miles Kemp, "INVASION OF IRAQ; Battle plan Baghdad", *The Advertiser*, January 30, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> For a survey of firsthand accounts of the destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and civilian property witnessed by embeds, see Atkinson, 219-220, 234-237; Katovsky ed., 60, 82, 259; North, 105, 179; Reuters ed., 14, 93, 120, 154; Rodgers, 49-50; West, 25, 194, 228; Wright, 89-90, 113, 151-152, 160-163, 256, 302.

<sup>48</sup> Mark MacKinnon, "Charred sites dot Iraqi landscape; Travellers to Jordan report airfield, café, communications tower reduced to rubble", *The Globe and Mail*, March 21, 2003.

window of a small barbershop, next to the girls' elementary school, on the roof of which Iraqi troops had built a redoubt of sandbags." the *Globe and Mail* article reported<sup>49</sup>

As was the case for most topics explored in previous chapters, wartime reports from the front were lacking detail and nuance regarding the destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and civilian areas. Postwar accounts, however, furnished a fuller picture. Rick Atkinson wrote of intense debate within the highest ranks about which targets could be destroyed. He quoted officers saying "'we've hit them hard the last two days whenever they've fired at us, from homes, from schools,'" but according to the embed, the troops were told explicitly that they couldn't fire directly at mosques, but they could destroy almost anything else. Complicating matters, however, was that they encountered many more civilians than they had anticipated, "'by a factor of a thousand,'" said General Petraeus.<sup>50</sup>

Evan Wright had a different experience, as his perspective wasn't from the command point of view, but alongside the infantry Marines. His accounts are littered with the death and destruction that followed the troops through Iraq. Commenting on the absurdity of war, he detailed how the Marines he lived and travelled with had been forced to clean up their litter outside *An Nasiriyah*, the infamous battleground, while "bombing the shit out of the city." Wright estimated that "hundreds, if not thousands of artillery rounds and bombs poured onto the city," and "kicked up a localized dust storm" due to the intensity of the bombing. "'This looks like Tijuana,'" one soldier said. "'And this time I get to do what I've always wanted to do [there]... burn it to the ground.'"<sup>51</sup> Wright's reflections included a detailed narrative on the battle for Nasiriyah, where "the impact of this shelling on its 400,000 residents must be devastating." In

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<sup>49</sup>Steven Myers, "A NATION AT WAR: IN THE FIELD -- THIRD DIVISION; A Tough Fight, a Retreat and a Look Ahead" *The New York Times*, March 28, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Atkinson, 219, 222, 218-223.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, 89.

a counter to the military official lines guaranteeing that all efforts would be made to avoid civilian casualties and the destruction of Iraq's cities and countryside, "despite America's dazzling high-tech capabilities -- the Marines moved through Nasiriyah by blasting it to hell."<sup>52</sup>

Wright's experience was far from unique, although stories did appear from embeds that confirmed that American troops had, in certain instances, made it a priority to avoid destroying homes and killing civilians if they could accomplish their missions another way. Oliver North, who was embedded alongside Marines for FOX News, witnessed one such event, after the troops of the unit he accompanied had been attacked from within a small village: "Rather than levelling the eight or ten structures with fire from an Abrams 120mm main gun," the Company Commander ordered his troops to clear the village on foot, at great peril to themselves. In an example of a more rose-coloured analysis, North explained how the tactic had paid off, as the Marines found only a dead enemy combatant and a group of scared civilians once they had reached the mud-hut town. "Often," wrote North, "civil affairs, and medical personnel accompany these patrols to win some 'hearts and minds' by providing limited emergency medical help, humanitarian rations, water, and even small amounts of fuel for tractors and irrigation pumps."<sup>53</sup>

Although the use of bombing was said by military officials to be greatly curtailed compared to operations in 1991, and limited to military targets, especially in regards to Iraqi infrastructure, the picture of tactical bombing painted by embeds casts a shadow over the assertion that airpower would be restrained in any way. Several accounts detailed the use of aircraft to dislodge the stubborn, unexpected, and effective defence of Iraqi cities, towns and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>53</sup> North, 106, 105-109.

villages. Unlike the supposed restraint that the military had claimed to show in the strategic air campaign, the reliance on airpower rarely reflected North's scenario above, according to Wright's experience, and many others.<sup>54</sup>

### **'Collateral Damage'**

The strategic air campaign -- those strikes aimed at the government's resources, industry and economy -- was said to have been limited in order to avoid destroying Iraqi infrastructure in an effort at setting the stage for a rebuilding phase to come later. Indeed, an early report from the *New York Times* confirmed "the much anticipated mass bombardment of Iraq," about which "Military officials said hundreds of government buildings and military targets in Baghdad were hit by a powerful combination of missiles and bombs," had indeed come. The story cited "eyewitnesses," who said "no residences in Iraq's capital appeared to have been hit, but there have been no official assessments yet on whether civilians were caught in the fierce bombardment."<sup>55</sup> Another *Times* article, published weeks later asked, "but how many Iraqi soldiers have died?" According to the Anthony Depalma, in a *The New York Times* article entitled "Bombarding Baghdad, Deaths in Battle, and Rising Support for Bush,"

It could be scores, hundreds, even thousands. No one outside Iraq -- and probably no one there, either -- knows. As in the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and in Afghanistan, the American military is not counting... Every day, briefers at Central Command here show high-tech images of buildings in and around Baghdad being blown to bits by America's advanced precision weaponry. Were there people inside? No one can say. "Body counts" got a bad name in Vietnam, where officers inflated casualty figures to win promotions and make their units look good. Often, the bodies

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<sup>54</sup> For a survey of firsthand accounts of the use of bombing on Iraq's cities, towns and villages, see Atkinson, 73-74, 118, 135; Katovsky, 51-52; Koopman, 259-260; North, 85-174; Reuters ed., 158; Rodgers, 66, 80; Wright, 47, 100-102, 121, 156-157, 302; Zucchini, 286.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Depalma, "Bombarding Baghdad, Deaths in Battle, and Rising Support for Bush", *The New York Times*, March 22, 2003.



were of innocent villagers. American officers have learned that no figures are vastly better than bad figures. After the first gulf war, estimates of Iraqi dead ran as high as 100,000, although the United States military never produced official or unofficial figures.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps this study has started the process of shedding some light upon the value of the embedding program, and allowed for a deeper understanding of issues such as the death, violence and destruction present within the modern combat experience. Indeed, it demonstrates that eyewitness perspectives are invaluable as a counter to official statements and the out-of-theatre analyses found in mainstream media regarding warfare in Iraq and its consequences.

Although this study has detailed many instances that highlight the true value of the embedding program, the vast array of issues that come to light when examining the sources produced by reporters that travelled alongside the troops in Iraq would be incomplete without a discussion of how a true military debacle took shape. The experiences cited here represent only a few pointed issues related to the effects of death, violence and destruction during the invasion of Iraq, and lack a deep focus on the aftermath of these events.

Despite some legitimate criticisms of the embedding program by academics, ignoring the intrinsic value found in the plethora of sources it later produced would be irresponsible, and prevent a deeper understanding of the combat experience in the Iraq War. Particularly relevant to this exploration are the ramifications of decision-making, leadership, and culture on the way the war proceeded. In order to address those topics, the embedded reporter's perspective is critical. Not all Iraqi civilians killed were killed on purpose; not all American or enemy troops died as a result of open combat. Indeed, there were almost always more layers to their stories than what was available at the time. The fog of war and SNAFUs (terms used to describe the chaos and

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<sup>56</sup> John Broder, "U.S. Military Has No Count Of Iraqi Dead In Fighting", *The New York Times*, April 2, 2003.

confusion of battle and mistakes and other miscalculations, respectively) sometimes fanned the flames of officer-enlisted personnel tensions, and often resulted in the shaping of masculine identifiers of courage and sacrifice -- as we shall explore next.

## **8. IDENTITIES & DECISIONS**

When analyzing the source base that embedded reporters provided of their experiences during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, several important issues surface. Of particular significance are the ways in which the constructions of the opposing force, or America's enemy, shaped the strategies and tactics employed by the invading forces. Also brought into sharper focus were the impact of desert conditions and the Iraqi environment on the battlefield.

Embedded reporters' accounts can provide agency to those affected by the battle for Iraq in early 2003 by addressing gender and a subset of class in military hierarchy. Open to exploration are weighty subjects such as the varied roles of women on the battlefield and the impact of masculinity within the group and in battle. Also coming into play are class issues, like the relationship between the lower ranks -- ordinary fighters, or "grunts" -- and the officers who led them. This must inevitably include an exploration of the decision-making processes at the center of key events and experiences from the perspective of embeds.

In effect, this chapter examines important experiential narratives linked to critical overarching themes found in war and society studies, based on a rich grouping of historical accounts of combat experiences taken directly from the Iraqi battlefields in 2003. Thematic questions considered include: What roles did women play in the embedding program? How were they welcomed into the fold? What status had women attained in the military at the time of the invasion of Iraq, and how was it reflected in the coverage of embeds? What were the gender constructions inherent within small units in combat, and how did those shape identities and inform portrayals of soldiers in reporting? And finally, what class divisions and hierarchical

structures were present in combat units, and how did leadership and management – whether effective or problematic –influence the group dynamic?

### **Women on the Battlefield**

Historically, since the end of World War II, gender has factored in subtle ways into the evolution and shaping of Washington’s complicated Middle East policies, particularly in concerns raised among presidents and policymakers about the status of women in certain countries. Iraq offered a unique case, however, as women had enjoyed a far greater amount of freedoms than in other nations in the region. The secular Ba'athist regime had followed its predecessors in Iraq in maintaining a relatively moderate stance on women’s roles in society. Indeed, according to social theory expert Douglas Kellner, it was "one of the few states in the region to give rights to women."<sup>1</sup>Even so, even before the 2003 invasion was underway, the Coalition attempted to leverage the prevailing sentiment within popular media that America would bring its progressive policies on equality with it once the war was won.

Maurice Chittenden of the *Sunday Times* wrote soon after the fall of Baghdad about an "equality envoy" sent to Baghdad, where officials aimed "to help emancipate Iraqi women," by advising "American generals as well as local leaders on the part women should play in the country's reconstruction." This effort towards influencing Western-style equality would be made even though one official noted in the same article that "'a fifth of the seats in Saddam Hussein's parliament were [already] held by women... [and] Iraq had its first woman cabinet minister in the 1920s,'" thus highlighting a tradition of equality. Nevertheless, the Coalition wanted the world to know that the "new Iraq" included participation by women in the rebuilt, (and re-imagined) nation. The official made it clear that the effort wasn't about dictating what role women would

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), 64.

play, but was "about supporting women in developing a voice and making a contribution to rebuilding and governing their country."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, gender-focused priorities had also factored prominently in the 1991 Gulf War's public relations campaign, as new roles of women in the American military – with emphases on empowerment and broadened participation – had been held up as a model to be followed. “The Persian Gulf war has drawn servicewomen closer to the front lines than any other war in America's history,” noted a January 22, 1991 article in *The New York Times*. In fact, the article pointed out, "the Gulf War has blurred the traditional limits placed on women in war zones," as "more than 27,000 women -- about 6 percent of the 460,000 American forces in the gulf region -- are performing a wider variety of jobs than ever before." Even though their roles were restricted and limited at the time to support trades and not direct combat, these changes nevertheless opened up an array of new opportunities for women, and the sheer increase in numbers represented a major slice of the U.S. military.<sup>3</sup>

Predictably, the steadily growing presence of women in the armed forces led to a spike in the attention that women received in the Gulf War's news coverage. A case could be made that this attention was justified, as this did indeed represent an historic turning point for women in the U.S. military. Countless stories focused on the bravery of women who stepped up to face the Saddam Hussein's "tyranny" while leaving their families behind. Stories with headlines such as,

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<sup>2</sup>Maurice Chittenden "Our sex equality envoy in Baghdad", *Sunday Times*, June 15, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Servicewomen; War Puts U.S. Servicewomen Closer Than Ever to Combat", *The New York Times*, January 22, 1991. Also see: Laurence Jolidon, "Females on the front lines: No easy task", *USA TODAY*, December 13, 1990; Susan Ellicott "America faces dilemma over female role", *The Times*, February 1, 1991. Some of the attention was due to the host nation's subjugation of women and the contrast between cultures, which actually served to reinforce the message. See "SAUDIS DIRECT THINLY VEILED ANGER AT FEMALE US TROOPS", *COURIER-MAIL*, n.a., August 17, 1990; "Culture Shock for Soldiers in Saudi Arabia", *The Washington Post*, n.a., August 29, 1990; "LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Women and the Arab Attitude" *The Washington Post*, n.a., September 5, 1990; David B. Ottaway "Combating a Cultural Clash; U.S. Tries to Prevent Friction Between Troops, Saudi Moslems", *The Washington Post*, September 13, 1990.

"Home-front husband worries about wife in war zone," published by *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, marked a dramatic shift in the media's coverage on women in military conflicts.<sup>4</sup> However, they also confirmed that "the dominant framing device used to represent female experience during the Gulf War was, however, to focus on women's roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and girlfriends," as opposed to regular soldiers, according to one study.<sup>5</sup> These new warriors, even though they had actually played a supporting role on the battlefield, made a remarkable impact on the military's public affairs effort, according to a collection of polling data provided in several studies.<sup>6</sup>

By the time the new Iraq War had begun in March 2003, that sentiment had found widespread traction in American society, as it had become widely accepted in the intervening years since the Gulf War that women would again play a critical role on the battlefield. The facts bore this out, according to the *New York Times* just before the invasion, as the number of female personnel had risen drastically:

If the United States goes to war with Iraq, it will do so with a greater percentage of women, in a greater array of positions, than at any other time in the history of the armed services. Between 1948 and 1967, women's presence in the military was capped at 2 percent. But since that policy was reversed, women have, with each boot-camp graduation class, with each list of officer promotions, with each mission, become more and more seamlessly integrated into all the services. At the time of the gulf war, 11 percent of military personnel were women; of the forces that were deployed, more than 40,000, or about 8 percent, were women, many of whom occupied combat positions. Pleased with their performance, the Pentagon dropped many of the remaining restrictions on how and in what positions women could serve. This time around, the ratios are

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<sup>4</sup>Gary Hendricks, "Home-front husband worries about wife in war zone" *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, February 1, 1991.

<sup>5</sup>Jansen, Sue Curry, and Don Sabo. "The sport/war metaphor: Hegemonic masculinity, the Persian Gulf War, and the new world order." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11, no. 1 (1994): 1-17.

<sup>6</sup> W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 182, 180-199; Kellner, 74-76; John R. MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 167.

even greater. The 210,177 women currently in uniform represent almost 15 percent of all active-duty military personnel and may occupy more than 90 percent of military career fields. They are still barred from certain roles -- those with specific physical requirements that, as a practical matter, women tend not to meet -- and from any units primarily involved with front-line battle. But in modern warfare, with its rapidly shifting front lines, or in the global war on terror, where there are no visible front lines at all, that last and most significant distinction is quickly diminishing.<sup>7</sup>

Where the female component of U.S. forces fit perfectly into the revitalization of the American military as the ultimate professional force in the 1991 Gulf War -- the force composed of so many young, willing, and professional service personnel that had seemingly left Vietnam behind -- the 2003 Iraq invasion was unique in the fact that so many embedded reporters were female. In fact, around 85 of the approximately 600 embeds were female, compared to 11 percent in military service. Most importantly, female embeds had access to the fighting units off-limits to female soldiers, which had rarely before allowed women amongst their ranks.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, female embedded reporters were attached to and shared the company of frontline combat units that were(still) strictly off-limits to enlisted and even commissioned female soldiers. This issue was present in media reports of the day.<sup>9</sup>

The experiences of female reporters attached to troops that had never before been the subject of a woman's point of view or scrutiny are invaluable and offer a unique opportunity to analyze the Iraq War through a unique lens not available in previous wars. Rick Atkinson

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<sup>7</sup> "Warrior Women", The New York Times, n.a., February 16, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 85 female reporters were embedded in Iraq, according to Sylvester & Huffman, 125. Indeed, female reporters have accompanied combat units in the past, just in smaller numbers. The experiences of iconic reporters such as Martha Gellhorn, Dickey Chapelle, and Gloria Emerson, especially, point to a tradition of female reporters successfully seeking out the intimate details of past wars. See Dickey Chapelle, *What's a Woman Doing Here?: A Reporter's Report on Herself* (Morrow, 1962); Martha Gellhorn, *The face of war*, (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988); and Gloria Emerson, *Winners & Losers: Battles, Retreats, Gains, Losses, and Ruins from the Vietnam War (reissue)*, (WW Norton & Company), 2014.

<sup>9</sup>For a period piece on the pervasiveness of gender roles in the US military, see Robin Gerber, "Don't send military women to back of the troop train", *USA TODAY*, September 23, 2002.

explained that “no journalist could be excluded from the frontline because of gender; if a female reporter wanted to live with a rifle company, so be it, even though by law female soldiers could not serve in such units.”<sup>10</sup> Bryan Whitman, one of the principle Pentagon architects of the embedding program, confirmed as much in a postwar interview. "We were completely gender blind," he said in *Reporting from the Front*, the oral history collection. Whitman specifically cited Katherine Skiba's experience, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter, in his praise for gender neutrality within the embedding program: "We had nothing but positive experiences with the process... [Skiba] had a great experience during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her unit was completely gender blind to her, and that's the way it should be."<sup>11</sup>

Several female embeds' accounts, of course, offer far more nuance and detail than that assessment.<sup>12</sup> Skiba's experience -- detailed in her battlefield memoir *Sister in the Band of Brothers* -- for instance, was rife with examples of the interplay regarding gender in the United States Army.<sup>13</sup> Her account confirmed that, in fact, not much had changed at all. Very early on, she was reminded of prevalent gender issues, as female reporters were segregated into their own living quarters from the very first day of their bootcamp training. She, and others, fought every step of the way to have their gender play no part in doing their jobs. For instance, she, like most

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<sup>10</sup> Atkinson, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Sylvester & Huffman eds., 47.

<sup>12</sup>For intimate, postwar accounts from female embeds, see "Sarah Dodd, KTVT-TV (CBS)" in Sylvester, Judith L. and Suzanne Huffman. *Reporting from the Front: The Media and the Military*. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, 125-128; "Chereyl Diaz Meyer, Dallas Morning News" in Sylvester, Judith L. and Suzanne Huffman. *Reporting from the Front: The Media and the Military*. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, 91-97; "Where the Boys Are: Leaf-Chronicle (Clarksville, Tennessee) military reporter Chantal Escoto" in Katovsky, Bill and Timothy Carlson. *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq - an Oral History*. United States: The Lyons Press, 2005, 127-133; "Maintaining a Family Legacy: Fox News Producer and Reporter Maya Zumwalt" in Katovsky, Bill and Timothy Carlson. *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq - an Oral History*. United States: The Lyons Press, 2005, 347-353. For a more general survey of embedded reporters' experiences with women on the battlefield during the invasion of Iraq, see Atkinson, 24, 81; Ayers, 191; Katovsky ed., 12, 121, 127, 161, 237; North, 189; Poole, 39-40; Skiba, 4-5, 10, 47, 55, 117, 148-149, 150-153, 172; Sylvester & Huffman eds., 91-97, 47, 56, 125-126; Wright 21, 205, 222; Zucchini, 166-167.

<sup>13</sup> For Skiba's views on gender issues in the Iraq invasion, see Skiba, 4-5, 10, 47, 55, 117, 148-149, 150-153, 172.



of her fellow female correspondents, refused to wear makeup and repeatedly mocked the military handlers' special treatment of women; and especially took exception to a documentary film crew following their training and focussing on their presence in the male-dominated world of the Army. "It puzzled me that they found woman correspondents training for war so fascinating," she wrote in her memoir. "I didn't think I was special. I had been in some hot spots around the world, but so had many others in the class."<sup>14</sup> Skiba's war experience was much the same as her prewar contact with the Army, she wrote, as the official policy was indeed "gender blind" to her; but the reality of a woman eating, sleeping, travelling and experiencing war with young, male troops in combat was apparent.

Skiba, the only female embed to publish an Iraq war memoir, found that the military version of "gender blindness" made living conditions in combat even more uncomfortable. She was alarmed to find that the military's sleeping quarters in the field were co-ed -- the opposite of the boot camp experience -- and that she "was pitifully out of date and out of step [when she] imagined that women had separate sleeping quarters in the field."<sup>15</sup> She argues that the military had tried a bit too hard to highlight their efforts at gender equality back home. She did, however, make it clear that the only way a reporter could find acceptance among troops was to gain their trust and respect, and her gender actually deepened the respect soldiers felt toward her. In particular, they held her tenacity in high regard, as she proved to be one of the few embeds who did not quit after a close brush with death under missile attack. They eventually refrained from calling her "Reporter Lady," and she received "new nicknames like 'Zena Warrior Princess.'"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4-5, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 117.

Indeed, Skiba had learned a lot about what motivated these soldiers in combat. For instance, she found out that it was masculine traits such as courage and the adrenaline rush from combat that mixed to "transform [her too] into the woman [she] knew only on occasion: bold and brave and even cunning." By risking her life alongside these soldiers, and toughing out the harsh desert environment with the troops, she gained greater acceptance and even forged friendships. "I wore my 'Action Girl Reporter' face," she wrote, "discretely keeping from my supercharged, testosterone-fuelled companions my duller, grayer alter ego, the Suburban Virginia Housewife."<sup>17</sup>

Numerous embeds found joining young men in combat to had been empowering experience. In fact, most accounts of female reporters shared a common theme of wanting to prove that they were up to the task. "Being a woman, I also thought it was important to show that women can handle the same assignments as men, even in dangerous situations," said TV reporter Sarah Dodd in an interview after returning from Iraq.<sup>18</sup>

However, not all female reporters found the experience uplifting. The ordeal of sustained, bloody frontline combat challenged women as profoundly as their male counterparts. Chantal Escoto, a small town reporter whose beat was the local army base, lobbied her editors for the Iraq assignment, looking for an exciting story. She was actually a former member of the army, but her five years of service were (typically) made up in support and logistics. As an embed, however, she had been welcomed into a unit where she was "the only woman among 700 guys." In her postwar interview, she recounted that the soldiers "didn't treat me any different, but in a way I wish they did." Escoto, 40, had a rather harrowing experience amongst the young male

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 149. Skiba recounted several instances where sexist attitudes and issues were more pervasive. See 150-151

<sup>18</sup> Sylvester & Huffman 125-126.

soldiers, who openly discussed sexual topics and other uncomfortable subjects in her presence. She argued that she became very close to the soldiers, even a confidant to many, as they felt they could share their deepest fears and emotions with her. She noted that they would never share these thoughts with their fellow warriors, as emotions other than violent ones were spurned in the masculine world of the combat arms. Even though the soldiers called her "mom," she argued that her place as a female embed actually allowed her to get closer to her subjects -- as was Skiba's experience -- and, conversely, the front lines as well. "We saw a lot of fighting," she noted, before explaining how the shock and horror of her combat experiences left her with psychological scars that have yet to heal, just like the male soldiers she covered.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that so many embeds experienced combat firsthand in conflicts where women combatants weren't allowed is noteworthy, and stands as another testament to the program's value. Escoto's experience was much like Cheryl Diaz Meyer's, the photographer from the *Dallas Morning News*. She was told by a female Public Affairs Officer charged with organizing her assignment, that "if you were a woman Marine, you would be making history. There are no women who will be as forward in battle as you will be." She too had reservations about the rules for privacy and other comfort issues in the field, but had "learned that I was going to have to make it up as I went along because there were no other women." The fact that she was the only woman in the unit, at the front, had an effect on the Marines as well. According to her postwar interview in *Reporting from the Front*, there were several instances where the soldiers risked their lives to protect her. "I was a woman there, and I think there was a real sense that they wanted to protect me as they would their own womenfolk."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Katovsky ed., 129-132, 132-133.

<sup>20</sup>Sylvester & Huffman eds., 92, 96.

Without question, complex gender dynamics shaped the work of female reporters in Iraq. Paradoxically, most engagements involving female soldiers on the battlefield were reported on by male journalists. Direct examples of women in combat appeared in embeds' postwar accounts. David Zucchini, for instance, told a story about a female soldier in the middle of the pitched battle for Baghdad. The embed noticed that a wounded male soldier had refused orders from the female sergeant who outranked him. She had ordered him to evacuate to receive medical attention. "[He] would have nothing to do with her." After the female sergeant had asked the Commanding Officer to help her force the private to obey her orders. In response, the private was then told to "go with this young lady and do what she says." The episode is one that spoke to several gender-related themes, as the wounded soldier refused to leave his buddies behind, and kept fighting, even when grievously wounded. Perhaps most significantly, he had displayed a propensity for self-sacrifice while refusing the orders of a woman.<sup>21</sup>

A chasm existed between the reality of women's roles in the battles for Iraq on the one hand, and the claims of military public relations and even news accounts on the other. Walter Rodgers, the famous CNN war correspondent confirmed that "in the combat units of the Cavalry, there [were] no women." Women were mainly absent in his war memoir, except for a story about women taking more than their share of time at an army shower station that he and the Cavalry soldiers had waited weeks to use. The story is rife with gender classifications and the sexism still pervasive in the U.S. military in 2003.<sup>22</sup> Oliver North, Vietnam veteran, infamous Regan-era Marine Colonel, and embed for Fox News, explained that "current law forbids putting women into combat units," but "that doesn't mean that young American women aren't in harm's way." In

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<sup>21</sup>Zucchini, 167, 166-168. Gender issues like the role of masculine identifiers and constructs within fighting units are explored below.

<sup>22</sup>Rodgers 41, pp 105.

a moving example, North recounted the actions he witnessed of a young female helicopter door gunner, who bravely -- and capably, according to North -- attacked enemy troops in a heated battle. North concluded that, "it's fair to say that this war couldn't have been fought without the fairer sex."<sup>23</sup> Even though examples of women on the battlefield existed, much more pervasive were the roles that gender definitions -- informed by masculine stereotypes and identifiers -- played in combat units during the invasion of Iraq. Probing these dynamics sheds light on crucial concepts of masculinity that assumed a central place in the Iraq War.

### **Macho Men, Heroes & Cowboys: 'Hegemonic Masculine Identities'**

Perhaps the best way to introduce the gender-charged, intensely masculine world of combat in the Iraq invasion is through an example provided by one of those eighty-five female embeds. Katherine Skiba's memoir offers a compelling account that confronts a wide range of gender issues, although the prescient point is that so little has actually changed by the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq -- not only in terms of the acceptance and roles of women on the battlefield -- but more specifically, the roles defined for men in combat. Skiba herself admitted that she actually agreed with some of the stereotypes, and as she admitted the term used to tease her by her military hosts, "dizzy blond," was actually appropriate. Not because she was unintelligent or needy, she argues: "At first I found that offensive, but maybe he had a point. What civilian woman would march into war -- voluntarily and unarmed -- if she wasn't mildly insane."<sup>24</sup> Echoes of this line of thinking could be found in certain media coverage at the time, perhaps most notably from sources outside the United States.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as noted above, the controversy

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<sup>23</sup>North, xii, 189.

<sup>24</sup>Skiba, 150, 149-151.

<sup>25</sup>Natasha Walter, "Women at war: Traditionally, women in wartime were seen as victims. But with so many involved in Iraq as soldiers and politicians, has that changed?" *The Guardian*, April 17, 2003; Ian Bruce, "Women find army is still a man's world; Prejudice against female soldiers runs as deep as ever" *The Herald* (Glasgow), February 5, 2003; Nicholas D. Kristof, "A Woman's Place" *The New York Times*, April 25, 2003. It must

surrounding women as soldiers had never really ended, as Martin van Creveld's 2002 book *Men, Women & War: Do Women Belong in the Front Line?* demonstrated. The debate had clearly already been framed for the war to come.<sup>26</sup>

Gender constructs that emerged out of the hyper-masculinity so ubiquitous in the American armed forces remained a critical factor for soldiers in combat units in 2003, when the invading armies of the Coalition brought hundreds of reporters along for the ride. Several theories aimed to explain the phenomenon. A study published in 1994 entitled "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities" by distinguished sociologist David Morgan, offered a good example:

Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity. In statues, heroic paintings, comic books, and popular films the gendered connotations are inescapable. The stance, the facial expressions, and the weapons clearly connote aggression, courage, a capacity for violence, and, sometimes, a willingness for sacrifice. The uniform absorbs individuals into a generalized and timeless masculinity while also connoting a control of emotion and a subordination to a larger rationality. Such links are very widespread and deeply embedded. The gendered associations of war and soldiering have been, at least until very recently, one of the most abiding features of the division of labor... As in other aspects of gendered divisions of labor, such expectations and prohibitions define not only who *does* what but who *is* what; the very nature of gender itself seems to be forged and reproduced in such socially constructed but very widespread and deeply pervasive divisions.<sup>27</sup>

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also be said that the media in the United States focused more on the contributions that women made to the war effort and the great strides towards equality, as detailed previously.

<sup>26</sup>Martin Van Creveld, *Men, women and war* (Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2001). The military historian argued at the time that women are less physically capable, more injury-prone, given more lenient conditions, and are disastrous for morale and military preparedness.

<sup>27</sup>Morgan, David HJ. "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities" in Brod, Harry, and Michael Kaufman, eds. *Theorizing masculinities*. Vol. 5. Sage, 1994.

Morgan framed the issues of gender and the military within a division of labour and masculinity context; one directly related to combat experiences in the Iraq invasion.

Morgan was not alone, as several studies pointed to the fact that masculinity has played a central role in military society; and in fact, it informs ideas, decisions, and actions taken on the battlefield. "Military service offers men unique resources for the construction of a masculine identity," Ramon Hinojosa wrote in his 2010 article in *The Journal of Men's Studies*, "Doing hegemony: Military, men, and constructing a hegemonic masculinity." Among these resources were "emotional control, overt heterosexual desire, physical fitness, self-discipline, self-reliance, the willingness to use aggression and physical violence, and risk-taking; qualities tightly aligned with the military." Importantly, he also argued that "identities are actively constructed as part of an interaction strategy that uses available symbolic and material resources," which, in the case of soldiers in the invasion of Iraq, included the stresses and motivations of combat. "The military offers the promise of being able to construct and claim a hegemonic masculine identity by making the necessary resources institutionally available."<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, a related article appeared, perhaps coincidentally, in the *Courier Mail* in Queensland, Australia, on March 29, 2003 that spoke to the role of masculinity in the war that was raging in Iraq:

One of the reasons for the success of the West has been its success in finding ways to channel testosterone into useful activities. When you think about it, many of the features of our society serve to defuse male aggression. Take team sports, for instance. Playing them teaches young men to co-operate, to follow rules, and accept the referee's decision. Following a team allows boys and men to indulge their penchant for competition in a generally harmless manner. Another channel

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<sup>28</sup> This contemporary study delves into the ways in which gender constructions shape the identities of individuals within military organizations. The group dynamics of combat factor into this equation. See Hinojosa, Ramon. "Doing hegemony: Military, men, and constructing a hegemonic masculinity." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 18, no. 2 (2010): 179-194. For further reading on the issue, see a pioneering study on the topic: Arkin, William, and Lynne R. Dobrofsky. "Military socialization and masculinity." *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no. 1 (1978): 151-168.

for aggression is the business world, where men can build forces, invade, destroy and retreat, using companies rather than guns and missiles. Perhaps most effectively of all, our legal and political systems enable men to be aggressive within formal structures that ensure their fighting does not break out into violence. In many ways, the history of the West is the story of how men moved from bloodthirsty violence, duelling, gang warfare, civil war and revolution to an acceptance that, for the good of the wider society, fights should occur in the courts or in parliament. Of course the fights still occur -- testosterone is part of nature... The fact that the West has been so successful in suppressing many of the damaging effects of masculinity does not mean that masculinity has disappeared. The violent feelings of men that for years have been played out in video games, business deals, the courts and parliament are still there, and have been let loose in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>29</sup>

Taking these themes, and Morgan and Hinojosa's "resource models," into account, and utilizing embedded reporters' postwar reflections, it is possible to delve into the secretive world of masculinity-informed identities in the Iraq invasion. Indeed, those "qualities tightly aligned with the military," according to Hinojosa, align, importantly, with Morgan's emphasis on aggression, courage, capacity for violence, and willingness for sacrifice. Indeed, soldiers in the battle for Iraq often did practice these tenets, and luckily there were hundreds of reporters around to observe them during the Iraq invasion. Gender roles and masculinity featured prominently into a wide range of battlefield experiences, leaving a profound mark on the group dynamic and the formation of masculine identities.

Many of these constructions are unique to the combat soldier, according to Oma Sasson-Levy, in her 2002 article on the Israeli army titled, "Constructing identities at the margins: Masculinities and citizenship in the Israeli army." Sasson-Levy noted a further division of labor within the military, between combatants and non-combatants, based upon the divide between the combat arms and a supporting cast of supply clerks, mechanics and cooks for example. "Unlike

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<sup>29</sup>Michael Duffy, "Western man's secret weapon let out of the bag", *Courier Mail* (Queensland, Australia), March 29, 2003.



the combat soldier, the masculine identities of soldiers in blue-collar jobs are not anchored in their military service."<sup>30</sup>

In the military culture of the Iraq War era, such attributes as aggressiveness, risk taking, a propensity for physical violence, and a willingness to sacrifice, were all essential ingredients in the dominant definition of courage, and were seen as essential components in the concept of 'heroism.'

### **Heroes, Courage and the Willingness for Sacrifice**

Individuals in battle do extraordinary things, although many intimate details of battlefield heroics often escape the traditional narratives on war. This was the case in the Iraq invasion. Even though, for the first time in history, hundreds of reporters rode into battle in Iraq with the invasion forces, wartime reports of heroics often proved superficial, even one-dimensional. Embeds indeed lived and breathed the war up close for weeks and months on end, and were privy to experiential and intimate details from which our understanding of the conflict in Iraq -- and modern warfare more generally -- can greatly benefit. However, the time and space limitations inherent in the embedding program intervened in the quality of coverage. Take, for example, the article by Ron Martz, "I owe these heroes my life", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, from April 6, 2003. As cited previously, the article offered a harrowing tale of combat, but lacked details that cast the troops in the battle in a conventionally heroic light. Sure, they were under fire, and Martz would have likely died without their protection. But in his view, they were simply doing their jobs. Did they act in a way that showed willingness to sacrifice

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<sup>30</sup>Sasson-Levy, Orna. "Constructing identities at the margins: Masculinities and citizenship in the Israeli army." *The Sociological Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2002): 357-383. For a definition of the term REMF, an acronym for "Rear-echelon motherfucker", the derisive slang term used by US and British troops for a soldier far from the front line, especially during the Vietnam War, see Albert T. Lawrence, *Crucible Vietnam: Memoir of an Infantry Lieutenant* (McFarland, 2009), pp 101-104 and Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat trauma and the undoing of character* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 150.

themselves? Perhaps. But the point is that the term “hero” -- built upon the foundation and fabric of masculinity -- was bandied about during the war in media accounts more freely than within the combat units.<sup>31</sup>

So what did soldiers themselves consider heroic? According to John Koopman, who covered intense combat with the Marines, "It's wrong to call every soldier or Marine a hero. That word should have a higher meaning than simply serving your country in a time of war." He argued that the resource models are true; that courageous men willing to risk their lives for their country indeed represent the majority of American combat soldiers, but "there are also cowards, slackers, petty thieves, and homicidal maniacs."<sup>32</sup>

A case of those not directly in a position to define “hero” was exemplified in an article headlined, "Class welcomes back their hero," that appeared immediately after the invasion, in the *News-Journal* (Daytona Beach, Florida). It was about returning soldiers visiting schools. "The children were thrilled to shake the hand of their hero, who came by to say thanks for providing a morale boost to him and his friends, some of whom died in combat," the story said. The soldier had told the kids how much their letters and gifts meant to the troops while in Iraq "facing sudden death on a constant basis." "One soldier was actually even "lucky to escape injury when a rocket landed in his encampment." The children, "exposed to the most accessible and graphic media coverage of any ground war in history... asked articulate questions."<sup>33</sup>

Another clear example of hero worship during the Iraq invasion was the controversy surrounding Private Jessica Lynch, the young truck driver who was captured, held as a prisoner,

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<sup>31</sup>Ron Martz, "I owe these heroes my life", *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, from April 6, 2003.

<sup>32</sup>Koopman, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Aldrich, "Class welcomes back their hero" *News-Journal* (Daytona Beach, Florida), October 30, 2003.

and rescued during the war.<sup>34</sup> "Rescued POW Jessica Lynch fought desperately to avoid capture by the Iraqis - but ran out of ammo," one story read. Jessica had "shot several of the enemy despite two broken arms and a fractured leg. An official said: 'She was fighting to the death. She did not want to be taken alive.'" The American public learned that "her courage was revealed in intercepted Iraqi communications."<sup>35</sup> The story sparked a sensation, with anecdotes of her fighting heroically to the last bullet before being captured taking centre stage. She was lauded as a hero for actions that turned out to be greatly exaggerated.<sup>36</sup> Many news outlets made these same types of generalizations about soldiers killed in the war, the exact issue that prompted John Koopman's cautionary note.<sup>37</sup>

Postwar accounts from embeds of combat offer a probing exploration of the human condition, and allow for a cultural and social examination of actions widely regarded as heroic at the time. For instance, Oliver North shared several accounts in his memoir of examples he thought constituted individual acts of courage and sacrifice. Even though he acknowledged caring deeds in war, such as Marines sharing the comforts of home with their comrades in a manner viewed as heroic, he reserved the masculine version for the real sacrifices he witnessed.<sup>38</sup> He recounted a young Marine who had witnessed the death of one of his mentors, a Marine Gunnery Sergeant, usually the oldest and most experienced member of a unit. As the older veteran warrior lay dying from wounds received in a desperate battle, the younger Marine, also

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<sup>34</sup> For two classics on hero worship, see Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-worshi* Vol. 12 (Chapman and Hall, 1869), and Dixon Wecter, *The hero in America: A chronicle of hero-worshi* Vol. 78 (University of Michigan Press, 1963).

<sup>35</sup>"JESS FIGHTING TO THE DEATH" *The Sun*, n.a., April 4, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> "Lynch deserves high honor", n.a., *USA TODAY*, April 9, 2003; Sharon Waxman, "Hollywood Zeroes In On U.S.'s New Hero" *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2003;

<sup>37</sup> The case was especially telling when dealing with soldiers killed in Iraq, as the papers used the term "hero" much more freely. For examples see "WAR HERO COMES HOME - BROOKLYN SON KILLED IN IRAQ", *The New York Post*, April 12, 2003; "Farewell to a father and a hero", n.a., *Yorkshire Evening Post*, April 12, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> North, iv.

wounded, bestowed the title on him, as he had saved lives in his death. "He was my gunny," the young Marine told North through tears as they watched his mentor die. "He was a really good man... He was a hero. Not just for the way he died. He was a hero for the way he lived."<sup>39</sup> North accounted for several other actions that were clearly based upon self-sacrifice, like that of the Sergeant who threw himself on a grenade to save his troops, taking the brunt of the explosion and dying in the process.<sup>40</sup> The Marine's selfless act was one of many that influenced North to "get this tribute to these young American heroes into print."<sup>41</sup>

Many embeds shared combat experiences in which they did not necessarily apply the term hero, but which fell into the conventional definition of heroic at the time. CBS News embed David Axelrod told of a story where a competing TV news truck, from ABC, rushed to the aid of his stricken vehicle, under fire, in the middle of a firefight on a bridge in Nasiriyah. The action gained the embeds some respect for their daring, and for their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their colleagues from a rival media outlet. "We were never so happy to have ABC there behind us!" Axelrod said after the war.<sup>42</sup>

Many instances of what embeds saw as heroic were those that helped protect the reporters themselves. Walter Rodgers of CNN told a story of a cold night of intense firefights and a lack of sleep. When he was informed of an Iraqi attack on his news truck that neither he nor his crew had witnessed or known about, he personally recommended the Medal of Honour for the young soldier that had saved him and his crew. Following the event, the Commanding Officer actually nominated the soldier for a Bronze Star, a much lower honour, and actually withheld the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 282-283.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>42</sup> Katovsky ed., P 26.

"additional citation for valor," perhaps offering an example of the contrast between what embeds considered heroic and what the army did.<sup>43</sup>

A central theme in Rodgers' coverage was the bravery of the embeds, a concept he explained that he "deliberately and consistently understated [his] live reporting under fire." Coming from a veteran war correspondent, this is telling, even if the personal flattery seems obvious. In fact, Rodgers was bestowed the title himself, according to his memoir. "'You were a true hero for sticking with us through it all,'" a Sergeant wrote in a letter after the battle.<sup>44</sup> Rodgers, however, did not compare his bravery to that of the troops, but did describe their stoic bravery in terms that define hegemonic masculine identities.<sup>45</sup>

Reinforcing those identities were the officers tasked with keeping morale high. Rick Atkinson, travelling alongside the generals, made note of several exchanges between commanders and frontline troops that extolled the virtues of heroism and bravery. In several instances, Lieutenant General David Petraeus, Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, referred to his troops as "heroes" when addressing them. "'Okay heroes, keep up the good work,'" he said in one instance. "'How you feelin' here heroes,'" he said in another. They also used the liberation angle as a motivator, and the hero dynamic was used as a rallying call: "'You have liberated Al Hilla. We just rode through the whole town and they're cheering.'"<sup>46</sup>

Many descriptions of acts celebrated at the time as heroic were simply those of soldiers bearing down and putting their lives on the line; simply put, service viewed as courageous. Walter Rodgers witnessed a group of soldiers standing guard, cut off on the other side of a bridge behind enemy lines, enduring bitter cold for an entire night. That, he believed, was an act of

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<sup>43</sup>Rodgers, 66-67, 67.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 77-80.

<sup>46</sup>Atkinson, 242, 274.

bravery that he and his crew had declined to participate in "for reasons of cowardice and discomfort." Indeed, Rodgers was one of many embeds that grew to respect the troops they covered so much that they themselves used the term. "There are far more heroes than I have been able to compress in this volume," he said in his memoir.<sup>47</sup>

Several accounts by embeds sought to fashion a definition of true heroism in combat. One such instance was witnessed by Bing West, the former Marine General who rode along with the invasion force as an embed. In a ferocious firefight, Lieutenant Jordan, an officer "highly respected by his weapons platoon," had been killed by an incoming mortar round. Lieutenant Reid and three others nearby were wounded:

His right arm dangling and full of shrapnel, Reid was trying to move an Amtrac back as an ambulance when he was hit again by shrapnel, this time in the face. Staggering and with his vision blurring, Reid knew he had to take care of the wounded before he passed out.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the embeds' accounts focussed on the extraordinary actions of individuals. Most notably, they shared intimate details of how specific soldiers fit into the battles they observed. Numerous stories focused on individuals who risked their lives to save a friend. Everyday occurrences of actions that tested the courage of soldiers did not always end with positive stories that emphasized themes of heroism. However, a great deal of coverage included masculine themes of masculinity that influenced combat actions. A perfect example of this is the awarding of the Purple Heart, the U.S. military's medal for wounds sustained in battle. In one instance, Atkinson recorded a speech by General Petraeus that helped define what that willingness for sacrifice meant to the soldiers on the ground, and what the medal represented to the institution:

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<sup>47</sup>Rodgers, 86, xiii.

<sup>48</sup> West, 39.

A hundred comrades stood at attention in the scorching sun as the medals were pinned on. Petraeus strode to the front of the ranks. "There is no greater commitment than that which is made by putting the American infantryman on the ground," he said. "We're here to honor two soldiers who are being awarded the most noble of decorations our country has. You've really walked point for our nation in this particular battle and this part of the campaign."<sup>49</sup>

### **Macho Men: Risk-Taking, Aggression & the Capacity for Violence**

"Walking point" for the nation was a way of saying that these soldiers were different from the people back home; viewed as brave and skilled, they took the fight directly to the enemy, and, in so doing, risked their lives for their comrades, and their country.<sup>50</sup> Embeds shared a multitude of accounts of troops demonstrating these masculine identities in pronounced ways that reflected risk-taking, aggression, and, especially, a capacity for violence.<sup>51</sup>

An enduring facet of war stories is the concept of bravado, another masculine trait that embeds detected on the Iraq battlefield. The actions that individuals took in response to the macho identity that had been constructed depicting the "valuable" soldier is one that has lasted for millennia. The quest for glory can take several forms, including those actions defined purely heroic at the time, but can also rest upon the individual's preconceived notions of his or her own identity, and indeed their motivation to kill. This reality is no different when we examine the battlefield actions of individuals in Iraq, where these "macho" men and "cowboys" often rode roughshod over towns and villages filled with enemies and innocents alike. The willingness to

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<sup>49</sup> Atkinson, 239.

<sup>50</sup> For an explanation of "walking point" see James E. Westheider, *Fighting in Vietnam: The Experiences of the US Soldier* (New York: Stackpole Books, 2011), 126.

<sup>51</sup> For a survey of themes associated with masculinity in combat units found in postwar accounts, see Atkinson, 72; Ayers, 183, 228, 234, 243, 253-254, 265-267, 269-270; Katovsky ed., 3-4, 9, 13, 37, 44, 48, 50-55, 131, 144, 259; Koopman, 15, 22, 28-29, 56, 72, 86, 92, 157-158, 181, 184-189, 262; Poole, 15, 99, 191; North, 34, 95, 98, 136, 220, 262; Reuters eds., 5, 7, 38, 61, 65; Rodgers, 22, 52, 63-66, 69, 72, 79, 86, 109; Skiba, 50-51, 117, 148-149; Sylvester & Huffman, 20, 93, 118; West, 2, 10-12, 39, 60, 83, 180, 197, 217, 242; Wright, 5, 7, 9, 21, 42, 76, 108, 259; Zucchini, 91, 109, 156, 329.

use overwhelming force and firepower assumes a central place in the narrative fashioned by embeds, and thus shaping the public's view of this war, at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

"Enjoying danger and taking risks seem characteristic of some aggressive, male personality types," correspondent Walter Rodgers wrote when reflecting on the soldiers he covered. He defined this as a trait that necessary to conduct work that involved killing, and sometimes, being killed.<sup>52</sup> Oliver Poole reflected on his personal thoughts while preparing to enter the Iraqi battlefield: "Though I did not like to admit it to anyone, a part of me wanted to test myself by seeing how I would react under fire.... I suspect almost all men secretly wonder how they would behave if they found themselves in the midst of a battle, that most extreme and masculine of all arenas. It would be the ultimate examination of my mettle."<sup>53</sup> In this instance, the embedded reporter found out he lacked those masculine traits that experienced and trained soldiers displayed to him on a regular basis while under fire. "I discovered how I would react the first time I came directly under fire," he candidly confessed. "There was none of the hoped-for heroism." He further admitted that the combat environment had actually caused a severe "shock that had rendered [him] immobile."<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps the machismo that soldiers routinely sought to demonstrate to embeds was indeed unique to their jobs, and to the time and place. Indeed, stories of soldiers taking wild risks, and acting with sheer recklessness in battle, were legion in the accounts of embeds who witnessed sustained combat during the invasion. The "macho" persona was identified by embeds as systemic, and it was explicitly encouraged by military leaders in the field. *Detroit News* reporter John Bebow recalled one particular Colonel who gained the respect of his men, and the embed, with his derring-do approach to operations. His bravado was centred on masculine

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<sup>52</sup> Rodgers, 52, 50-54.

<sup>53</sup> Poole, 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 99, 101.



constructions that his troops respected, such as courage and a capacity for violence. Even though Bebow was initially assigned to a rear area unit, the Colonel had invited him to "come on up and see the actual war," Bebow explained in a postwar interview: "Colonel Pomfret was like a lighter shade of Colonel Kilgore from *Apocalypse Now*." Pomfret's style was one that sought out wild adventures, and he demonstrated traits tailored to suit his tough-guy Marine persona. He was "tough as they come," Bebow said. He was "just rock hard as a Marine is supposed to be. Had a real hunger for action." Such a portrayal dovetailed with what Bebow noted as the prevailing sentiment amongst Marines: that the mission was theirs because they were viewed as the ideal force to deal death to America's enemies as "vengeance for 9/11."<sup>55</sup>

Poole had a similar experience with a young Captain, who earned a reputation as a ferocious warrior in combat; taking risks and gaining the respect of his troops by acting with macho bravado in the face of great peril. The troops were all "talking of their surprise at discovering the extent of the captain's ferociousness in battle," Poole recounted. The embed, an Englishman, was "amused to hear one soldier attributing it to him playing 'that rugby shit'. Even for soldiers, playing a contact sport without padding was a macho folly that deserved to be respected." In the same way, the troops respected their comrades when they acted with such folly, risking it all in wild shootouts with the enemy.<sup>56</sup>

All of this, of course, ran counter to the ways in which the classic American war hero acted in battle, according to James Gibson in *Warrior Dreams*. Gibson framed how the American hero was supposed to act: "American soldiers never fight for the sheer joy of fighting. they are at war to stop the enemy and to establish or preserve the sacred order."<sup>57</sup> But it is evident, from

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<sup>55</sup> John Bebow, "Charging into Bad-Guy Country with Custer," in Katovsky , 3, 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Poole, 191, 190-192.

<sup>57</sup> James William Gibson, *Warrior dreams: Violence and manhood in post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 22.

these firsthand accounts, that the American soldier in the Iraq invasion acted in contrast to the image constructed in the media in the run-up to the invasion, and in the prevailing popular imagination. The regular fighting men, or “grunts,” especially, routinely accepted and embraced the dominant masculine role assigned to them in the conflict.<sup>58</sup>

Military leaders in the field's influence on the troops in Iraq is defined above, but it could be argued that they acted in accordance with one of their primary functions: motivating troops to fight. Motivating young men to kill, and risk their lives and those of their comrades in the most trying and dangerous situations imaginable, takes more than leading by example, and was supported by extolling the virtues of the masculine combat soldier. After all, these were professional soldiers and Marines; who had volunteered for a new army that promised action, adventure, and victory. *Rolling Stone* correspondent Evan Wright had a deep and intimate experience with these troops. Indeed, the Recon Marines to which he was attached were held up as the cream of the crop: elite special forces soldiers that experienced pain and suffering on a regular basis. Their training guaranteed their toughness, as only a tiny percentage of Marines -- tough soldiers to be sure -- were selected to join the recon, and even fewer survived the brutal training.<sup>59</sup> Once they did, most fully embraced the role of tough guy cowboy warriors, within a group distinguished by masculine traits. The only thing left to prove was their ability to cope with combat. Wright's account *Generation Kill* could serve as a case study in this regard. However, for the purposes of this study, a few important examples from his fascinating inside

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<sup>58</sup>For further reading on this see David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> These Marines were indoctrinated and trained through a predominantly violent culture, in order to completely transform into killers, according to Wright's account. see Wright, 9-11. For further reading on this training, see Fred J. Pushies, *Marine Force Recon* (Zenith Imprint, 2003), especially chapter 4, "Selection and Training", 59-75.

look at combat Marines will suffice. These Marines had no problem with killing, and were known as "the Marine corps' cowboys."<sup>60</sup>

Wright pointed to these Marines as conditioned men with one goal: to kill the enemy and go home. "We're like America's little pit bull. They beat it, starve it, mistreat it, and once in a while let it out to attack somebody," one Marine told him.<sup>61</sup> In a telling tribute to the formation of the "tough guy" identity in the actions of these elite Marines, Wright told of how they referred to the "extra comforts" of equipment like sweaters, foam sleeping pads, and "even cold medicine" as "snivel gear."<sup>62</sup> It shocked Wright to discover the level to which the reputation, and in turn, collective respect of the group rested upon each individual's masculine identity. "You don't want to ever show fear or back down, because you don't want to be embarrassed in front of the pack," Colbert, a revered and thoughtful Sergeant, said.<sup>63</sup> After observing these men in sustained and bloody combat, Wright noted that "what unites them is almost a reckless desire to test themselves in the most extreme circumstances...Their highest aspiration is self-sacrifice over self-preservation."<sup>64</sup>

These Marines' capacity for violence and their sheer aggression shone through in Wright's memoir. In one instance, he spoke with a young Marine who offered thoughtful impressions on the war, killing, and how the Marines worked:

When I run into Fawcett a short while later, he greets me with a blisshed-out, asram grin. After weeks of complaining about the war, fretting about its moral implications, he enthuses about slaughtering squads of uniformed Iraqi soldiers in the fields with the nearly 250 Mark-19 rounds he fired. "I feel invincible," he tells me. "I had rounds skipping in the dirt right next to me, a BMP

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<sup>60</sup> Wright, 7, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21, 21-22.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 24.

shooting straight at us, Cobras lighting stuff up all around, a five-hundred-pound bomb blow up almost on top of us, and nothing hit me."<sup>65</sup>

"You need psychos like us," one Marine said, although with a qualifier attached, perhaps speaking to the societal and engrained culture of violence in the combat arms: "I'm not a hero... Guys like me are just a necessary part of things." Indeed, many embeds believed that the exhilaration of combat and the fraternity of front-line troops became enticing. Perhaps the key is that most embeds began to develop an understanding of that macho attitude, and how it manifested itself in battle. Walter Rodgers discussed the experience of persistent battle and its ultimate influence on his own bravado: "We had become almost *blasé*," he wrote in his memoir, referring to the ways in which he and his TV crew walked amongst the death, destruction, and danger.<sup>66</sup> Bebow, the *Detroit News* reporter, admitted that the experience was addictive, and when he returned to civilian life, he felt an "itch to return."<sup>67</sup> There is much to learn in the ways that being embedded in combat units at war transformed these participant-observers. The impact on the troops proved severe, as well. According to Wright, they would "struggle with fear, confusion, questions over war crimes and leaders whose competence they [didn't] trust. Above all, they [would] kill a lot of people. A few of those deaths the men [would] no doubt think about and perhaps regret for the rest of their lives."<sup>68</sup>

### **Military Hierarchy and Decision-Making: Officers, 'Grunts', Leadership & SNAFUs**

Yet another important layer in understanding military culture at the beginning of the century, along with gender constructs and pervasive masculinity, is the role of leadership in battle. Embedded reporters experiences with matters of hierarchy within combat units in complex ways, from the perspectives of the lowly grunts all the way up to their commanding

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>66</sup> Rodgers, 66.

<sup>67</sup> Katovsky ed., 9

<sup>68</sup> Wright, 8.

generals. Here we are introduced to the hierarchical structures, and divisions, of a modern army, and how the chain of command worked in combat. Several important accounts dealt with the issues surrounding these themes, and we can gain more important anecdotes from the nuanced and intimate accounts of embedded reporters.

Indeed, the intersection between masculinity and hierarchy in the military's officer/soldier dynamic is identified in Hinjosa's study. His interviews with young soldiers explained the divide between leaders and their troops; an issue that has survived countless conflicts and many centuries:

From the enlisted perspective, officers are inexperienced or lazy, looking for the easiest jobs in the military, and less self-disciplined. He said officers were “half-educated, half-cocked micro-managers.”... He asked rhetorically, “these guys who get to be officers, what do they know? They just sit behind their desks and give orders.” “It’s us enlisted guys who get to do the work, do the job. They just sit around and drink coffee and get the credit. We’re the one’s sweating and working and they get the medals.” From the perspective of the enlisted men, being enlisted was evidence of their greater self-discipline and stronger work ethic. Situating enlisted service in this way, officers were, by comparison, inexperienced, lacked the discipline to truly understand the military, and for Jose, incompetent.<sup>69</sup>

Scores of embedded media outlets reported on the activities of units at the lowest levels, namely from within rifle squads, artillery batteries and vehicle crews. They rode alongside the regular “grunts,” shared the experiences of combat with them, and offered details of the group and power dynamics inherent in the vast United States military establishment. Memoirs of, and interviews with, embeds demonstrate the value of deeper postwar hindsight in elaborating on these themes.<sup>70</sup> Especially relevant are intimate details focussing on more bottom-up criticism of

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<sup>69</sup>Hinjosa, 190-191.

<sup>70</sup> For a survey of postwar embedded accounts related to officer vs enlisted perspectives within the invasion forces, see Atkinson, 25, 37, 56, 71, 91, 94, 109, 177, 206, 213, 294, 267; Katovsky ed., 3-5, 68-69, 81, 116, 128, 144 ;

military leaders in planning and implementing the Iraq invasion from the regular soldier's perspective, or the so-called "worm's-eye view." Their accounts often stand in contrast to wartime reporting, which, as discussed previously, was often based upon analysis made by pundits and military officials, and former soldiers not directly present at frontline battlefield conflicts. In certain instances, stories of poor leadership and questionable strategies and decisions reached the American public. For instance, the battle for Nasiriyah and the operational pause that was seen to stall the Coalition's advance on Baghdad made headlines with embeds offering limited front-row perspectives.<sup>71</sup> On the whole, these reports, however, contrast with postwar embedded accounts analyzed here when considering their value in terms of detail and nuance.

Wright's memoir is indispensable in this regard, as he rode alongside grunts at the bottom of the command chain. He repeatedly referred to officers as "leaders whose competence [the grunts] don't trust." He identified several Marines who were shocked by the specific mission they were given – namely, invading Iraq at the very front of the assault in non-armoured vehicles, when the Marine recon's primary mission was, traditionally, stealthy special warfare. The battle plan "went against all our training and doctrine, but I can't tell a general I don't do windows," said one NCO. Others lamented a distinct lack of training for this type of mission, and directly criticized their leaders for tasking Force Recon with it.<sup>72</sup>

Wright identified that the troops' most trusted military leaders were the NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers, usually Sergeants), who had much more experience than the brass planning the assault. There was a "heightened level of tension between officers and enlisted"

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Koopman, 77, ; Poole, 43, 205; North,; Reuters eds., 116, 120, 143, 213; Rodgers, 15; Sylvester & Huffman, 116,; West, 44, 59, 67, 84, 87, 90, 116, 196, 201, 202, 220-224, 229 ; Wright, 18-20, 45, 68, 113, 147, 187-189, 290, 342, 237, 158, 10, 174, 146-147, 13, 93, 175 ; Zucchino, . 6-7, 92, 166, 209, 220, 234.

<sup>71</sup> The criticism of the war plan and progress was discussed in depth in previous chapters.

<sup>72</sup>Wright. 8, 12

throughout the invasion in Wright's unit, and even junior officers confided these views in him. Lieutenant Fick, a young platoon leader who was respected by his men, called it "the incompetent leading the unwilling to do the unnecessary." The Recon Marines repeatedly called officers "incompetent military leaders."<sup>73</sup>

However, not all senior officers were seen as incompetent or even poor leaders. The Battalion Commander, who went by the name "Godfather" on the radio for instance, had gained the respect of the Marines due to his macho persona, and especially for his capacity for violence. "Godfather was awesome," one Marine told Wright, as he recounted the commander's decisions on the battlefield. "Some commanders get caught up worrying about the politics of being too aggressive -- destroying too much property, hurting innocent civilians -- that they put their forces at risk. Godfather told us to do what we needed to do, and it was good to go."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, officers like Fick and others who wanted the respect of their Marines walked a "fine line" between following orders, taking the initiative, showing aggressive spirit, and criticizing poor leadership based on their decisions.<sup>75</sup> Lieutenant General Mattis, the commander of all Marines in Iraq, told Wright that "what [he looked for] in the people I want on the battlefield [was] courage and initiative."<sup>76</sup>

Other accounts brim with examples of leaders earning the respect of troops through their macho personas, thus placing them in high regard. "His men liked him a lot," Koopman said in an interview about Lieutenant colonel Bryan McCoy, the confident, tough, masculine commander he travelled with on many occasions. "I say this objectively because I have talked with a lot of them and I have watched the Colonel from a distance. He liked to talk to them and

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<sup>73</sup>Wright, 18-20, 19, 18, 20.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 290.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 13.

find out what their problems were, and they liked him."<sup>77</sup> Bing West had several important experiences with officers of all ranks, and their men, but he identified Colonel Steven Hummer as one who maintained a strong rapport with his men. He "was known as a careful planner, a reserved man who understood he was both a battle leader and a father figure." Importantly, he had taken risks to aid several very junior enlisted men, and had gained the respect of others through caring, good planning, and steady leadership.<sup>78</sup> That meticulous and thoughtful planning -- also noted by West regarding a senior NCO named Sergeant Major Dave Howell -- proved the difference between life and death in many instances in the Iraq invasion. Indeed, many leaders would lose the respect of their troops and, worse, cost the lives of others when their plans and directives were less than well-conceived.<sup>79</sup>

Much of the criticism of officers consisted of complaining about the mission and the generally miserable conditions found in Iraq. Reinforcing such portrayals was a phenomenon in combat operations known as "hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror."<sup>80</sup> *Los Angeles Times* embed David Zucchino captured in his dispatches the long bouts of combat-free time for soldiers in Iraq. "Moping and complaining about sitting there all day," he found, fuelled grievances about higher-ups. "The officers told me that they were having a hard time keeping the guys motivated," he later recalled in an interview.<sup>81</sup> Gordon Dillow, the *Orange County Register* embed, saw the officers assume common characteristics of grunts, especially in regards to the way they used colourful language and complained:

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<sup>77</sup>Koopman in Katovsky ed., 116.

<sup>78</sup> West, 84.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>80</sup>For one take on the phenomenon, see Jane Armstrong, "Hours of boredom and seconds of terror", *Globe and Mail*, October 6, 2006.

<sup>81</sup>Zucchino in Katovsky, 143-145, 144.



Every fucking word was fucking this or fucking that. It's the all-purpose modifier. It was things like "I wish I had a fucking shower." "I wish I had a fucking beer." "I wish I had a fucking MRE." That's just the way they talk -- officers and men the same way. It's a construct that they use and in a way it gets poetical -- the way they can string these "fucks" together. If some guy's saying, "I fucking told the fucking Lieutenant that that fucking track was going to get caught in the fucking mud," it adds so much more emphasis and life than "I told the lieutenant that the track was going to get caught in the mud." But you can't put that in the family newspaper.<sup>82</sup>

Embedded reporters, depending on their assignments, often had remarkable access to the troops and commanders in battle, and one account especially captured the perspective from the officer class. Rick Atkinson witnessed the war from a unique, command perspective, which "disclosed much about the art of generalship... Petraeus kept me at his elbow in Iraq virtually all day, every day, allowing me to feel the anxieties and the perturbations, the small satisfactions and the large joys" of commanding a division in combat.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, Atkinson was able to write a detailed profile of General Petraeus' leadership in battle, and provide multiple instances of command staff friction and decisions that sometimes led to disaster.<sup>84</sup>

### **SNAFUs and the Fog of War**

A vital aspect of battlefield history is the human side of decision-making and leadership, which can influence events in catastrophic and history-shaping ways. In every major combat operation, there are unique circumstances and even significant anomalies that often escape official and popular histories. After all, getting lost or attacking the wrong target are simply chalked up to the "fog of war" (or limited awareness in military operations), a ubiquitous reality since the dawn of modern warfare, and perhaps before.<sup>85</sup> Another way that soldiers describe

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<sup>82</sup>Katovsky ed., 49.

<sup>83</sup> Atkinson, 2.

<sup>84</sup>Atkinson 92, 236-7, 218, 217, 196, 202, 234, 207.

<sup>85</sup> See Villacres E.J. and Christopher Bassford. "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian trinity." *Parameters* 25, no. 3 (1995): 9.

mistakes is by calling them SNAFUs (an acronym for Situation Normal, All Fucked Up), a universal term in modern military history used to describe miscalculations.<sup>86</sup>

The power of SNAFUs was illustrated months after the Panama invasion in 1990, when the term "friendly fire" was first used in a news investigation uncovering inconsistencies related to the deaths of two American troops.<sup>87</sup> Subsequent stories in the *Washington Post* confirmed that "an investigation [was] unable to determine whether the 21 U.S. soldiers wounded in the attack were hit by U.S. rounds from the aircraft or by mortar rounds fired by Panamanian defenders." Pentagon officials had admitted to the possible error, "in response to allegations in *Newsweek* magazine that most of the U.S. soldiers injured in the invasion and nine of the 23 battle dead were victims of friendly fire." Indeed, the Pentagon asserted "that two and possibly three of the 23 deaths and 15 of the 311 battle-related injuries were caused by U.S. fire."<sup>88</sup> The incident gained widespread attention, not coincidentally since so few Americans had been killed in combat since Vietnam. "A nation that does not acknowledge its friendly fire casualties cannot learn how to reduce them. 'We should have learned that from Vietnam,'" said a military critic almost a year later in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Retired Colonel David Hackworth, "a highly decorated veteran of World War II and the Vietnam War," cautioned, "'It's the return of the deception of Vietnam concerning the body counts.'"<sup>89</sup>

This phenomenon was infamously widespread in the 1991 Gulf War, although perhaps the prevalence of reports was due not only to the stunning ratio of casualties by friendly fire

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<sup>86</sup> For further definitions of the term SNAFU, see Geoffrey Regan, *Snafu: great American military disasters* (New York: Avon Books, 1993); Gordon L. Rottman, *SNAFU Situation Normal All F\*\*\*ed Up: Sailor, Airman, and Soldier Slang of World War II*. (Osprey Publishing, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> "'Friendly Fire' Killed 2 U.S. Troops", *The Washington Post*, n.a., June 19, 1990.

<sup>88</sup> "Tape Shows 'Friendly Fire' Aimed at U.S. Troops in Panama", *The Washington Post*, n.a., June 22, 1990.

<sup>89</sup> "FRIENDLY FIRE WOUNDING OF OFFICER DISCOUNTED", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, n.a., December 23, 1990.

versus enemy action, but also to the lasting atmosphere from Vietnam that influenced a major aversion to U.S. military casualties.<sup>90</sup> Period news reports fanned the flames of controversy, as the stunning victory over Iraq in 1991 was tarnished by these negative stories.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, some reports alleged the U.S. government sought to cover up these instances, and the debate over the issue lingered long after the spectacle of various victory parades.<sup>92</sup>

Analysis of these events can provide much more than simplistic explanations about how soldiers died or became casualties; indeed, they offer clues as to why battles unfolded the way they did, and individuals acted in certain ways, and how the consequences of battlefield decisions impacted factors such as operational planning and morale. SNAFUs had far-ranging effects which sometimes deepened a profound gap between common soldiers and their leaders, one that often widened into a proverbial canyon. Such was the case whether the incident was based on simple mistakes or flat-out unconscionable errors in judgment.

In the Iraq invasion, the fog of war often represented an obstacle to the success of missions. Situations often became confused, and mistakes -- or "SNAFUs" -- happened frequently. Embedded reporters offered an inside look at military manoeuvres, actions and battle

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<sup>90</sup> The ratio of casualties sustained by friendly fire in DESERT STORM was staggering, at 35:148 killed and 72:467 wounded. See Naylor, Sean D. "Friendly Fire: The Reckoning." *Army Times* (1991): 4-6, which is a summary of the Army's official report. Also see United States. Dept. of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress* (Washington: DoD, 1992); The avoidance of American casualties was an indispensable part of what was termed the "Vietnam Syndrome." See George C. Herring, "The Vietnam Syndrome" in David Anderson, ed., *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 409-430, 419.

<sup>91</sup> See Ron Martz, "Friendly fire' investigated in deaths of 11 Marines; Vehicle possibly hit by a U.S. missile", *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, February 1, 1991; Debbie Howlett with Tom Squitieri, "Marines 'didn't die in vain'; 'Friendly fire' claims lives of 7 Marines", *USA TODAY*, February 4, 1991; "Killed by Friend or Foe, It's All the Same" *The New York Times*, n.a., February 14, 1991.

<sup>92</sup> M. Rucci, "FRIENDLY-FIRE DEATHS KEPT FROM FAMILIES", *Courier Mail*, February 16, 1991; Edward Lucas, "Families of US victims 'not told whole truth' ; Anger over ministry's 'misleading information' as soldiers tell of final minutes of Warriors 22 and 23 in which nine Britons died in Iraq during an attack by US warplanes", *The Independent* (London), n.a., May 10, 1991; Andrew Alderson, "Schwarzkopf denies any cover-up on Gulf deaths", *The Sunday Times* (London), July 28, 1991; Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Says Its Fire Killed 20 Americans in the Gulf", *The New York Times*, August 10, 1991; Barton Gellman, "Gulf War's Friendly Fire Tally Triples; Pentagon: 35 Died In Accidental Attacks", *Washington Post*, August 14, 1991; Colman McCarthy, "Burying Gulf Tragedies in the Sand", *The Washington Post*, August 27, 1991.

plans gone awry. Some offered top-down explorations that provide examples from the command point of view, while others furnished the perspective of the soldiers left to pick up the pieces. The sheer weight of experiences with SNAFUs further shines light on the value of postwar embedded accounts. After all, these are unique memoirs and interviews, written by authors that were not the chief actors or belligerents, but trained observers. This, as aforementioned, is what separates the source base used here from other types of war memoirs and oral histories from various conflicts, including the Iraq War.<sup>93</sup>

### **Friendly Fire**

SNAFUs manifested themselves in the Iraq invasion in a variety of ways, the most prevalent being friendly fire. The topic had clearly survived as a hot-button issue.<sup>94</sup> Media reports from embeds again covered several incidents during the war with several limitations in place. For instance, an article from embed John Simpson entitled "'Sound of freedom' turns to screams as U.S. pilot bombs coalition convoy" appeared in the *Calgary Herald* on April 7, 2003. The story did not identify the soldiers hit, the location of the incident, or precise details of the event.<sup>95</sup> News reports from non-embedded sources took note, and reported on the return of friendly fire: "As many as 30 Marines were injured in a terrible friendly fire mistake during the fierce fighting raging around the southern Iraqi town of Nassiriya. According to sketchy reports

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<sup>93</sup> For a survey of postwar embedded accounts related to SNAFUs, see Ayers, 265; Atkinson, 107, 146, 165, 166, 176; Katovsky ed., 21, 49, 60, 68, 69, 119; Koopman, 113, 125, 135-138, 185; North, 12, 100, 163, 164; Skiba, 67, 72, 119, 122; Sylvester & Huffman, 130, 139, 159, 176, 214; Poole, 99, 204; Reuters eds., 2-5, 39, 161; Rodgers, 69-72, 73, 80, 111-112; West, 24, 36, 39, 40, 44, 57, 101, 113, 130, 157, 160, 168, 177-178, 196, 218; Wright, 12, 18, 30, 50, 56, 85, 86, 88, 101-102, 107, 134, 138, 163, 164, 179, 180, 197-198, 215, 217, 270; Zucchini, 174, 221-223, 262, 312.

<sup>94</sup> Donna Leinwand, "New technology aims to reduce 'friendly fire' deaths", *USA TODAY*, March 20, 2003.

<sup>95</sup> John Simpson, "'Sound of freedom' turns to screams as U.S. pilot bombs coalition convoy", *Calgary Herald*, April 7, 2003.

trickling in from reporters traveling with the troops, two units mistakenly fired on each other in the confusion of Iraqi rocket attacks."<sup>96</sup>

Postwar embedded accounts offer information more substantive than “sketchy reports.” For example, West recounted a frightening scene that followed Sergeant Reid's heroic actions while his arm dangled by the ligaments and tendons:

They saw an American A-10 Warthog swoop by, circle around, and line up on their position for a strafing attack from north to south. Reid watched in disbelief as the "friendly" green tracers from the A-10 slammed into vehicles herringboned alongside the road. Marines scurried for cover, dragging wounded out of the line of fire and looking for a red pyrotechnic to launch -- the signal to identify friendly forces and to cease fire... but [the plane] had done its damage... and departed before a red pyro could be located.<sup>97</sup>

The battle continued after the friendly fire incident, and West wrote in his memoir that "veterans and academics alike refer to the 'fog of war' -- this battle could be used as an illustration".<sup>98</sup>

Oliver North, flying in a medevac helicopter, witnessed the aftermath of one such friendly fire incident. He described a scene where "several of the killed and injured had terrible wounds inflicted by a USAF A-10 that swept over the gunfight strafing the 2nd Marines' column." He pointed to the fact that "despite extraordinary efforts to prevent such friendly-fire incidents," the pilot had mistaken the Marines for an enemy force and caused horrific carnage.<sup>99</sup> Other accounts described similar scenes of chaos and confusion. Friendly fire wasn't limited to mistaken identity from the air, either. David Zucchini, travelling with the 3rd Infantry Division on their "Thunder Run" into Baghdad, recounted an instance where armoured vehicles from

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<sup>96</sup> Greg Gittrich and Helen Kennedy, "MARINES HIT BY FRIENDLY FIRE Up to 30 wounded in southern Iraq" *Daily News* (New York), March 28, 2003; also see Martin Kasindorf, "Accidental deaths exceed those in combat", *USA TODAY*, March 27, 2003.

<sup>97</sup> West, 39-40.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> North, 79-80.

neighbouring units had engaged each other in a battle. "A lead Bradley from 2-7's Alpha company had opened up by mistake with its 25mm Bushmaster chain gun," he wrote in his memoir. In a successful attempt at signalling the attackers that they were firing at friendly forces, the troops waved big fluorescent "VS-17" panels to ward off their comrades. "The friendly fire ceased." Zucchini wrote that "Miraculously... no one had been hit by the friendly-fire."<sup>100</sup>

Friendly fire was not always the result of an error in targeting. In one instance, Oliver Poole recounted a soldier's unfortunate run-in with an unexploded bomblet from a cluster munition, the type criticized for their collateral damage effects on civilians. American military personnel found out firsthand the deadly nature of unexploded munitions on the battlefield, as the soldier "was a casualty of his own country's weapon."<sup>101</sup> Allied troops weren't always the targets of friendly fire, either. John Koopman recounted an incident in which American tanks inadvertently attacked a British TV crew working independently of the invading forces in a capacity as non-embedded reporters, termed "unilaterals."<sup>102</sup>

Within the fog of war, confusion and chaos on the battlefield made identifying friendly fire difficult, if not impossible, in some circumstances. Sometimes, troops and embeds never knew if it had been friendly or enemy fire that had targeted them. Koopman, in recounting a terrifying episode that nearly killed him, saw an artillery shell destroy an American vehicle, just metres away from where he was hunkered down, under fire. One Marine had insisted that "the

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<sup>100</sup>Zucchini, 223. Zucchini's account repeatedly mentions the concern over friendly fire, and how the possibility of mistakenly targeting allied forces was a constant worry for the troops and their leaders. See 37, 61, 81, 262, 268, 287, 303.

<sup>101</sup>Poole, 204.

<sup>102</sup>Koopman, 134.

artillery shell came from the Iraqis, not the Americans." Koopman concluded: "I don't believe him."<sup>103</sup>

### **Incompetence, and Justifiable Human Error**

In certain instances, poor planning and decision-making involved a lack of provisions for troops engaged in battle. Even though the American military was one of the best-equipped in the world, SNAFUs frequently prevented the most important supplies from reaching the troops. Rick Atkinson recalled when many American units had run out of ammunition, and had actually resorted to "fighting with scavenged AK-47s." Due to a lack of planning for sustained resistance, it had become a widespread issue for many units. He also several instances of various units running low on, or even running out of ammunition in the middle of desperate battles.<sup>104</sup> War reports from the battlefield acknowledged mistakes and SNAFUs, although they were limited in what they could report due to concerns over operational security defined by the embedding program's ground rules. One example of the type of report from an embed that reached the public during the war is included here:

The column of several hundred Bradley Fighting Vehicles, M-113 armored vehicles, combat assault bridges, bulldozers, M-88 recovery vehicles, and other engineering vehicles was strung over at least 12 miles. A number of fuel trucks and support vehicles had gotten stuck, including a Patriot air defense battery with seven launchers and a command vehicle. Several vehicles also reported running out of gas.<sup>105</sup>

Some SNAFUs were simply foolish mistakes, like when troops with whom Koopman was embedded had hand grenades bounce back at them off a wall while clearing a building.

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>104</sup>Atkinson 146 165-166.

<sup>105</sup>S. Thorne Harper, "The U.S. Troops; Successes, surrenders, and a rumbling drive north", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 22, 2003.

Several Marines had been wounded in one incident alone.<sup>106</sup> Mistakes like these cost lives, and were dealt with harshly by superiors in the field. Tough NCOs were usually left to publicly shame and humiliate the offending soldiers, as the worst form of humiliation in the masculinity-dominated combat environment was letting your leaders-- and especially your fellow soldiers -- down. Oliver Poole witnessed one such incident when a young tank driver mistakenly crashed his vehicle while driving in a severe sandstorm, at night. Even though Poole considered this an understandable miscalculation by a disoriented soldier, he understood what the Sergeant's decision to scream at the shocked and upset driver. "You useless piece of shit!" the Sergeant yelled, attacking the soldier's very value, which defined his masculine hegemonic identity. "I knew you were a lazy, stupid, good-for-nothing, but I thought you could at least drive in a straight line down a road." Poole identified the Sergeant as a tough Irish-American thirty-three year old, who used his temper to establish dominance. "I'm going to leave you here when we finally go," he told him. "Let's hope the Iraqis capture you so you can ruin some of their equipment."<sup>107</sup> Indeed, "messing up" was seen as a major detriment to one's masculine identity, and worth as a soldier. Even senior officers were not immune to this dynamic. "Don't fuck this up," General Mattis -- a man renowned for his machismo, aggressiveness, risk-taking and capacity for violence -- told Colonel McCoy, in front of embedded reporter John Koopman.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, this experience aligns with what David Morgan called "control of one's emotion and subordination to a larger rationality."<sup>109</sup> Clearly, the masculine nature of military hierarchy was a factor that kept soldiers, of all ranks, in line.

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<sup>106</sup>Koopman, 125

<sup>107</sup>Poole, 85, 85-86.

<sup>108</sup>Koopman. 185.

<sup>109</sup>Morgan, David HJ. "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities" in Brod, Harry, and Michael Kaufman, eds. *Theorizing masculinities*. Vol. 5. Sage, 1994.



Seemingly minor and innocent mistakes, however, had deadly consequences in several instances during the Iraq invasion. Koopman recounted two terrible incidents: one where, during sandstorm, a Marine simply fell off of a tank, and was paralyzed. A second story detailed how an armoured vehicle ran over two troops by mistake. A Major and an NCO were crushed to death in the incident.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, a simple navigation error was ultimately responsible for the entire Jessica Lynch story. Her unit had simply missed a turn, as Bing West's Marine unit had become aware, too late to help. The whole episode was one big SNAFU as it turned out; a mistake by truck drivers at night, their ability to see narrowed by night-vision goggles, compounded by not properly following their maps and GPS. It led to nine American troops killed and six captured, including Lynch.<sup>111</sup>

Navigation errors were common on the Iraq battlefield, and resulted in entire units getting lost and, in many cases, walking directly into enemy ambushes. Rodgers' memoir makes note of several cases where the entire 7th Cavalry was stopped in its tracks and forced into desperate battles due to simple matters like making wrong turns, or troops being too tired to properly follow maps. "Our first few miles into Iraq we got lost," Rodgers recalled. "I had to remind myself that the cavalry was the scouts, the ones with 'balls of steel.'" Rodgers found out that even the most skilled troops, with the best, high-tech equipment available, were just regular people, as fallible as anybody else. "We turned west into what was to become a minor debacle," he recalled of a later SNAFU caused by a commander's poor navigation and decision-making. "No one really knew where we were going." Unfortunately getting lost during an invasion wasn't simply a

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<sup>110</sup> Koopman., 137-138

<sup>111</sup>West, 36.

matter of course correction, as "the Iraqis were showing an inclination increasingly to fight madly, if not bravely."<sup>112</sup>

These firsthand accounts make it clear that the fog of war in Iraq greatly impacted operations, as well as the day-to-day experiences that embeds and soldiers shared. According to Atkinson, "ample mistakes had been committed, including friendly-fire episodes and wrong turns and sufficient miscalculations to reaffirm the old military bromide that no plan survives contact with the enemy."<sup>113</sup>

With this type of approach to military history, it becomes apparent that deeper social constructs originating in America, including gender roles, masculinity, and military hierarchy factored prominently into battlefield actions. The model utilized here can identify the complex ways in which the invasion of Iraq transpired, and how the experiences of individuals give agency to embedded reporters and soldiers alike. With this in mind, the first-hand accounts that have appeared since reporters have returned to the relative comfort of their homes and civilian lives stateside have grafted their intrinsic value onto our understanding of the realities of the modern battlefield. These indispensable sources, written by and collected from trained participant-observers, have provided insights into a wide range of socio-cultural dynamics in the early years of the new millennium.

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<sup>112</sup> Rodgers, 36, 69, 69-72.

<sup>113</sup> Atkinson, 4.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The goal of this study has not been to judge the successes or failures of the invasion of Iraq, or even to evaluate the merits of the embedding program as a media policy, or the actions taken by the soldiers that took part in the war for that matter. The goal is to offer deep insights into the culture of an army at war. By analysing the ways in which soldiers perceived their adversaries and mission, experienced harsh environments and emotional stress, coped with and responded to violence, and partook in gender and identity constructions, it is possible to add greater clarity to the complex intersection of military culture and mass media coverage at the outset of the new millennium.

This investigation aims to complement earlier studies by war-and-society pioneers who have offered their own examples of battlefield histories to the larger tapestry of warfare history. It builds on their work in a current, more contemporary context, and attempts to explain the myriad issues pertaining to a conflict so fresh in our collective memories. Indeed, this type of examination allows for a deeper understanding of a war that actually continues; an examination enhanced significantly by the first-hand accounts utilized here, which constitute the first draft of a history that will likely be explored, and added to, by generations of historians to come.

The proximity of this war to the present offers historians a unique opportunity to examine the Iraq invasion up close, through the embedded reporters' eyes; through the cultural lens that this public affairs approach produced; and through a multitude of snapshots in time that allow for greater clarity and a more nuanced version of events. At this early, decisive, ground-floor stage in Iraq War historiography, the worm's-eye view maintains a profound influence on the narrative, and exemplifies both the value and limitations of the embedding program to the historical record.

From the unique source base that embeds produced after their time in battle, a more authentic face of war emerges. The blood, sweat and even tears of soldiers in life-and-death struggles can be found not only in combat against perceived and real enemies, but inside of their own units, and within the armed forces as a whole. The conditions of the battlefield, the psychological and sociological toll of combat, and, the socio-cultural identities woven into these experiences, comprise the foundational history of a war whose impact will endure for decades to come. With these thoughts in mind, original and important anecdotes are gleaned, and lessons on the ways we may interpret future battlefield actions are learned.

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