



Raid in Iraq's "Indian Country"

by Pamela Hess

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CAMP SCORPION, Iraq, Aug. 5 (UPI)—Northern Babil province is what the Marines call, in their typically politically incorrect way, "Indian country." When there are ambushes on Army supply convoys, when roadside explosions claim the limbs and lives of American servicemen driving in Humvees, when humanitarian aid workers' cars are shot at, this is usually where it happens.

The army has lost about 50 soldiers to enemy fire since the war ended. Task Force Scorpion is here to do something about it. What was once a clash of armies has come to this: painstaking detective work, and then a hunt for the "bad guys," one at a time.

The 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion heads Scorpion. They have moved from hot spot to hot spot throughout Iraq and have now brought their peculiar blend of high spirits and blood thirst to north Babil. Their morale is disproportionate to the squalid conditions in which they live.

Mad Max would turn his nose up at Camp Scorpion. There is nothing but garbage and dirt and sand as far as the eye can see. Marines live and sleep in the open air of a gravel parking lot, except for the few one-story concrete buildings that are air conditioned on the rare occasions the generators can be coaxed to work. They have no chow hall (they drive to an army supply outpost a few miles away to eat twice a day) and until portable toilets arrived recently, bathroom facilities were a plywood bench with four holes in it, side by side. Powerful winds sweep the grounds, kicking up massive dust clouds that coat everything in dull brown powder several times a day.

"This is the best we've had it!" laughs Master Gunnery Sgt. Paul D. Clark, from Austin, Texas, the battalion's operations chief.

Clark is not kidding. It's better than the underground bunker, where their faces and hands inexplicably swelled like sausages. It is better than the sheep farm, where they were covered head to toe with unknown insect bites. It is better than the castle on the Iran-Iraq border where it was never less than 115 degrees and the rooms were filled with flies and mosquitoes.

Once they cleaned out months of accumulated human and animal feces—origins unclear—with shovels and wheelbarrows, Camp Scorpion became Club Med in comparison.

"See that brown line?" Clark asks, enjoying the telling, pointing to a faint horizontal mark circumnavigating the room about a foot off the floor. That was the top of the pile, he says.



The rough concrete walls are covered in Arabic graffiti. There is a framed picture of a young Saddam Hussein that one sergeant intends to "liberate" when he leaves. Camouflage ponchos cover the doors, and the harsh sun is blocked with torn cardboard boxes in the window frames. It looks like every war movie set ever built, but 100 times worse.

The 4th LAR is the only Marine reserve battalion commanding active duty forces in Iraq, says commander Lt. Col. Anthony Pappas. Like most of the men in the 1,000-man task force, Pappas is a civilian most of the year. He works at the Drug Enforcement Administration in southern California.

The 4th LAR moved to north Babil in June from the castle on the Iran-Iraq border at the Army's request.

The Army had set up its main resupply depot at a desolate place known as Dogwood. It is a relatively straight shot north to the bulk of Army forces at the Baghdad International Airport. It has good roads, but they require passing through a highway intersection known as the "Mixing Bowl."

"The army out of the blue picked Dogwood. It is the most ambush-friendly place in Iraq," Pappas says. "Every terrorist-wannabe is coming here to kill Americans."

While the Army loses soldiers to guerilla attacks on an almost daily basis, the Marines have not lost one. They have suffered heavy casualties, however.

"We've had a lot of wounded," says Maj. Joe Cabell, who in his civilian life plans military exercises in Hawaii. "My detachment of 50 has had five injuries. Three are back on duty and two had to be medevaced. Still, that's 10 percent." Although the area is close to Baghdad and it was Army convoys being attacked, Babil is technically within the 1st Marine Division's area of operation. It falls to them to get it under control.

"It was a joke when we came here," Pappas says of the security situation.

Like Fallujah and Baghdad to the north, north Babil is dangerous.

"It's our problem child," acknowledges Lt. Col. David Furness, operations officer for the 1st Marine Division based in Babylon.

In the haste to get to Baghdad during the war, no forces stayed behind to tame the area. Most of the Marines' progress to the capital city was conducted as a leapfrog operation: One unit would fight forward, then stay in place for three or four days while another pushed ahead. The Marines left back would resupply, rest, clean their weapons and then fan out into the villages to hand out candy and food, assess their humanitarian needs, and forcibly bring order where it was needed.

North Babil never received such attention.

"They roared through the area because they were wanting to hit Baghdad," says Maj. Dave Bellon, a lively San Diego personal injury attorney and the task force's operations director.

The problem, say Pappas and Bellon, was standard Army land-warfare doctrine. When a supply convoy is attacked, it is supposed to speed up and get out of the danger zone. Once the vehicles are through the ambush area, the force can swing around and go after the enemy if it has the firepower to do so.

That response only makes sense, however, if the convoy were attacked by an enemy that knows how to ambush, Bellon says. A well-trained enemy would shoot the first and last vehicles in line, halting the procession in place, and then destroying it in its own good time.

The 4th LAR soon figured something out.

"They didn't know what they're doing!" Bellon says. "They fire at the middle truck and then run away. If Marines were doing the ambushes, they'd all be dead."

But it was enough to do serious damage to the Army: The lumbering supply convoys were sitting ducks, as the Marines tell it. The drivers sometimes wore flip-flops and headphones instead of Kevlar and body armor, and they frequently stopped at roadside stands for sodas, Bellon says.

"This place was going off like a firecracker," he says.

What the Marines did was simple: They escorted the convoys and fired back. In the two weeks before the 4th LAR arrived, there were 51 ambushes on convoys. For the first eight days after the Marines arrived and began work, there was none.

"We thought we had it pretty well snapped," Bellon says, "Marines were stopping and fighting, and they (the shooters) were getting killed."

The shooters, who the military says were generally out-of-work locals paid by remnants of Saddam's Baathists to

take potshots at Americans, were no match for Task Force Scorpion. Gunmen who survived contact with the Marines went back to their villages and told of their enemy's mystical powers—the force-field that protected the snub nosed, 14-ton Light Armored Vehicles, and the “magic eyes”—infrared sensors—that let them see at night.

“Suddenly it became a bad summer job to have,” Bellon says.

With the enemy now engaged on the roads, Task Force Scorpion turned its attention to a “hearts-and-minds” campaign for the two main towns, Yusufiyah and Mumadiyah. The 4th LAR has begun what will be \$350,000 worth of projects that will be completed next month.

Of critical importance is electricity. Hundreds of miles of canals crisscross the area, providing the only irrigation; it almost never rains. It takes three full days of electric power to pump water through the canal system from start to finish. The best the Marines have been able to muster is about 3 hours on and 3 hours off.

After a month of working in the villages—handing out candy and toothbrushes to children, refurbishing schools and running 3,000 meters (nearly 2 miles) of electrical wire to hook into the Baghdad power grid—they began to see a change. The people, if not waving from the streets, are at least beginning to point out the “bad guys” to them in private. Sometimes a sheikh appears at the camp gate with a note, other times the information comes when a Marine is walking a patrol.

“For 35 years, anyone with an innate leadership either was on board with the Baath party or killed. This is an entire generation of people who watch and wait,” Bellon says. “We also told them not to let their sons take the money, because we’ll kill them (if they shoot at us).”

But one day in June, someone fired a rocket-propelled grenade into a military ambulance and then moved in for the kill with guns. The daylight attack—the first one Task Force Scorpion had seen—claimed one soldier and critically wounded two, including the injured man being transported.

“The day we lost that soldier was like a gut shot. There was a lot of anger,” Bellon says. “That was the first indication we were involved in a chess match. They were evolving, and we were evolving.”

Forced to fire from farther and farther away from the road to avoid certain death, the shooters soon switched to “improvised explosive devices”—often a 120mm artillery shell with a fuse, or a car battery packed with C-4 explosives. As days wore on, the devices got more sophisticated, evolving from command detonation—with the attacker on the scene to set off the bomb—to trip wires and timing devices. Sometimes a motorcycle will pull up next to a convoy and toss a landmine underneath.

Despite the escalation, a Marine intelligence officer sees an improvement.

“They are afraid to engage us up close,” he says. “We’re winning,”

But defensive operations can no longer handle the threat. The 4th LAR is now on the offensive, collecting intelligence and swooping down on their enemies' homes in the minutes before dawn. They have conducted more than 20 raids on the houses of people suspected of organizing the attacks.

“We’re right in their face. It’s great!” says Pappas, gleeful in the hours before the night’s raid.

As godforsaken as Camp Scorpion seems, a few miles west on the banks of the Tigris is a shady green paradise that would not look unfamiliar to wealthy Floridians—blue sky, palm trees, jasmine and a fast-moving waterway behind well-kept, large, modern homes.

“This is beach-front property for Baghdad,” Bellon says.

The Marines are convinced these are the homes of the moneymen—the brains and resources behind the attacks.

This weekend, the 4th LAR saw something new: an Improvised Explosive Device—or IED—made from a soda can sitting on a pile of rocks a few feet high on the side of the road. The added height allowed the bomb to bypass the armored undersides of the target vehicle and to spray its shrapnel at a level calculated to do maximum damage to the person. On Friday, a Humvee drove into the trip wire, about a kilometer—just over half a mile—from the task force command center. The can exploded, firing rocks and gravel at the driver and tearing apart his arm. It may have to be amputated.

This was especially dispiriting news at command headquarters. On July 22, they had captured a man they believed to be behind the 18 IED attacks on the roads near the Mixing Bowl. They were pretty sure they had their man, as there had been no attacks for 10 days—until the soda-can bomber.

Friday night’s raid, however, had a different quarry.

The raid went after one man, a well-heeled resident of the Baath neighborhood with a house on the river, a Mercedes and a satellite dish.

“This is the suburb of Baghdad where all these knuckleheads live,” Pappas says.

The raid involved two UH-1 helicopters with forward-looking infrared sensors in case there are “squirters”—people who escape and hide in the surrounding vegetation.

Also participating were almost 50 Marines, four Light Armored Vehicles, two Humvees and a team of engineers that will use metal detectors to look for buried weapons or explosives on the property. Cabell, the military-exercise planner who lives in Hawaii, planned the raid.

“We’ve had this guy’s name for four weeks,” he says.

Task Force Scorpion asked that the target’s name not be released.

They have information that this man planned and financed a late June ambush against a military police convoy that was heading to repair a water-treatment facility. The attack seriously wounded one Marine and hurt two more. An LAV unit got the distress call and raced to the fight. It flipped in a gully. One Marine was crushed and seven more were wounded.

“That was a big day for us,” Bellon says. “We’ve been waiting for this guy.”

After a series of briefings and small unit rehearsals, the raid party left Camp Scorpion at 3 a.m. local time. The LAV units were to arrive at the house about 45 minutes before dawn and knock on the door. An Arab linguist would direct those inside to open the door and ask for permission to search.

“We search anyway,” Cabell says with a sly smile. “But it’s good to ask.”

But there’s a snag—the raid party arrived 15 minutes late. The helicopters had been waiting in the air, burning fuel.

Finally in place, the raid party knocked on the door and asked for permission to enter. No response. They kicked in the door.

“We’ve got a squiter!” a voice crackled over the radio.

They found seven sleeping men on a roof deck. The eighth man heard the raid and launched himself—wearing nothing but underwear, according to the Marines—from the deck to the backyard, and slid down the steep, muddy slope to the Tigris.

The Marines gave chase but couldn’t find him. His ride down the bank had camouflaged him in mud. They were 2 meters away from his hunched form and had no idea where he was.

Overhead, the Huey turned on its infrared sensor and quickly located the man in the mud. With a laser pointer, Bellon designated the target’s body. At that moment, he lurched into the river and disappeared into the reeds that stand 6 feet tall.

Three Marines tore off their body armor and boots and dived in after him. At the same moment, the Hueys had to pull off. They were out of fuel.

The search continued on the river. Without the Hueys, though, they had no way of distinguishing their well-hidden target in all the vegetation. The sun was fully up now, diminishing the edge that thermal sensors would give them when the helicopters returned.

In the backyard of an adjacent house, seven handcuffed men knelt in a circle, facing out, on a patch of grass surrounded by bedraggled rose bushes and Marines whose M-16s pointed at the ground or hung off their backs. Nearly a dozen pajama-clad children and four women watched through curtains from inside the house.

Two boys brought water to the captives. A Marine grabbed one of the captives who was watching the search party and forced him to look down.

The Hueys returned and flew low over the reeds, using the powerful downwash of the rotors to flatten the thick brush on the banks. They saw the escapee pop up once before he disappeared again. The helicopters pulled off for more fuel.

“When the helos had to refuel we lost him on IR,” Cabell says, shaking his head, angry. “I had to blow one of 40 raids. I’m almost perfect every time. I miscalculated by 15 minutes.”

The prisoners told the Marines the man they were looking for was not there. He had left the house the day before, they said. Moments later, Saudi-born Staff Sgt. Rashed Qawasmi emerged from the house with the man’s wallet, driver’s license and car keys. He also carried a letter that discussed the jihad against the Americans at length.

“Left yesterday? Without his keys and wallet?” Cabell asks. “These people must think we’re retarded.”

He gave the order and one by one the men’s heads were hooded with empty sand bags. Although they could breathe—the plastic fabric is porous—it is a frightening experience for them and their watching families. The Marines use the hoods to control their prisoners without having to use force, and to keep them from knowing where they are going.

“It keeps ‘em from looking around,” Cabell says grimly.

The children came to the door and then into the yard, crying and beating their legs and arms in fear and anger. The women pleaded in Arabic, pointing to the crying children. It was an awful scene.

“I told her to keep the damn kids inside, they don’t need to see this,” Cabell said sharply to Qawasmi.

This is the hardest part for the Marines, who are well aware these women and children think their loved ones are going to be executed—because that is what Saddam used to do when he brought out the hoods. But most of these men will be home within hours or days, they say.

“The kids just kill you,” a sergeant says. “They break your heart.”

One of the hooded seven was about 17. As he was led away, he began to sob and beg to see his mother one last time. Qawasmi pulled him aside. Still, in the hood, the boy began to whisper: Three of the men came here for a meeting last night with the Iraqi who disappeared into the brush. They are planning an attack on the Americans. The man who fled is the man the Marines want.

The boy was allowed to see his mother, and then was put in an LAV with the others. He was warned not to speak to them.

All the prisoners would return to Camp Scorpion’s detention facility where they would sit for 8 hours before anyone interrogates them. They would get food and water, but the wait is critical for wearing them down, an intelligence officer says. U.S. military rules say they can only be kept for 72 hours at Camp Scorpion. At that point, they will either be freed or sent to a prisoner of war camp in southern Iraq, said an intelligence officer.

A young sergeant told Cabell he found fresh tracks in the mud, leading away from the river. The man somehow got from the water, around the Marines looking for him, and past the point guard on the road.

“He’s probably in someone’s house by now,” the sergeant says.

Cabell reluctantly called off the raid, most of which United Press International was present for. His man got away. But they have a huge haul—they’ve never pulled in seven potential plotters before, and they are sure they disrupted a future attack. And they also have their target’s Mercedes.

“We’ll give a receipt to his wife and tell her he can come pick up the car tomorrow,” Cabell laughs. “You wouldn’t believe how often that works. These guys will just come to the gate.”

Despite the escape and fruitless search, Pappas says the mission is a success.

“He’s running around in his underwear, covered in mud and smelling like the river and he knows we’re looking for him,” Pappas says. “That’s not small.”

The psychological blow to the men who are targeting the Americans will be major, Pappas says. They know their neighbors are giving up their names and their addresses. They no longer act with impunity.

Besides, Pappas has something else in mind for the man who got away.

“We’re telling the seven guys we got that he didn’t escape. We let him go,” he laughs. “The search was for show. We’re telling them he is working for us.”

After the 6-hour mission, which has caused them to miss breakfast, lunch will likely be a small can of tuna and an orange, the 50 exhausted Marines return to Camp Scorpion.

Six sweating engineers and a Navy medic tumble out of the back of the cramped LAV and unload their gear under the scorching sun. Their home is a taped off square of gravel parking lot, wedged between LAVs and Humvees and port-a-potties. They have eight nylon cots among them. They do not have a tent. A dust storm is kicking up, coughing hot, dry sand all over them.

They have another mission in 18 hours: to capture three men who have put a bounty on Qawasmi’s head.

“The latest intel says its about \$2,000,” Qawasmi laughs. “That’s cheap, huh?”

The Saturday night raid yields two of the three men. The most important one got away, a senior military official told UPI.

Part VI

Media Operations: Telling the Story





Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/d20030228pag.pdf.10
February 2003.

Subject: Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Commands (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR)

References: Ref. A. SECDEF MSG, DTG 172200Z Jan 03, Subj: Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) for Movement of Forces into the CENTCOM AOR for Possible Future Operations.

1. Purpose: This message provides guidance, policies and procedures on embedding news media during possible future operations/deployments in the CENTCOM AOR. It can be adapted for use in other unified command AORS as necessary.

2. Policy.

2.A. The Department of Defense (DOD) policy on media coverage of future military operations is that media will have long-term, minimally restrictive access to U.S. Air, ground and naval forces through embedding. Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the U.S. public; the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement. Our ultimate strategic success in bringing peace and security to this region will come in our long-term commitment to supporting our democratic ideals. We need to tell the factual story—good or bad—before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story—only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops. We must organize for and facilitate access of national and international media to our forces, including those forces engaged in ground operations, with the goal of doing so right from the start. To accomplish this, we will embed media with our units. 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 and related operations. Commanders and public affairs officers must work together to balance the need for media access with the need for operational security.

2.B. Media will be embedded with unit personnel at air and

ground forces bases and afloat to ensure a full understanding of all operations. Media will be given access to operational combat missions, including mission preparation and debriefing, whenever possible.

2.C. A media embed is defined as a media representative remaining with a unit on an extended basis—perhaps a period of weeks or even months. Commanders will provide billeting, rations and medical attention, if needed, to the embedded media commensurate with that provided to members of the unit, as well as access to military transportation and assistance with communications filing/transmitting media products, if required.

2.C.1. Embedded media are not authorized use of their own vehicles while traveling in an embedded status.

2.C.2. To the extent possible, space on military transportation will be made available for media equipment necessary to cover a particular operation. The media is responsible for loading and carrying their own equipment at all times. Use of priority inter-theater airlift for embedded media to cover stories, as well as to file stories, is highly encouraged. Seats aboard vehicles, aircraft and naval ships will be made available to allow maximum coverage of U.S. troops in the field.

2.C. 3. Units should plan lift and logistical support to assist in moving media products to and from the battlefield so as to tell our story in a timely manner. In the event of commercial communications difficulties, media are authorized to file stories via expeditious military signal/communications capabilities.

2.C.4. No communications equipment for use by media in the conduct of their duties will be specifically prohibited. However, unit commanders may impose temporary restrictions on electronic transmissions for operational security reasons. Media will seek approval to use electronic devices in a combat/hostile environment, unless otherwise directed by the unit commander or his/her designated representative. The use of communications equipment will be discussed in full when the media arrive at their assigned unit.

3. Procedures

3.A. The office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OASD (PA)) is the central agency for managing and vetting media embeds to include allocating embed slots to media organizations. Embed authority may be delegated to subordinate elements after the commencement of hostilities and at the discretion of OASD (PA). Embed opportunities will be assigned to media organizations, not to individual reporters. The decision as to which media representative will fill assigned embed slots will be made by the designated POC for each news organization.

3.A. IAW Ref. A, commanders of units in receipt of a deployment order may embed regional/local media during preparations for deployment, deployment and arrival in theater upon receipt of theater clearance from CENTCOM and approval of the component command. Commanders will inform these media, prior to the deploying embed, that OASD (PA) is the approval authority for all combat embeds and that their particular embed may end after the unit's arrival in theater. The media organization may apply to OASD (PA) for continued embedding, but there is not guarantee and the media organization will have to make arrangements for and pay for the journalists' return trip.

3.B. Without making commitments to media organizations, deploying units will identify local media for potential embeds and nominate them through PA channels to OASD (PA). . . . Information required to be forwarded includes media organization, type of media and contact information including bureau chief/managing editor/news director's name; office, home and cell phone numbers; pager numbers and email addresses. Submissions for embeds with specific units should include an unit's recommendation as to whether the request should be honored.

3.C. Unit commanders should also express, through their chain of command and PA channels to OASD (PA), their desire and capability to support additional media embeds beyond those assigned.

3.D. Freelance media will be authorized to embed if they are selected by a news organization as their embed representative.

3.E. Units will be authorized direct coordination with media after assignment and approval by OASD (PA).

3.E.1. Units are responsible for ensuring that all embedded media and their news organizations have signed the "Release, indemnification, and hold harmless agreement and agreement not to sue," found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/feb2003/d20030210EMBED.PDF>. Units must maintain a copy of this agreement for all media embedded with their unit.

3.F. Embedded media operate as part of their assigned unit. An escort may be assigned at the discretion of the unit commander. The absence of a PA escort is not a reason to preclude media access to operations.

3.G. Commanders will ensure the media are provided with every opportunity to observe actual combat operations. The personal safety of correspondents is not a reason to exclude them from combat areas.

3.H. If, in the opinion of the unit commander, a media representative is unable to withstand the rigorous conditions required to operate with the forward deployed forces, the commander or his/her representative may limit the representatives participation with operational forces to ensure unit safety and inform OASD (PA) through PA channels as soon as possible. Gender will not be an excluding factor under any circumstance.

3.I. If for any reason a media representative cannot participate in an operation, they will be transported to the next higher headquarters for the duration of the operation.

3.J. Commanders will obtain theater clearance from CENTCOM/PA for media embarking on military conveyance for purposes of embedding.

3.K. Units hosting embedded media will issue invitational travel orders, and nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) gear. See Para. 5. For details on which items are issued and which items the media are responsible to provide for themselves.

3.L. Media are responsible for obtaining their own passports and visas.

3.M. Media will agree to abide by the CENTCOM/OASD (PA) ground rules stated in Para. 4 of this message in exchange for command/unit-provided support and access to service members, information and other previously-stated privileges. Any violation of the ground rules could result in termination of that media's embed opportunity.

3.N. Disputes/Difficulties. Issues, questions, difficulties or disputes associated with ground rules or other aspects of embedding media that cannot be resolved at the unit level, or through the chain of command, will be forwarded through PA channels for resolution. Commanders who wish to terminate an embed for cause must notify CENTCOM/PA prior to termination. If a dispute cannot be resolved at a lower level, OASD (PA) will be the final resolution authority. In all cases, this should be done as expeditiously as possible to preserve the news value of the situation.

3.O. Media will pay their own billeting expenses if billeted in a commercial facility.

3.P. Media will deploy with the necessary equipment to collect and transmit their stories.

3.Q. The standard for release of information should be to ask "why not release" vice "why release." Decisions should be made ASAP, preferably in minutes, not hours.

3.R. There is no general review process for media products. See Para 6.A. For further detail concerning security at the source.

3.S. Media will only be granted access to detainees or EPWS within the provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. See para. 4.G.17. For the ground rule.

3.T. Having embedded media does not preclude contact with other media. Embedded media, as a result of time invested with the unit and ground rules agreement, may have a different level of access.

3.U. CENTCOM/PA will account for embedded media during the time the media is embedded in theater. CENTCOM/PA will report changes in embed status to OASD (PA) as they occur.

3.V. If a media representative is killed or injured in the course of military operations, the unit will immediately notify OASD (PA), through PA channels. OASD (PA) will contact the respective media organization (s), which will make next of kin notification in accordance with the individual's wishes.

3.W. Media may terminate their embed opportunity at any time. Unit commanders will provide, as the tactical situation permits and based on the availability of transportation, movement back to the nearest location with commercial transportation.

3.W.1. Departing media will be debriefed on operational security considerations as applicable to ongoing and future operations which they may now have information concerning.

4. Ground Rules. For the safety and security of U.S. Forces and embedded media, media will adhere to established ground rules. Ground rules will be agreed to in advance and signed by media prior to embedding. Violation of the ground rules may result in the immediate termination of the embed and removal from the

AOR. These ground rules recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or uncomplimentary information. Any modification to the standard ground rules will be forwarded through the PA channels to CENTCOM/PA for approval. Standard ground rules are:

4.A. All interviews with service members will be on the record. Security at the source is the policy. Interviews with pilots and aircrew members are authorized upon completion of missions; however, release of information must conform to these media ground rules.

4.B. Print or broadcast stories will be datelined according to local ground rules. Local ground rules will be coordinated through command channels with CENTCOM.

4.C. Media embedded with U.S. forces are not permitted to carry personal firearms.

4.D. Light discipline restrictions will be followed. Visible light sources, including flash or television lights, flash cameras will not be used when operating with forces at night unless specifically approved in advance by the on-scene commander.

4.E. Embargoes may be imposed to protect operational security. Embargoes will only be used for operational security and will be lifted as soon as the operational security issue has passed.

4.F. The following categories of information are releasable.

4.F.1. Approximate friendly force strength figures.

4.F.2. Approximate friendly casualty figures by service. Embedded media may, within OPSEC limits, confirm unit casualties they have witnessed.

4.F.3 Confirmed figures of enemy personnel detained or captured.

4.F.4. Size of friendly force participating in an action or operation can be disclosed using approximate terms. Specific force or unit identification may be released when it no longer warrants security protection.

4.F.5. Information and location of military targets and objectives previously under attack.

4.F.6. Generic description of origin of air operations, such as "land-based."

4.F.7. Date, time or location of previous conventional military missions and actions, as well as mission results are releasable only if described in general terms.

4.F.8. Types of ordnance expended in general terms.

4.F.9. Number of aerial combat or reconnaissance missions or sorties flown in CENTCOM's area of operation.

4.F.10. Type of forces involved (e.g., air defense, infantry, armor, marines).

4.F.11. Allied participation by type of operation (Ships, aircraft, ground units, etc.) After approval of the allied unit commander.

4.F.12. Operation code names.

4.F.13. Names and hometowns of U.S. military units.

4.F.14. Service members' names and home towns with the individuals' consent.

4.G. The following categories of information are not releasable since their publication or broadcast could jeopardize operations and endanger lives.

4.G.1. Specific Number of troops in units below corps/MEF level.

4.G.2. Specific number of aircraft in units at or below the air expeditionary wing level.

4.G.3. Specific numbers regarding other equipment of critical supplies (e.g. artillery, tanks, landing craft, radars, trucks, water, etc.).

4.G.4. Specific numbers of ships in units below the carrier battle group level.

4.G.5. Names of military installations or specific geographic locations of military units in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, unless specifically released by the department of defense or authorized by the CENTCOM commander. News and imagery products that identify or include identifiable features of these locations are not authorized for release.

4.G.6. Information regarding future operations.

4.G. 7. Information regarding force protection measures at military installations or encampments (except those which are visible or readily apparent).

- 4.G.8. Photography showing level of security at military installations or encampments.
- 4.G.9. Rules of Engagement.
- 4.G.10. Information on intelligence collection activities compromising tactics, techniques or procedures.
- 4.G.11. Extra precautions in reporting will be required at the commencement of hostilities to maximize operational surprise. Live broadcasts from airfields, on the ground or afloat, by embedded media are prohibited until the safe return of the initial strike package or until authorized by the unit commander.
- 4.G.12. During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movements, tactical deployments, and dispositions that would jeopardize operational security or lives. Information on on-going engagements will not be released unless authorized for release by on-scene commander.
- 4.G.13. Information on special operations units, unique operations methodology or tactics, for example, air operations, angles of attack, and speeds; naval tactical or evasive maneuvers, etc. General terms such as “low” or “fast” may be used.
- 4.G.14. Information on effectiveness of enemy electronic warfare.
- 4.G.15. Information identifying postponed or canceled operations.
- 4.G.16. Information on missing or downed aircraft or missing vessels while search and rescue and recovery operations are being planned or underway.
- 4.G.17. Information on effectiveness of enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection, or security measures.
- 4.G.18. No photographs or other visual media showing an enemy prisoner of war or detainee’s recognizable face, nametag or other identifying feature or item may be taken.
- 4.G.19. Still or video imagery of custody operations or interviews with person under custody.
- 4.H. The following procedures and policies apply to coverage of wounded, injured, and ill personnel.
- 4.H.1. Media representatives will be reminded of the sensitivity of using names of individual casualties or photographs they may have taken which clearly identify casualties until after notification of the NOK and release by OASD (PA).
- 4.H.2. Battlefield casualties may be covered by embedded media as long as the service member’s identity is protected from disclosure for 72 hours or upon verification of NOK notification, whichever is first.
- 4.H.3. Media visits to medical facilities will be in accordance with applicable regulations, standard operating procedures, operations orders and instructions by attending physicians. If approved, service or medical facility personnel must escort media at all times.
- 4.H.4. Patient welfare, patient privacy, and next of kin/family considerations are the governing concerns about news media coverage of wounded, injured, and ill personnel in medical treatment facilities or other casualty collection and treatment locations.
- 4.H.5. Media visits are authorized to medical care facilities, but must be approved by the medical facility commander and attending physician and must not interfere with medical treatment. Requests to visit medical care facilities outside the continental United States will be coordinated by the unified command PA.
- 4.H.6. Reporters may visit those areas designated by the facility commander, but will not be allowed in operating rooms during operating procedures.
- 4.H.7. Permission to interview or photograph a patient will be granted only with the consent of the attending physician or facility commander and with the patient’s informed consent, witnessed by the escort.
- 4.H.8. “Informed consent” means the patient understands his or her picture and comments are being collected for news media purposes and they may appear nationwide in news media reports.
- 4.H.9. The attending physician or escort should advise the service member if NOK have been notified.
5. Immunizations and personal protective gear.
- 5.A. Media organizations should ensure that media are properly immunized before embedding with units. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)–Recommended immunizations for deployment to the Middle East include Hepatitis A; Hepatitis B; Rabies; Tetanus-Diphtheria; and Typhoid. The CDC recommends meningococcal immunizations for visitors to MECCA. If traveling to certain areas in the CENTCOM AOR, the CDC recommends taking prescription antimalarial drugs. Anthrax and smallpox vaccines will be provided to the media

at no expense to the government (the media outlet will bear the expense). For more health information for travelers to the Middle East, go to the CDC web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/mideast.htm>.

5.B. Because the use of personal protective gear, such as helmets or flak vests, is both a personal and professional choice, media will be responsible for procuring/using such equipment. Personal protective gear, as well as clothing, will be subdued in color and appearance.

5.C. Embedded media are authorized and required to be provided with, on a temporary loan basis, nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) protective equipment by the unit with which they are embedded. Unit personnel will provide basic instruction in the proper wear, use, and maintenance of the equipment. Upon termination of the embed, initiated by either party, the NBC equipment shall be returned to the embedding unit. If sufficient NBC protective equipment is not available for embedded media, commanders may purchase additional equipment, with funds normally available for that purpose, and load it to embedded media in accordance with this paragraph.

6. Security

6.A. Media products will not be subject to security review or censorship except as indicated in Para. 6.A.1. Security at the source will be the rule. U.S. military personnel shall protect classified information from unauthorized or inadvertent disclosure. Media provided access to sensitive information, information which is not classified but which may be of operational value to an adversary or when combined with other unclassified information may reveal classified information, will be informed in advance by the unit commander or his/her designated representative of the restrictions on the use or disclosure of such information. When in doubt, media will consult with the unit commander or his/her designated representative.

6.A.1. The nature of the embedding process may involve observation of sensitive information, including troop movements, battle preparations, materiel capabilities and vulnerabilities and other information as listed in Para. 4.G. When a commander or his/her designated representative has reason to believe that a media member will have access to this type of sensitive information, prior to allowing such access, he/she will take prudent precautions to ensure the security of that information. The primary safeguard will be to brief media in advance about what information is sensitive and what the parameters are for covering this type of information. If media are inadvertently exposed to sensitive information they should be briefed after exposure on what information they should avoid covering. In instances where a unit commander or the designated representative determines that coverage of a story will involve exposure to sensitive information beyond the scope of what may be protected by prebriefing or debriefing, but coverage of which is in the best interests of the DOD, the commander may offer access if the reporter agrees to a security review of their coverage. Agreement to security review in exchange for this type of access must be strictly voluntary and if the reporter does not agree, then access may not be granted. If a security review is agreed to, it will not involve any editorial changes; it will be conducted solely to ensure that no sensitive or classified information is included in the product. If such information is found, the media will be asked to remove that information from the product and/or embargo the product until such information is no longer classified or sensitive. Reviews are to be done as soon as practical so as not to interrupt combat operations nor delay reporting. If there are disputes resulting from the security review process they may be appealed through the chain of command, or through PA channels to OASD/PA. This paragraph does not authorize commanders to allow media access to classified information.

6.A.2. Media products will not be confiscated or otherwise impounded. If it is believed that classified information has been compromised and the media representative refuses to remove that information notify the CPIC and/or OASD/PA as soon as possible so the issue may be addressed with the media organization's management.

7. Miscellaneous/Coordinating Instructions:

7.A. OASD (PA) is the initial embed authority. Embedding procedures and assignment authority may be transferred to CENTCOM PA at a later date. This authority may be further delegated at CENTCOM's discretion.

7.B. This guidance authorizes blanket approval for non-local and local media travel aboard DOD airlift for all embedded media on a no-cost, space available basis. No additional costs shall be incurred by the government to provide assistance IAW DODI 5410.15, Para 3.4.

7.C. Use of lipstick and helmet-mounted cameras on combat sorties is approved and encouraged to the greatest extent possible. . . .



Conducting Expeditionary Public Affairs

by Captain Joseph M. Plenzler

Marine Corps Gazette, February 2004.

*“Left unsung, the noblest deed will die”
–MajGen James N. Mattis*

The 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv) attacked across the line of departure from Kuwait into Iraq on 20 March 2003 to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. The division, together with the U.S. Army’s 3d Infantry Division, accomplished this mission by destroying resisting Iraqi forces and capturing the capital city of Baghdad. More than 80 national and international media, embedded within the division’s tactical units, witnessed the campaign and saturated the world’s airwaves and newspapers with reports of the division’s exploits and experiences in combat. The division’s success in the media was predicated on five essential elements:

- (1) The initiative and aggressiveness of junior Marines and officers who embraced the media, shared their courage with the world, and proved to the Iraqi people that there is no better friend, no worse enemy than a U.S. Marine.
- (2) Building realistic expectations of the media in our ranks and ensuring every Marine and sailor had a clear understanding of the commanding general’s (CG’s) mission and intent.
- (3) Early engaging and maintaining contact with the international and national media upon arrival in theater.
- (4) Embracing the media through a humanistic reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSO&I).
- (5) Capitalizing on key critical events by exploiting tactical successes in the media.

Public affairs officers (PAOs) and commands with embedded journalists can best influence the course of the “information war” at the tactical level by setting the conditions for individual and unit success in the media prior to combat and by providing “reinforcing fires” on key communications objectives and tactical victories during the fight.

Preparation for Combat—Building Expectations

There are no finer Marine Corps spokesmen than our junior enlisted Marines. The division’s PA team decided early in the planning phase that the division’s story would be primarily told “where the rubber meets the road.” Early in August 2002, the CG charged his PA section with supervising the development of a predeployment brief to be given to the 20,000 Marines and sailors of the division. The predeployment brief was designed to “image” each Marine and sailor from southern California through deployment and subsequent combat operations on foreign shores with the specified intent of crystallizing the CG’s intent and key mission expectations into the minds of the audience.

The brief provided a powerful vehicle for the PA section to reach out to the commanders, Marines, and sailors of the division; forewarn of the large numbers of media to accompany units in combat; and disarm skepticism about the media’s presence. The media would be riding along with the Marines into battle—living, sweating and, in some cases, bleeding alongside them. To encourage the junior Marines to tell their story to the media, the PAO correlated engaging the media to the “free beer” that patriotic civilians buy Marines on liberty in their hometowns and increased stature in the eyes of attractive members of the opposite sex due to the representation of Marines in the entertainment media. The brief highlighted the photographing of the flag raising atop Mount Surabachi by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal as a positive example of cooperation between the two different camps. The CG encouraged the division telling all hands that the media is an entirely winnable constituency and, that “left unsung, the noblest deed will die.”

Movement to Contact

From the onset, the division PA section recognized the criticality of gaining and maintaining contact with

the media in Kuwait City. The 400 reporters in country, frustrated by the slow pace of media opportunities at the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) press information center, languished in hotel lobbies as irate editors in New York and London screamed for copy. The PA section recognized this hunger for media opportunities and, pockets bulging with journalist' business cards, embarked on a media blitzkrieg hosting more than 400 reporters in 40 days.

The PA Marines put together media opportunities on "bubble gum and bailing wire" often hitchhiking with the media due to the scarcity of available military and commercial vehicles. In one instance they led 36 journalists in a 16-media-vehicle convoy to visit 1st Tank Battalion out at Udari Range #9 in the middle of a tooz—an Arabian sandstorm—navigating by global positioning system and map alone with visibility at less than 50 feet through 40 to 60 mile per hour winds. The tanks couldn't see their targets on the range. The story of the tank company training in harsh weather conditions carried the headlines, taught the reporters about the tenacity of our young Marines, and also provided a good lesson of what to expect should they decide to embed with the division for combat operations.

To further develop the relationship between the division and the media, the PA team organized professional military education (PME) sessions for the reporters at the CFLCC weekly meetings. Topics covered nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) defense familiarization; a gear packing seminar; tips on field living; and division-specific media ground rules. The objective of the PME sessions was to convey to the media that the 1st MarDiv cares whether embedded media live or die.

Concurrently, the PA team began exploring the feasibility of many television (TV) reporters' requests to use hard-wired, satellite transmission capable, 4-wheel-drive, diesel, desert colored vehicles, and night vision qualified drivers to support their broadcasts while embedded with the division. The team determined that allowing the media to use their own vehicles would benefit the division by ameliorating some of the logistics burden on receiving units (a TV crew generally requires ten 10-cube equivalents of space and lift) and allow the media to broadcast "live on the fly" in combat. (The setup time for transmission without the hard-wired vehicle is 2 hours.) Division PA requested to I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) to appeal the Assistant Secretary of Defense prohibition on media vehicles in embedded units. Most TV media opted to assign vehicles to their embedded correspondents in the hope that the verdict would be positive and fielded the vehicles on short-term embeds with division units. On all early tests they performed spectacularly. Unfortunately, the division's appeal to allow the vehicles was rejected. This subsequently limited some embedded TV media's ability to file their stories.

RSO&I

On 10 March the PA section met at the Hilton Hotel in Kuwait City with 80 reporters assigned to embed within the division's tactical units. Marines issued NBC suits, masks, and nerve agent antidote kits. Doctors turned correspondents into pincushions with anthrax and smallpox vaccinations. Senior Marine leaders gave briefings on ground rules and the organization and mission of I MEF. The division PA team worked furiously to address the needs of individual media, answer hundreds of questions, and ensure that the media were prepared to embed. During one briefing a reporter skeptically asked, "Really, how close are you going to allow me to get to the frontlines?" The division PAO replied:

I can put you in the back of an LVTP-7 amphibious assault vehicle with 18 angry grunts, drive you within 300 meters of the objective, and send you in the assault as the Marines storm the enemy's trench lines and drive bayonets into their hearts.

The room went silent. The audience could have heard a pin drop. "Is he serious?" asked one skittish reporter. The division would later deliver, in scores.

Prior to embedding, the PA team spent many hours determining the best spread load of correspondents across the battalions to ensure a balance of print, radio, and TV journalists throughout the division's battlespace. Every news agency would get their own "exclusive" and be separated from their competitors. The PA team honored every previous habitual relationship between commanders and reporters without exception—going so far as to promise reporters with prior experience with the division that they would be "picked up at Starbucks in Kuwait City" if their official request to embed was not approved. The PA team

aggressively lobbied for the additional media, and the requests were eventually approved.

The PA team made every effort to maximize the social bonding potential of the Marines and media by assigning reporters to units based on the hometown of the commander (or home station in the case of Reserve units). PAO considered media embedded within the regimental combat teams (RCTs) and separate battalions almost to be in a “direct support” relationship and retained a small group of “general support” reporters from the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, National Public Radio, and *El Correo* at the division main to exploit key successes in the media by transporting them to key locations on the battlefield. The PA team purposely chose the reporters residing at the main on three key factors: circulation, depth of reporting, and acknowledgement of international contribution to the coalition (in the case of *El Correo*—the largest circulating newspaper in Spain).

All too often, words such as “handle,” “escort,” and “manage” are used to describe interactions with the media. This vocabulary insinuates that PAOs can control or manipulate the media, and Marines caught using such foul language in the division had their collective mouths washed out with proverbial soap. The CG suggested to the unit commanders, Marines, and sailors that the media is an entirely winnable constituency, and a new lexicon was established to set the tone. Marines assigned to assist the media were called buddies. Media were not escorted; they were “adopted” and made members of the division team. This subtle difference framed the division’s desired approach to interactions between Marines and the media and, coupled with the Marines’ traditional comradeship, resulted in quick assimilation of journalists into the ranks. Journalistic professionalism and the desire to remain “objective” could not stop human nature, and the media quickly bonded with the Marines amid austerity, danger, and hardship.

Reinforcing Fires

PA is a combat multiplier. Properly conducted, media operations can provide “reinforcing fires” that support operational and strategic objectives by exploiting fleeting opportunities that emerge on the battlefield. The following are some examples.

Moustaches. As the division prepared for combat in Kuwait, the G-2 (intelligence) section learned that Iraqi paramilitary forces possessed U.S. military uniforms and could wear them to infiltrate friendly units and to commit atrocities against the Shia population in an attempt to turn local public opinion against the U.S. forces. It is common knowledge that Iraqi males prize their moustaches and loathe shaving them off. To illustrate the significance of the seriousness of the issue, a common insult in the region is, “A curse upon your moustache!” In an effort to neutralize the infiltration threat, the CG invited all Marines and sailors in the division to participate in the “First Annual Moustache Growing Contest” that was promptly reported by the media and presumably collected in the open press by Iraqi intelligence. The desired effect was for the Iraqi infiltration squads to feel reassured in keeping their moustaches. Immediately prior to crossing the line of departure, all division Marines were promptly told to shave their moustaches and challenge any moustache-bearing individual in U.S. uniforms.

Securing the south Rumaylah oilfields and liberation of Safwan. The division attacked and defeated the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Infantry Division to secure the south Rumaylah oilfields and liberate the town of Safwan in a lightning strike during the night from 20 to 21 March. This attack was launched a day early due to intelligence reports and unmanned aerial vehicle reconnaissance indicating that Saddam Hussein’s forces were preparing to destroy critical oil infrastructure in the hopes of creating an environmental disaster and deny the use of the oilfields to the new Iraq. Following the advance of assault forces, the division PA team scrambled the headquarters battalion embedded media and hurried them to the oilfields and border town.

SSgt John Jamison took John Kifner, a *New York Times* correspondent, and photographer Ozier Mohammed aboard a UH-1N helicopter to inspect one of the gas and oil separation and pumping stations secured by RCT- 5. The simple fact that the sky was not ablaze with burning oil smoke and the Persian Gulf was not slick with crude was a clear and early victory for the coalition forces. This fact was not lost on the press.

The PAO and deputy G-3 (operations), LtCol Clarke Lethin, drove Mercedes Gallego of *El Correo*, John Burnett of National Public Radio, and Tony Perry of the *Los Angeles Times* to the small border town of Safwan. On scene the embedded reporters and a host of unilateral media from the Associated Press and *Newsweek*, to

name a few, watched as jubilant Iraqis looted the Ba'ath Party headquarters and U.S. Marines tore down murals of Saddam Hussein. The interactions of the Marines with the Iraqis reinforced, early on in the campaign, the President's message that coalition forces were liberators, not conquerors. Cecil B. Demille could not have created a better scene for the media on the first day of the war than the reality of Safwan in front of them.

The fedayeen and "Chicken Little" reporting. The division battled fedayeen militants using unconventional terrorist tactics from the Euphrates to the Tigris and beyond. Highly motivated and poorly trained, they routinely fired on Marines from ambulances, behind women and children, in apartments, and inside hospitals, schools, and mosques. The inflated news of fedayeen attacks became prominent in the press at a time when the Marines were killing the zealots by the scores. This hyperbole of fedayeen capability sent visions of Vietnam dancing in journalists' heads. The PA team acted quickly to highlight the destruction of fedayeen and Ba'ath Party loyalists in villages and small towns by transporting headquarters battalion's embedded media to RCT-1 to observe combat operations along Highway 7. As the division resumed its attack toward Baghdad, the press quickly realized the Marines had the Iraqis on the run. The CG conducted a well-timed press conference near the banks of the Diyala River to highlight the fedayeen's cowardice and flagrant violations of the Geneva Convention, Law of Land Warfare, and any code of chivalry. "They are as worthless an example of men we have ever fought," MajGen Mattis said, "and it is a pleasure to kill them." His words resounded in the media within hours. The combined effort assisted in taking the wind out of fedayeen sails on the battlefield of public opinion.

The suicide school. At 1530Z, 10 April 2003, a 30-year-old Iraqi male walked up to a checkpoint manned by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, pulled a pin on a handgrenade, and blew himself in half, injuring four Marines and one sailor. Fifteen minutes after the incident, the division PAO went live on the air with Cable News Network (CNN's) Christiana Amanpour to discuss the incident. The reporter asked pointed questions about "new suicide tactics and the state of security measures," yet the PAO used the opportunity to highlight that the:

. . . division planned on encountering every dirty trick. That's what you get when you fight a regime that has systematically raped, tortured, and imprisoned its populace for the past 22 years.

The interview quickly departed the issue of security and allowed the PAO to take the "bully pulpit" and highlight the regime's complete disregard for the Law of War and Geneva Convention. It reinforced the CG's earlier remarks about the lack of manhood and cowardly acts of the paramilitary fighters

The next day the division staff judge advocate, Maj Joe Lore, called to notify the PA team of an emerging, immediately exploitable event. Earlier in the day RCT-7 captured an elementary school in a highly populated area in central Baghdad that the fedayeen were using as a training facility for suicide bombers and storage for their deadly cargo. The RCT's explosive ordnance disposal team diffused several timed explosive boobytraps left behind in briefcases and boxes. Had the devices detonated, the resulting explosion would have leveled the neighborhood.

Within minutes the PA team scoured the hotel and rounded up CNN, CBS (Columbia Broadcasting Station), and NBC (National Broadcasting Corporation) camera teams and drove them to the site. Inside of what appeared to be a health science classroom, 60 handsomely fabricated black leather vests were laid on the floor in plastic bags. Each vest was filled with explosives and ball bearings and wired with blasting caps. Timed, command activated, and mercury switch detonators that were designed to fire when the assailant raised his arms over his head in a surrendering pose sat in boxes nearby. Nearly 250 other, less sophisticated suicide devices filled other rooms. The vests and detonators were of Palestinian design, and the markings on the boxes read, "Made exclusively for the Saddam Fedayeen." The press reported that the discovery of the materials conclusively linked the regime to international terrorism.

The Palestine Hotel. Returning to the Palestine Hotel, the PA team exploited the day's success in the media. Concurrently, the division established a civil-military operations center (CMOC), led by LtCol Pete Zarcone, the division's civil-military liaison officer, in the briefing room previously used by Tariq Azziz. The CMOC immediately set about trying to "jump start" the city back to life. The first priority was the reestablishment of civil order, and to do that, the Marines needed the local police and traffic cops to come back to work.

But how do you find the police, and how do you get them back to work? With all of the mass communications stations knocked off air by coalition bombing and the lack of electricity in the city, only one means existed to reach the people of Baghdad—radio.

The PA team immediately located nearby Iraqis and, with the help of a translator, determined that Baghdadis preferred their own radio stations but had been listening to the British Broadcasting Corporation's Arabic World Service. Coordinating with the CMOC, the PA team and a Free Iraqi Forces' interpreter went on the air to deliver an appeal to get the local police supervisors, electrical power grid technicians, water engineers, and other critical infrastructure personnel to come to the hotel to start coordinating with military officials to bring the city back to life. Over 300 Baghdadis showed up at the front entry control point the next morning.

Throughout the week the PA team made the daily rounds of a circuit judge throughout the hotel, visiting news agency after agency to highlight the division's successes in the reestablishment of an interim police force, the delivery of 15,000 gallons of fuel to critical water treatment and pumping stations, the reestablishment of power to limited parts of the city, and many others. The PA team set up radio interviews for local Imams to call on the Iraqi people to stop the looting and cooperate with the coalition forces. In nearly every instance, correspondents would devour the information and broadcast it to the world minutes later.

Conclusion—A Qualified Success

Embedding media into the division's tactical units was a qualified success. It significantly countered any Iraqi propaganda attempts by having the media reporting the division's combat operations to the world. Embedding helped mitigate negative news due to the bonds formed between the media and their assigned units. Reporting was positively influenced by the unavoidable human tendency for Marines and reporters to bond while living together for extended periods of time amid austerity, danger and hardship. Embedding brought the sacrifices, trials, and victories of 18-year-old Marines and sailors to the American and international public on an hourly basis. And, ultimately, embedding closed some of the gap that exists between the military and media. Marines and members of the press built significant bonds and grew to respect each other's professions and common goals.

One must remember that, in this campaign, the coalition forces were both good and lucky. I caveat the success of the embed process with the words of George Orwell:

In general, one is only right when either wish or fear coincides with reality—we are all capable of believing things which we know to be untrue, and then, when we are finally proved wrong, impudently twisting the facts so as to show that we were right. Intellectually, it is possible to carry on this process for an indefinite time: the only check on it is that sooner or later a false belief bumps against the solid reality, usually on a battlefield.

We were fortunate to have achieved victory with minimal casualties—friendly, enemy, and civilian. Shock, speed, and surprise shattered the enemy's will to fight. How would American public opinion have changed if the media reported that coalition forces suffered mass casualties in a chemical attack? How would support for the war on the homefront have changed if Baghdad had been a long, bloody slog and was broadcast live into the living rooms of America on a nightly basis? Although the division experienced success with the embed construct in this conflict, a new risk-benefit analysis must be conducted prior to embedding media in anticipation of and during future conflicts. The division only hopes that the Iraqi people will wisely spend this gift of newly found liberation and freedom paid for by the blood of the young men and women of the United States of America and United Kingdom.





The Military-Media Relationship: From Bull Run to Baghdad

by Major Douglas M. Powell

21st Century Defense: U.S. Joint Operations, 2003

“The first essential in military operations is that no information of value should 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 and reconcile these sometime-diverse considerations.”

—Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1944

Since the Civil War, the US military and media have struggled to find common ground regarding freedom of information and the nature of the relationship between the military and media. The relationship has flexed, bent and broke at various points of our nation’s history. In a democracy, the military and the media have a natural tension between them. In response to this tension, access provided the media in wartime has varied. Nevertheless, the mission of the military is fundamentally the same as the media: to uphold and defend democracy, the constitution, and personal freedoms. It’s unfortunate that the military and media’s means of accomplishing our respective missions is sometimes at odds. At its root, the tension between the military and media is healthy, and will probably always exist at some level. The government and military exist to serve the interests of the American people. There is no argument from either side that access to public records and openness in government are essential in a democracy, and freedom of information is essential in times of crisis and change.

In a time when our country faces threats inside our borders and against US citizens and interests overseas from terrorists who engage in asymmetrical warfare, both the military and the media face the difficult task of deciding how information is gathered, distributed and used. Often times, the interests of the media and military are competing. The media in general recognize the need for confidentiality and secrecy in certain military endeavors, and government endeavors for that matter, and the importance of privacy protection in an ever-increasing electronic information era. Transformations in the nature of warfare, technology improvements, and the structure and speed of the mass media have wrought major changes in the military-media relationship.

Bull Run to Baghdad

The level of cooperation and understanding between the military and the media has changed significantly from one war to another. During the Civil War the government imposed restric-

tions on the press for operational security reasons and because of the speed at which the telegraph allowed news reporters to reach the presses. Reporters were able to send reports of the battle of Bull Run to New York City in 24 hours by using the telegraph. During World War I Congress passed the Sedition Act of 1918, part of the Espionage Act, which prohibited anyone from printing, writing, or publishing anything that could be construed as counter to the war effort. During World War II the media reported on the war with a self-censorship methodology. Although these guidelines relied upon voluntary censorship by journalists, military commanders in the field proved far more restrictive. Six months after the Korean War started, full military censorship was imposed, and correspondents were placed under the complete jurisdiction of the Army. Reporters could be punished by court-martial for any violation of a long list of instructions. The media's coverage of the War in Vietnam was drastically different and caused a significant rift between the military and the media. The media roamed freely and censorship was practically non-existent because the military had no means to enforce it. The invasion of Grenada in October 1983 involved severe media censorship and control, but was a significant point in the military-media relationship because it resulted afterwards in much effort at military-media cooperation. As a result of Grenada the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a panel of experts to re-evaluate the military-media relationship. The panel's report contained eight major recommendations, the most significant of which was the creation of a 'pool system' of reporting, which ultimately became the Department of Defense National Media Pool (DNMP). Another significant recommendation was that military commanders conduct public affairs (media relations) planning concurrently with operational planning. All of these brought with them significant impact on the operational commander and his planning staff. The first use of the DNMP occurred in 1989 during Operation Just Cause, the US invasion of Panama. During this operation the 'pool' system received mixed reviews. Although media were deployed from Washington DC to Panama to cover the operation, the media's access to troops and the battlefield was very limited and after-action reports later indicated that public affairs planning was not done concurrently with operational planning.

Birth of Public Affairs Doctrine

From Department of Defense Directives to individual service instructions and directives, today's military makes public affairs planning an integral part of operational planning. However, that was not always the case. Over the course of several decades the Pentagon and the services have struggled with the 'how' and 'why' of incorporating public affairs planning into operational planning.

Not until the 1991 Gulf War, the dawning of the "CNN War," and the Pentagon's development of the "Principles for News Media Coverage of DoD Operations," did commanders fully realize the importance of preparing for combat coverage. On the flip side, journalists and editors and the mass media industry have faced an internal struggle with their own military reporting. During the 1991 Gulf War many journalists were ill-prepared to describe or assess American performance on the battlefield. Military control over the media during the Gulf War was very restrictive once again. Essentially, the military implemented the 'Press Pool' system. Some of the pools went into the field for a few hours at a time, some for days. Public affairs officers accompanied the press pools, selected and pre-briefed the troops to be interviewed, checked TV shots, reviewed photos and written reports, removed information deemed sensitive, changed wording of stories in some cases, and sometimes ordered further review of stories and pictures. Once again, the media were unsatisfied with the level of control and limited access on the battlefield.

After the Gulf War, in April 1992, a significant conference with far-reaching implications was held between military and media leaders in Chicago. This successful conference resulted in the mutually agreed upon 'Nine Principles for News Coverage of the US Military in Combat,' and have since been incorporated into the Pentagon's, and subsequently all the services', doctrine for media relations. The military's doctrine can be found in Joint Publication 3-61, titled 'Public Affairs Support of Joint Operations.'

The agreement reached in Chicago in April 1992 set the stage for media coverage of future operations. In essence, the agreement stated that during conflict, the military services would follow the new principles to improve combat news coverage. While the 'Nine Principles for News Coverage' highlighted concepts and procedures that had been in other DoD documents for years, the publication of Joint Publication 3-61 in 1997 went a step further and emphasized to commanders at all levels the importance of their personal involvement in plan-

ning for news coverage of combat operations. Furthermore, it solidified three concepts: that open and independent reporting was the standard for combat coverage for the future, that pools were to be an exception rather than the rule, and that voluntary compliance with security guidelines was a condition of access to US military forces.

Post Desert Storm

The media's coverage of the US' and United Nations' intervention in Somalia influenced military operations primarily because the press had unprecedented access on the battlefield. The media's freedom to move virtually unrestricted on the Mogadishu battlefield gave reporters unprecedented access to cover hostilities.

The US led invasion of Haiti in September 1994 saw military-media cooperation significantly improved from the 1991 Gulf War. Detailed media planning was integrated into operational plans with special emphasis from Lieutenant General H. Hugh Shelton, Commander Joint Task Force for the operation. Lieutenant General Shelton later wrote, "In this operation, the media were assigned to units spearheading the planned invasion. This way, reporters, and thus, the American people, would see how their Armed Forces performed in action. While operations in Haiti may not be the new paradigm for the media-military relationship it certainly improved it."

War reporting in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom was difficult for reporters because the military campaign, meant to topple the Taliban government and destroy the Al Qaeda terrorist network, relied heavily on special operations units and air power. The media's access to military units throughout the majority of operations in Afghanistan was limited. However, the Marine Corps embedded 46 journalists with Task Force 58, which resulted in more than 350 stories being filed about Marines at Camp Rhino and Kandahar. Although the official DoD press pool system was never activated during the Afghanistan campaign, the Corps' proactive engagement with the media opened the door for future DoD endorsement of embedding during later operations, such as Operation Anaconda. The Pentagon's decision to limit media coverage of operations in Afghanistan had some negative effects. For example, a raid by the Army's 10th Mountain Division on the remote village of Danditemur, a purported Taliban holdout, allowed the Taliban to put out damaging propaganda against the US after the raid. When US reporters, who were not allowed to accompany forces during the actual raid, visited the village a day after, residents claimed soldiers had run down and killed a small child and then beat an 80-year-old man to death with their gun butts. This account dominated some reports about the episode.

In November of 2002, with the expectation that the US would be at war with Iraq within a few months, the Marine Corps initiated a 'media boot-camp' training course at Quantico, Virginia the brilliance of the concept was quickly realized by others in the Pentagon, and the effort soon grew into a Pentagon-sponsored, joint program. The media boot-camp was meant to improve the military-media relationship and was not intended to be a certification program guaranteeing journalists an embed position with military units during any future conflict or a prerequisite for access to military units. The focus of the one-week courses was to educate journalists in regards to things that would help them better understand military culture, provide journalists with skills that would help them survive and cope in a combat or hostile environment, and expose them to the physical requirements of field training. Two hundred and thirty two journalists attended four separate media boot camps, representing the largest and smallest of media organizations, from Reuters and New York Times to smaller newspapers such as the Virginia Pilot. Some of the media included foreign journalists representing Agency France Press, Russian ITAR-TASS, and Abu Dhabi television network.

Embedding Program

In December 2002 the Pentagon announced that if there was fighting in Iraq, reporters would accompany the troops. The media looked upon the Pentagon's announcement with a weary eye based upon past experience. Nevertheless, the Pentagon was embarking on a public-relations experiment of unprecedented size and scope. In March 2003, as part of a coalition force of approximately 250,000, the US military launched Operation Iraqi Freedom. Accompanying the military force were approximately 600 'embedded' journalists. The last time journalists accompanied a large American invading force in this fashion was on the beaches of Normandy in World War II, and then the number of journalists was significantly less.

The Pentagon's intent for the embedding program was to maximize coverage of coalition operations, which was a significant departure from operations in Afghanistan and other operations in recent history. Reporters lived with, ate, slept and worked alongside coalition forces from beginning to end of the operation. With the exception of Special Operation Forces, the embeds were permanent. Journalists could not leave the unit and did not have the choice to move to a different unit. However, journalists did have the option of leaving a unit and returning to a safe area if desired. Once embedded, journalists operated as part of the unit and commanders provided media with every opportunity to observe actual combat operations, and the reporter's safety was not a reason to limit a reporter's movement or access. Nevertheless, there were a few bumps along the way.

Many in the mass media felt the reporting that resulted from the embed system was like "looking at the Grand Canyon through a thousand straws" or an 'ant's view of an ant hill.' Despite the mass media's investment of tens of thousands of dollars and hundreds of journalists, the collective story about the war was often blurry. Prior to the war's start, editors at the major newspapers and networks were very excited at the embed program because the expectation was that journalists would be able to see and report actual combat as it happened while other journalists receive the larger operational or strategic story of the war from US Central Command or the Pentagon. However, journalists attending the Central Command briefings in Qatar and the Pentagon briefings in Washington were frustrated by what many perceived as vague briefings. In addition, communications technology caused much frustration among the media because of the information gap created by the real-time war reporting that was being provided by the embedded journalists. With their satellite telephones and other high-tech communications gear, they often were providing colleagues at Central Command headquarters in Doha, Qatar with battlefield information before the military's public affairs team knew anything about it.

Prior to the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard B. Myers, released a joint message to all US combatant commanders explaining the importance of facilitating media coverage of the war, which would play a large part in shaping public perception of the war effort, both at home and abroad. They knew that the speed of the media and scope of impact has greatly accelerated and increased since the 1991 Gulf War. They knew that the speed and breadth of news coverage on the battlefield could not be contained, nor controlled, but must be embraced in order for military commanders to have any significant influence in shaping the 'information' war. Commanders were asked to engage not only journalists from the US, but foreign media as well. Commanders were told to make plans for declassification of information and release of video and images at the lowest possible levels in order to allow journalists to rapidly get the story back to their news organizations.

Faced with the churn of 24/7 news and the prospect that former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would mount an effective media campaign of his own, Pentagon officials concluded that reporters embedded with units would be more credible than military briefers.

The Pentagon's embedding strategy was very much an effort to fight a public relations battle at home and abroad during the course of a war. Also, it is a natural progression towards improving the military-media relationship in light of the lessons learned in all the conflicts since Vietnam.

Embed Ground Rules

If it's true and it's news, journalists will report it. In reporting the news journalists do not always consider whether or not the story will hinder or help the war effort. However, the Pentagon and White House are undoubtedly concerned about the effect news reporting has towards the war effort. In light of this, the Pentagon required all media embeds to comply with a set of ground rules, which were established for the safety and security of coalition forces and embedded media.

These embed ground rules were not meant to prevent the release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or uncomplimentary information. Similar to the DoD's self-censorship rules during the Civil War and WW II, the journalists had the freedom to transmit or file text, images or video without prior review by military censors for the most part. There were times that the media had to agree to content review in order to gain access to sensitive briefings, but as a matter of course, however, there was no censor review. Embedded media were exposed

to battle plans, troop movements, battle preparations, material capabilities, vulnerabilities, as well as some elements of enemy order of battle. As much as journalists and military commanders both understand the importance of maintaining operational security, operational security is often difficult to explicitly define. Commanders in the field had the responsibility of ensuring media were thoroughly briefed as to what information was sensitive and the parameters for reporting such information. As a member of the unit, journalists were aware that release of certain operational information could potentially be detrimental and harmful. For their own safety and the safety of the unit, self-censorship worked well and the ground rules were adhered to. However, there were a few instances where journalists reported information deemed by the Pentagon to be potentially harmful to operational security. The most publicized incidents along those lines involved non-embedded reporters, such as Fox's Geraldo Rivera, who drew a map on camera indicating troop positions, or Christian Science Monitor freelancer Phil Smucker, who was accused of revealing troop locations in a TV interview.

If one of the Pentagon's top priorities is to keep reporters from reporting sensitive information, the embed program is most certainly the answer. There is no faster way to sensitize a news organization to the dangers or reporting too much information than assign one of their reporters and camerapersons to a combat unit, according to Jamie McIntyre, senior CNN reporter at the Pentagon.

Reporters or Cheerleaders

Some journalists and editors worried that the embed program engendered one-sided coverage. However, as much as some people felt the embedded journalist were nothing more than 'cheerleaders,' embedded reporters didn't always follow the Pentagon's party line, particularly when things went wrong. Early in the conflict, embedded journalists offered a dramatic look at the attacks on supply lines, for example. The Christian Science Monitor's Ann Scott Tyson, embedded with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, reported that the Army nearly ran out of food and ammunition, due to poor planning. The most memorable situation where a field dispatch discredited the official line at the Pentagon was a Washington Post story that told of members of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division who 'slaughtered' an Iraqi family approaching their checkpoint in a civilian vehicle without firing enough warning shots. "You just [expletive] killed a family because you didn't fire a warning shot soon enough," the Post's William Branigin wrote, quoting an Army Captain. Branigin's report was exceptional enough that the Pentagon used it as an example of how the embeds were telling the whole story, good and bad.

Future Looks Bright

There is absolutely no question that the Pentagon's embedding program has made a positive impact on the military-media relationship. Without question, there are now more than 600 very seasoned combat reporters around the world who have a solid understanding of how the military conducts warfare and perhaps a greater respect for service members. Also, thousands of US troops now have a greater understanding of the professionalism and dedication of journalists and a healthy respect for the role the media now plays and will always play in future military operations. In the near future, the professionalism and bravery of our nation's service men and woman will be detailed in the history books that will soon begin rolling off the presses, thanks in no small part to the comprehensive 'rough draft' written by more than 600 journalists who risked their lives to witness the truth and write it.

There will no doubt be much discussion and analysis in the near future regarding what worked and what didn't about the media's coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as the military's control of journalist and the amount of access granted. However, both the media and the military must keep in mind that regardless of how successful the embedding program worked during Operation Iraqi Freedom, there is no certainty, nor should there be, that the Pentagon will use the same concept of dealing with the media during future conflicts. However, a very strong precedent has been set and even Bryan Whitman, assistant press secretary for the Pentagon and architect of the embedding program, said, "I think this is how we're going to cover wars in the future."



PRES

DANGER
KITTY

CLOWNS to the left of me...

by Captain Dan McSweeney

U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November 2003.

A Marine Corps public affairs officer and his media embeds ride the “clown cart” to help tell the story of the war in Iraq.

Charlie scrawled “clown cart” in magic marker on the back of a wooden Saddam sign and tied it to the grille of our seven-ton truck. That’s how we got the label. On the surface, he was just adding levity to a stressful journey across the highways and dusty side roads of central Iraq during the third week of the war. Over the next few days, however, I began to understand the significance of the sign.

In addition to Charlie, who writes for *The New York Times*, there were journalists from CNN, BBC, NPR, *Newsweek*, Associated Press, Abu Dhabi TV, Getty Images, and *Stern* magazine in our group. They were embedded with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and I, as the unit’s public affairs officer, was their escort. During the two weeks they spent in country with us, I came to some realizations about military-media relations and had some memorable, if trying, experiences with these men.

The 24th MEU had been deployed for seven months and was on board ships of the *Nassau* (LHA-4) Amphibious Ready Group, preparing to head home, when the ground war in Iraq began. A week later, the Marines heard they were going in. Spirits were high as the unit readied to go ashore, and my focus became gathering and preparing the embeds assigned to us by the Pentagon.

They all had been reporting on the war from Kuwait and were anxious to go north. Though the group was a virtual dream team, I could sense there would be some challenges ahead.

At the Coalition Press Information Center, I described the MEU to them, discussing our capabilities, size, assets, and missions and answering all manner of questions on what they could expect. A few days later, we flew north and joined the 24th MEU at a base camp between Nasiriyah and Al Kut. After settling in, the reporters and I traveled with the MEU commander to the outskirts of Al Amarah, just west of the Iranian border, for a mission.

Our artillery battery had set up a gun position in muddy field and was waiting for fire missions to be called by the mechanized company that had rolled into the city, looking for the 10th Iraqi Division. We soon discovered that there was little resistance, mostly thumbs up from the locals, so we spent the night at a nearby military airfield secured by “Easy” Company, and the journalists all set up videophones to file their reports.

The clown cart sign appeared the next morning, salvaged from the airfield headquarters building. Although I initially did not like the label, it stuck. To my surprise, the 14 reporter and 6 Marines in our group developed a sort of shared identity once that sign was placed on the truck.

To their credit, these reporters did not take themselves too seriously. They, like the Marines they were covering, were all about mission accomplishment. It probably was ingenious for them to embrace the clown cart concept, as it caught most of my unit off guard. Many of our Marines cringed at the thought of having to deal with fussy, self-important journalists, but the clown cart sign elicited begrudging smiles—and the reporters got good access.

There was a lot of experience on that truck—top-notch reporters who had been there, done that. They had an insatiable desire to question and to move and to push, and they had no qualms about living the way we did. They slept next to us and jumped into their survivability holes when the alarm was sounded. (The miniature gear tents several of them brought, mistaking them for full-sized shelters, did elicit laughs from our Marines, though.)

According to protocol, the reporters were the equivalent of majors and, therefore, outranked me. I tried my best not to yell at them, but they regularly infuriated me. They brought way too much gear. They had to be told over and over to close the doors of their work tent at night to maintain light discipline. They apparently were incapable of picking up after themselves. The list goes on. In spite of all of this, I liked them.

We rode our crowded, clanging truck through the ruins of ancient Mesopotamia, listening to classic rock and Miles Davis, in logistics convoys led by force reconnaissance Marines, military police, and antitank vehicles. I got them where they needed to go; they got what they needed to get; and as combat operations subsided, they left us.

It was a symbiotic relationship fraught with fundamental and irreconcilable differences. We butted heads at least once a day, and at one point I heard myself yelling “Good riddance!” at a reporter who was telling me about his upcoming departure. (We later made plans to have a beer in Washington after the war.)

Stuck in the Middle with Them

These reporters and the Marines in my unit met in a continuously redefined middle. Neither they nor we had any choice in the matter. They approached the situation from a certain culture: individualistic, informal, committed to disseminating information. We came to the experience from a different place. Our primary concern was the group, and preserving the security of information was fundamental to our operations. Still, each cohort made significant efforts to compromise. Each came to the field and literally found common ground on which to walk, sleep, and work during the embedment. The effort led to a mutual, if guarded, sense of trust.

This was classic military-media tension. The only two innovations were quantity (almost 800 embedded reporters and more than 2,000 unilateral registered at Coalition Press Information Centers) and reporting speed (potentially instant global coverage).

Come to think of it, this was revolutionary.

The time we drove to the Al Amarah stadium is a perfect illustration of the grey areas we inhabited during our time together. I had planned to let the TV guys do a live shot from the site, in front of an Al Samoud missile that had been discovered beneath the bleachers there. As the reporters conducted interviews and photographed the missile on its bullet-ridden mobile launcher, hundreds of locals gathered around and began to press into the clown cart, fascinated by the cameras and microphone.

My Marines provided security around the truck. Though we understood that this was a neutral-to-friendly crowd, we quickly realized that all the ingredients for riot, ambush, or abduction were present. Surrounded by several hundred Iraqis, I was caught between wanting to maximize exposure of the missile and the need to get out of there before anything came undone. In the end, the BBC crew was the last to break down, complaining that we were being too cautious, although some of the other reporters exclaimed that we already had stayed too long.

We split the difference between access and security and, thankfully, no one got hurt. Part of me feels I should have moved us out earlier. And yet, it was a relatively safe setting in the context of wartime reporting. The 24th MEU had helped liberate the city, and most of the locals were waving to us.

Our experiences in and around Al Kut were just as insightful for me. The 24th MEU’s role in the assault on that city was to establish a blocking position south of the city limits—but the reporters wanted more. They wanted to see what was happening in the center of town.

“Why can’t we just drive in and take a look around?” one of them asked. It took some effort, but I accepted that this was not a completely ludicrous question.

“Because your embedment is with the 24th MEU and the 24th MEU has no Marines going into the city right now,” I replied.

“We’ll there’s no story here,” another said.

“Well, I can’t tell the commanding officer of this unit to change the operations order for this mission and send a detachment of Marines into the center of Al Kut because our reporters want to cover what is happening there.”

Probably, I did not say it as smoothly as that. Their attitude surprised—almost galled—me. They were hard-headed, stubborn. I was frustrated. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that getting them into town was a relevant objective. Luckily, my commanding officer understood that too and looked into getting us closer.

I eventually got permission to push the clown cart north on a scheduled logistics run. We got a glimpse of the city while in the convoy and continued to the I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), the senior command for all Marines in Iraq. There, I thought we might be able to link with some psychological operations (psyops) or civil affairs guys and head back to the center of Al Kut for a closer look.

By chance, while we were at the I MEF base camp, the seven prisoners of war rescued outside Samarra were flown in for transport to Germany. Our unexpected arrival led to a disagreement among the reporters and public affairs officers about how the rescue should be reported. I MEF had its own embedded reporters, who felt their agreement with the command to receive special access to its activities would be violated if all my reporters were allowed to cover the event. That made sense to me, since the I MEF embeds had spent weeks developing a relationship with the command and had shown commitment to it.

Regardless, many of my embeds mounted a well-coordinated effort to be granted access. After several minutes of raised voices and negotiations, the deal was made to have my TV and photo guys cover the arrival along with I MEF embeds, both of whom were writers. This allowed for the widest possible coverage while preserving the I MEF embeds' expectations. It was a fair deal brokered by the I MEF public affairs officer, who was put in a difficult situation by our unannounced arrival.

Those prisoners of war became one of the biggest stories of the war, and the manner in which their rescue was reported illustrates one of the fundamental tensions in the embed program. While the reporters embedded with I MEF had a right to expect special access, the importance of disseminating visuals of rescued Americans was clear. So this hybrid coverage occurred, and I realized that, like every other important construct in life, media activity must turn on a dime, as one of my reporters pointed out. You need to be flexible. You need to constantly push and adapt.

It was a two-way street: They constantly pushed me stories and I reminded them they would be sitting in a hotel in Kuwait were it not for their embedment with us.

One last anecdote. Our unit's translator, Khuder al-Emiri, was a native of Qalaat Sukaar. Our first mission in that town was to raid the local Ba'ath Party and secret police headquarters buildings. We arrived early one morning, and on securing and searching the buildings, found weapons ranging from rifles to mortar rounds, which we began loading on our trucks.

All the while, Khuder was in the psyops vehicle, broadcasting prerecorded warnings in Arabic for the locals to stay away and not interfere with the mission. Their curiosity piqued, some approached the vehicle, and Khuder stepped outside the Humvee. Everything changed then. The locals recognized him, and they broke into singing, laughter, even crying, which quickly spread to hundreds of others in an impromptu homecoming celebration.

I had never seen anything like it. The scene approached ecstatic pandemonium when the crowd produced two young men whom Khuder did not recognize. They were his sons, and he had not seen them or any of the other locals in 12 years. The event was captured in video, still image, and sound for a global audience.

This occurred at a point when, at least in certain media outlets, our success in the war effort was in question. Khuder's story ran widely for several days, and I would like to think it convinced many people of the Iraqis' support for regime change.

For me, the larger lesson was that a significant portion of the media business comes down to chance. I did not know Khuder was from that village; no one knew how the locals would react when they saw him. Again, the important of flexibility and trust between the military and the media was made clear.

The Morning After

Overall, the media embed experience was as satisfying as it was frustrating for our unit. We all were doing our part to tell the story of the war. Through these reporters, we were demonstrating U.S. resolve to do well and to do good.

There were some drawbacks. As in most things military and media, the main challenge was logistical. My commanding officer earmarked one of the 24th MEU's trucks for the reporters. If not for his support, they would have come away with only half of the stories they covered. Granted, the media effort was an important aspect of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but that truck could have provided additional support to our companies in the field.

Our reporters enjoyed intimate access to our small units and leaders—the main goal of the embed program—but they also got to observe and report on many events tangential to the 24th MEU's operations.

I realize now that these reporters, like the Marines they covered, represent American society at large. For better and for worse, they are us. The good news is that, by and large, they meant well. Our embeds were concerned about what was going on with the unit and what has happening around us, and they wanted the best for everyone involved. Their ethics and practices were above reproach.

Together, we rode the clown cart because, like clowns, we lived and worked in a kind of controlled chaos. And, like clowns, we could not remain still. As information workers, we searched for stories, action, connections.

I would be surprised if our reporters did not consider the embedment program a success. Being stuck in the middle with these reporters showed most of us that while there are worlds of difference between the military and the media, both groups share many traits. They are probably more willing to admit it than we are, though.

As it became clear that the 24th MEU would be leaving Iraq, the reporters discussed their next moves with me. Most of them transferred to Task Force Tarawa, which was beginning heavy civil-military operations in Al Kut. Some went home. On the day of their departure, we reminisced about our experiences. The separation was more than cordial. I saw them off at the airfield then returned to the MEU's base camp. It seemed empty somehow. I gathered my gear, saw the clown cart sign, and hesitated only briefly before putting it in my rucksack.