War Coverage from Vietnam to the "War on Terror":

60 Years of Broadcasting from the Front

Julianna Jaime

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Julianna Jaime, Student

Dr. Janet Fallon, Thesis Supervisor

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Second Reader

Honors Director or Designee
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Introduction

The media are defined broadly for the purposes of this thesis to mean broadcast television. Media have long had a dynamic, and often difficult relationship with the United States military in their attempt to professionally, accurately, and objectively disseminate information to the general public specifically in times of conflict. Throughout history, the prevailing challenge that has repeatedly hardened the relationship between the media and the U.S. military has been the attempt for the two to agree upon a satisfying method to disseminate appropriate information that not only appeases the public’s interest on the home front, but also protects U.S. military forces fighting in combat abroad, and allows for the success of their often dangerous missions. This thesis will review key points of broadcast coverage of American military conflicts by correspondents on the frontlines over the past 60 years beginning with the Vietnam War era through the more recent ‘War on Terror’ and fight against ISIS. The conflicts are connected by focusing on the continuously hardened relationship between the U.S. military and the media in a narrative that highlights the ways in which broadcast reporters have been subject to various tactics of reporting the war from the frontlines, often finding no easy solution that satisfies the public, the media, and the military simultaneously.

The continuing and tumultuous relationship between the U.S. military and the media can be attributed as an outgrowth of the largely unregulated and uncontrolled information that first flowed freely from the frontlines of the Vietnam War via television into American homes, creating lasting consequences on overall morale. While it has never been the military’s intention to keep the public uninformed, the actions and behaviors of reporters covering Vietnam had a significant impact on the access the media would be given to the frontlines of
U.S. involved conflict in the future. Struggling to find an appropriate balance and unable to return to the uncontrolled reporting tactics that were used by reporters in Vietnam, by the time of the Persian Gulf War, an attempt at a solution appeared to be keeping reporters confined to one place within press pools, employing media blackouts for periods of time, and having daily briefings delivered to the press by military officials far behind the frontlines. Unhappy with this solution, the relationship between the military and the media remained strained until after the onset of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan known as the ‘War on Terror’ a new solution was suggested, and reporters were again given access to the frontlines this time as embeds with units predetermined by the military.

However, to fully understand the compromises that have since been made between the media and the U.S. military over the last 60 years and to determine the efficiency of these compromises, there must be an understanding of the concerns that U.S. military leaders have consistently had about media tactics used by reporters on the frontlines. While the American public may feel as if it has a right to know information about their troops who are deployed and fighting in foreign wars, and while reporters seek to appease their audiences’ curiosity about such topics through various broadcasting techniques, understanding the consequences of sharing what may be deemed as classified information by the military is important for the continued success of their missions and operations. With operational security as the military’s primary concern, it is essential to the success of all operations that no information that has the potential to endanger the lives of U.S. service members is revealed prematurely by a correspondent looking to tell their story first. Notably, although the military currently maintains a working relationship with the media and ensures there is no excessive censorship in the attempt to inform the viewers
at home, it will not allow for lives to be endangered by reporters in the pursuit of a good, exclusive story.

**Bridging the Gap for Future Conflicts**

Broadly connecting the various troubled relationships between the media and the U.S. military from Vietnam through the more recent ‘War on Terror’ in Iraq and Afghanistan, General Gration of the United States Air Force delivered a keynote address at the first International Conference on "Defense and the Media in Time of Limited Conflict" at the Queensland University of Technology in 1991 (Van Moorst, 1991). The conference was held to provide the media with a more full rationale for censorship during periods of conflict and to provide an opportunity for the military and the media to “discuss the increasingly complex and difficult relations between the Defense and Media in time of war” (Van Moorst, 1991). At the conference, General Gration suggested four points of common ground between the media and the military that build a foundation for further understanding and discussion concerning future relationships between the two based on numerous and evident past failures.

According to General Gration, one of the major problems with the concept of a free press is understanding the most effective way in which to apply it to war because there always has been and always will be “extensive media coverage of any modern conflict,” as “the public will demand it; it is an essential part of maintaining support for our efforts in the war” (2013, p. 17). Therefore, the military should get “used to the idea and work out how best the process can be managed for the national good” (Gration, 2013, p. 17). Third, as Vietnam became the nation’s first television war and was easily broadcast to the living rooms of all those watching from the
home front, the era proved that new communication technology “opened up new dimensions in covering a conflict, in terms of immediacy, quality of images and global coverage to a massed audience” (Gration, 2013, p. 17). The introduction of television, and later the take off of the Internet and social media proved that reporters will quickly adapt to new tactics to ensure their messages are relevant to the technology available to them and shared with large audiences.

Finally, General Gration states that the media will be “a most powerful force in forming public opinion, one way or another, for or against the war” (2013, p. 18). In so far as the military is concerned then, the performance of the media is “a matter of national importance” (Gration, 2013, p. 18).

It clear that the U.S. military and the media must heavily rely on each other for any dissemination of news despite their independent and often competing agendas. Above all the military is and has always been concerned with the lives and well being of all its service members, has regarded “the successful prosecution of the war as an absolute priority”, and has historically taken a “dim view of distractions from the media, or worse what may be seen as attempts by the media to undermine our efforts” (Gration, 2013, p. 17). Gration argues the media’s agenda is centered on “exercising the public’s right to know what is going on” which results in the media becoming a watchdog for military incompetence (2013, p. 17). While the media and the military typically want and ask different things from each other, a working relationship must continue to exist between the two for any story from either side to be successfully told to the public on the home front.
Embedded Journalism as a Possible Solution

Arguably, the current solution of placing embeds into specified units in zones of conflict is a reasonable, appropriate, and justifiable solution concerning issues of media coverage of and involvement with the U.S. military. The Department of Defense is justified in its attempt to work with the media in this way as it gives them the option to strategically place reporters in locations where they can tell their own stories while taking into consideration the best interests of the service members, the success and security of the mission, and the protection of information not deemed appropriate or safe to be broadcast to viewers at home. The military must also recognize the power of the media to shape the public opinion of those watching from the home front, which largely affects overall morale for those watching from home.

Finally, the media has the power to bridge the already large military-civilian gap in the United States. With less than one-half of 1% of the U.S. population in the armed services as of 2015, it is crucial for the military to be able to work well with the media in order to connect with and tell its stories to the people it serves (Zucchino & Cloud, 2015). A continuance of an already hardened relationship between the press and the military only has the potential to further this extreme gap between those who serve and their families who are familiar with a military way of life and the rest of the citizens of the United States who know little of their military and rely so heavily on them for protection and security in times of war.

Despite the troubled relationship between the two institutions over the past 60 years, this thesis will employ examples from both past and modern day broadcast coverage of conflict and place them within a chronological and historical context to argue that the current agreed upon tactic of embedded journalism offers the best, most reasonable, attempt at a solution. Embedded
journalism offers civilians a more personalized and frontline, yet appropriate, glance into the workings of U.S. military personnel, allows the Department of Defense to predetermine where reporters will be located and with whom they will be working with, and it allows reporters protected access to the frontlines of war where they can tell the stories they witness in a way they know will resonate with many civilians watching on the home front.

**The Vietnam War: 1954-1975**

Between the years of 1945 and 1954, the Vietnamese were financially supported by the United States as they waged an anti-colonial war against France, eventually leading to a peace conference in Geneva resulting in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam receiving their independence (Mintz & McNeil, 2016). Vietnam was temporarily divided in half with the southern half being anti-Communist. As the Cold War continued, the United States hardened its policies against allies of the Soviet Union and, led by President Eisenhower, pledged its support to South Vietnam, by providing training and equipment from American military and police in attempt to remove the Vietnamese Communists, known as the Viet Cong, from South Vietnam (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). By 1957 after unification elections were not held, the Viet Cong began to fight back with violent attacks on government officials, and by 1959, had begun to engage in firefights with the South Vietnamese Army (“Vietnam War History”, 2009).

Working according to the aptly named “domino theory” which stated that if one Southeast Asian country fell to communism, the surrounding ones would as well, President John F. Kennedy committed additional U.S. aid to South Vietnam in attempt to stop the spread of communism, and by 1962 the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam had grown to 9,000 troops (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). As U.S. military presence in Vietnam grew at such an
alarming rate, it was becoming clear to Americans that this conflict had the potential to escalate quickly and call many to more Americans to service. In 1964 after North Vietnamese forces fired upon two U.S. destroyers stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress authorized President Johnson to take necessary measures to retaliate and promote peace and security in southeast Asia (Office of the Historian, 2016).

In 1965, with a large amount of support from the public, President Johnson sent 82,000 more troops to South Vietnam, and authorized a combined 200,000 more military members to be sent in July of 1965 and throughout 1966 (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). By 1967 however, the number of American troops in Vietnam was nearing 500,000, U.S. casualties were increasing, and soldiers began to distrust their own government wondering why they remained in combat despite Washington’s claims that the war was being won (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). The public was beginning to wonder how long the conflict would last and how many more troops could possibly be sent after already seeing so many friends and family members leave to fight abroad. It would not take long for public opinion of the United States’ involvement to begin to deteriorate quickly at home as the idea that Americans were doing more damage to civilian communities than enemy combatants became more widespread.

The Nixon administration began the campaign for Vietnamization, a policy that favored withdrawing American troops and putting more responsibility on South Vietnam for fighting the war (Mintz & McNeil, 2016). However, in violating Cambodian neutrality, Nixon furthered American’s heightened discontent with the administration’s foreign policy and sparked numerous anti-war protests when American soldiers were sent to destroy Communist supply bases in Cambodia in 1970 (Mintz & McNeil, 2016). After this incident, the Nixon administration
committed itself to seeking peace over reelection and turned its attention toward ending the conflict through diplomacy and peace talks (Mintz & McNeil, 2016). Finally, in January of 1973 an agreement was reached and the remaining U.S. troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Four months later South Vietnam was reunited with the North after surrendering (Mintz & McNeil, 2016).

After almost two decades of conflict and having lost nearly 58,000 American lives, this era ended with many Americans having unfavorable opinions of their own government (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). Morale had been destroyed, and many people on the home front showed their dissatisfaction with the era through the treatment of veterans returning home. The Vietnam War was ended in 1975 when communist forces “seized control of Saigon… and the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the following year” (“Vietnam War History”, 2009). It would take years to change American’s perception of the Vietnam War’s purpose and to repair bitter divisions between the general public and veterans on the home front.

Broadcast Coverage of the Vietnam Era

“The First Television War”

The Vietnam War quickly became simultaneously known as “the first TV war” and America’s “living-room war”, as it was the first time a major armed conflict took place after the television set had become “dominant in the familial landscape of the home in the developed Western world” (Hoskins, 2005, p. 13). Television allowed Americans to see more than they ever had, as “every phase of the war” that was being described seemed as if it was “fought in
the American home itself” (Hoskins, 2005, p. 13). As Americans at home developed the habit of clustering around their television sets to watch regularly scheduled nightly news programs that included coverage of the war in Vietnam, they were suddenly subject to the shocking and never before seen gruesome and uncensored images that were being broadcast from dramatic war zones on a regular basis. Television cameras and the correspondents behind them were giving Americans more access than they had ever had to the frontlines of a major U.S. involved conflict.

While the conflict in Vietnam raged on, it became the new normal for viewers to frequently see scenes of airplanes dropping bombs and even U.S. troops on patrol or engaged in combat. As a result, it is largely argued that Vietnam was America’s first clear defeat. Some claim Vietnam was impossible to win because America’s army of half a million soldiers who failed to stop the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese from overthrowing the government of South Vietnam was consistently scrutinized, critiqued, and largely unsupported throughout the duration of the war due to the portrayal they had received from the unregulated reporters attempting to take advantage of their access and sell their stories of war from the frontlines (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 157).

As television quickly became the principal medium for news in the United States during the Vietnam Era, in 1963 the evening news programs were extended from fifteen minutes to a half-hour allowing networks to hire more reporters and grow their presence at various Saigon bureaus (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 159). With more time to dedicate to the war in Vietnam, correspondents reporting from Saigon were encouraged by their producers to shoot film of dramatic or exciting combat scenes in efforts to attract viewers to tune in for the now longer nightly news programs
Film that was shot, however, was “seldom broadcast the same day” so instead, reporters would send their combat footage of Americans engaged in vague, unspecified, and seemingly successful military activity back to the home front where it could then be put together and presented as a series of images that carried “no explicit message” with little to no interpretive framework (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 160).

While the images chosen for the nightly news gave viewers an illusion of military progress, the footage sent home was in reality a seemingly endless supply of details, not information. Initially, due to the networks’ decision to give limited context on the scenes they were projecting into homes across the nation, the government was left to “provide the interpretive framework for the television coverage of the war in Vietnam” (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 160). Early broadcast from the Vietnam War was certainly showing Americans what war looked like from all angles, and perhaps convinced them of their own military’s abilities to progress and succeed, but failed to the provide context that could shape what the audience would believe, think about, and accept on both a national and individual level.

The Agenda Setting Theory of Communication

While this communication theory would not be given a name until later, the media’s effort to shoot scenes from the frontlines of Vietnam and re edit them to eliminate them of proper contextualization, but rather show in detail strictly the actions of the war fits the characteristics of the agenda setting theory of communication. Named by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, this theory suggests that the media set the public agenda through the stories that are reported, given prominence, and shared most frequently with viewers. While this theory
states that the media do not tell viewers exactly what to think, they do determine what viewers think about by controlling the types of stories that are released to audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). With the networks shying away from making too bold of commentary on the footage they were sending home, the government and the military were left with the opportunity to contextualize the footage sent home to the American public.

Government spokespeople in Saigon and Washington alike were left with ample broadcast time to provide “the interpretive framework for the television coverage of the war in Vietnam” to the American public (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 160). For example, in 1967 the Johnson Administration “made a special effort to persuade the public that the war was going well, that it was being won, and that the end was in sight” (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 159). Initially, this relationship between the press and the military seemed to work. However, this relationship certainly worked more to the military’s advantage. During the early days of the Vietnam War, the public listened to its government and military officials who skillfully framed the pictures of the war being sent home by reporters on the frontlines with their own understanding and ideas of success. As a result, the Vietnam War was initially met with openness and little resistance or complaint from those viewers frequently watching the broadcast coverage in their living rooms on the home front.

However, whether or not the U.S. military considered the consequences of giving broadcast correspondents such unlimited access to the frontlines during the Vietnam War is unlikely. It is more likely that government and military officials intended on staying in the position of being able to frame the images the correspondents captured throughout the entirety of the war, solely because it had been working for them at the onset of the conflict. However, as the
war dragged on and correspondents saw more frequently brutal images of war, death, and despair than they ever had unfolding before their cameras, it was inevitable that the story being told at home would change as reporters would begin to question government officials asking, “Why is this happening?” It was almost to be expected that the longer the correspondents were subject to having their horrifying images contextualized to the public for them the more likely it would be that they try to take a more active role as the storytellers of their own images on behalf of the public.

Tim Bowden, a former ABC News Vietnam correspondent reflected on the U.S. military’s policy concerning reporters’ early access to the frontlines saying, “the strategy was to say, ‘look, anybody can come in and see what great things we’re doing for the Vietnamese people and attacking the communists’” which ultimately turned out to be an “utter disaster” for them as time progressed (Deveny, 2016). As a number of brutally honest and shocking stories made their way to the home front, Bowden felt that the audience began to more fully understand that “this was an atrocious war” (Deveny, 2016). Morale at home began to dwindle and “collapsed well and truly into the late 1960s” according to former ABC correspondent John Pilger, and soon the U.S. military would begin to blame the media for their “graphic, relentless, uncensored reporting” of the war (Deveny, 2016). It appeared as if “the strategy” had essentially backfired on the media and as the military lost their control over framing the images sent home for viewers, the media effectively took over the storytelling eventually leaving them responsible for first losing support of Americans at home, and later arguably losing the entire war.
Walter Cronkite Goes to Saigon

A symbol of success and media integrity and well known for his commitment to thoroughly investigate, report, edit, and write before ever uttering a word on the air, emerging star correspondent Walter Cronkite built a well respected reputation for himself. Loved for his charismatic personality, he was selected as the nation’s first anchor of a half hour news program when he joined CBS News (Brinkley, 2012). Cronkite quickly became the “personification of media integrity” and played a large role in maintaining the credibility and strength of the CBS brand by subjecting to their “ironclad rule that its journalists never editorialized” to promote their commitment to impartiality in their reporting (Brinkley, 2012). It was known that if any reporter for CBS uttered a “single verb or adjective that lurched toward opinion on the CBS Evening News, the reporter would be immediately reprimanded” as protecting the network’s standing as a “middle of the road” honest, and factual source for news was of utmost importance (Brinkley, 2012). However, in the midst of the conflict in Vietnam and with ratings high and trustworthiness strong, CBS was in a position to make a change and make a statement using its most influential anchor that held the nation’s trust.

The significant shift in the media’s willingness to let military and government officials alone frame the context of the conflict in Vietnam for their viewers at home was initially seen as a risky, yet major decision made by the president of CBS News, Richard S. Salant. When the highly trustworthy, well known, and trusted CBS correspondent Walter Cronkite approached Salant with a pitch to "try and present an assessment of the situation as one who had not previously taken a public position on the war”, and asked to report on the Tet Offensive from
Saigon, it was clear that the media was flirting with the idea of a new era where it would no longer act as impartial storytellers allowing others to frame the context of their images (Brinkley, 2012). Salant knew allowing Cronkite to interject his opinion into the news was a calculated risk in so far as ratings and that doing so had the potential to drive away valued viewers from the CBS Nightly News. However, in seeing the animation in Cronkite’s pitch, he suggested Cronkite travel to Vietnam to create a documentary about Saigon in which he could explain why had traveled there and make a suggestion “about where the war ought to go at that point” (Brinkley, 2012). With his approval of Cronkite’s documentary project, Salant had broken the CBS golden rule. His willingness to let Cronkite editorialize would have lasting impacts and most notably change the public’s entire view on the war with the power of his words. In February of 1968, Walter Cronkite finally made his trip to Saigon. Upon arrival, he was met with the sounds of bombs and long-range artillery bursting in the distance. With an eagerness to get to work on his documentary, he began to gather information. Cronkite initially gathered facts and stories from orphaned children and traumatized and tired U.S. soldiers, went on patrol with Marine units, and stayed with other reporters who were living in, working out of, and often sleeping on the floor of a Vietnamese doctor’s house that had been turned into a full pressroom for correspondents covering Vietnam (Brinkley, 2012).

Within a few hours of arrival in Saigon Cronkite was able to secure an interview with General Westmoreland, commander of the U.S. forces. Westmoreland was “brash and dismissive” toward Cronkite, claiming the Tet Offensive was an American victory as the Vietcong had been prevented from striking Saigon making it clear that the U.S. Army was winning this war (Brinkley, 2012). Further, Westmoreland told Cronkite three U.S. Marine
Corps battalions had “defeated more than 10,000 entrenched People's Army of Vietnam and
Vietcong at Hue”, however, when Cronkite and his team traveled up Highway 1, he discovered
Westmoreland had lied blatantly (Brinkley, 2012). Cronkite witnessed U.S. Marines still trying
to take the city and explosions rocking the center of the town stating later, “The battle was still
on in Hue when I got there” (Brinkley, 2012).

The more that Cronkite took in from his surroundings, the more he began to recognize
the extent to which his own network had “bought into Westmoreland’s propaganda between 1965
and 1968” (Brinkley, 2012). CBS, along with the other major news networks had reported Hue
as a victory, a result of allowing top military commanders like Westmoreland frame the context
of the information and images of the war reporters were given access to. As Cronkite left Hue in
a helicopter surrounded by a dozen dead Marines in body bags, it was difficult for him to process
that Westmoreland had just recently and confidently acclaimed that Hue was pacified. It was
clear now that significant information was missing from the way that Westmoreland had tried to
manipulate Cronkite’s network into believing his own personal opinion about the successes of
the war efforts.

“Report from Vietnam” Revolutionizes the News

On February 27, 1968, Cronkite was ready to share his half hour “Report from Vietnam”
where he began by calmly and objectively sharing the facts he had collected and presented a
standard briefing of his trip to Vietnam. His piece showed viewers everything from U.S. air
raids to images of villages in ruin. Millions of Americans were tuned in and watching what,
until this point, had been considered standard CBS reporting. After the last commercial break,
Cronkite faced the camera and stated that he would now speak “personally” to viewers in a
speculative and subjective manner, reasoned with the audience that after all he had experienced in Saigon from a U.S. military perspective the war in Vietnam was unwinnable, and signed off (Brinkley, 2012).

Cronkite’s labeling of the Vietnam War as a “stalemate” was somewhat of a middle ground in 1968, and likely more of an attempt to appear like had not jumped to conclusions. Cronkite’s words were heard across the country and would have an impact much greater and larger than CBS may have initially expected. By expressing an opinion that resonated strongly with viewers, Cronkite’s words were quickly picked up by the press, quoted often, and opened the door for other news networks to air similar opinion based documentaries. Following the “Report from Vietnam” and in response to Cronkite’s stated position, the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal stated “The whole Vietnam effort may be doomed” (Brinkley, 2012). It was in fact the first time a war had been declared over by a news commentator, and “Report from Vietnam” signaled a critical turning point in how the rest of the war would be viewed and covered.

The broadcast had impacted even the highest political office on the home front, as President Johnson purportedly said, “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost middle America” (Brinkley, 2012). At this point however, the war was far from over. There would still be years of anguish, death, and tragedy to report on and send home, but Cronkite had made certain the media would now have a larger role in framing the context of their own images, straining their relationship with the military, and eventually forcing it into a “deep freeze” (Ewers, 2003). The struggle would worsen as the stories coming home turned increasingly sour and critical of U.S. military
policy resulting in a power struggle between the two to control the context of the story and changing feelings about American involvement in Vietnam at home.

**Blurred Lines: News versus Commentary**

However, as the country accepted and praised Cronkite’s honesty based on the fact that he had for so long been their most trusted source of newsworthy information, CBS saw its ratings go up and the country continued to watch as anti war protests became ferocious. The line between news and commentary had become blurred and suddenly, following Cronkite’s lead, civilians on the home front felt more compelled to outwardly voice their own negative opinions about Vietnam fueling further the growing anti war movement. Protestors began to take advantage of the knowledge that protests brought cameras that could gain them coverage on the major news networks or secure a couple of minutes of attention toward the protests from the nightly news. CBS news considered protests to be “excellent television” that would draw viewers, comparable to combat footage, and in this way allowed civilians to set the tone and interpret the war for the remainder of the conflict (Brinkley, 2012). The extensive coverage of the anti war protests by the networks was not of great support to the military. With dwindling support, morale too would dwindle amongst the thousands of soldiers still required to fight knowing those at home no longer supported their actions.

At the center of the anti war activists’ cries for peace, they believed “American involvement in Vietnam was an unwarranted intrusion into a civil war and a violation of the nation’s values” and that the price of continuing to wage such a war was much too high (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 166). The true impact that television had in propagating this anti war stance was the fact that it did not necessarily “create active opposition to the war,” but rather
served as “network of communication through which people in one part of the country discovered that others elsewhere shared their feelings about the war” (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 164). In the minds of anti war protest leaders, the success of their demonstrations could be measured by whether or not they received a few minutes of coverage on the major nightly evening news programs.

The Vietnam era of television marked a significant time of change in the dissemination of news. The impact of the U.S. military losing its hold over how the shocking and dark images making their way home and into living rooms on the home front could be framed along with the networks’ bold move to interject commentary and opinion with the facts proved detrimental for the success of the U.S. military. As the anti war movement exploded, millions of negative attitudes toward the war were shaped. Arguably, the United States lost the war in Vietnam because the media effectively commandeered the military’s role of telling one story in pursuit of independently telling its own without proper military context, resulting in the loss of support and critical condemnation of U.S. policy from those watching on the home front. Had the media allowed the military to continue to tell and share what it deemed necessary and appropriate for viewers at home, the public view of Vietnam may have been different. Unregulated access for correspondents only became an issue when the networks decided to stop allowing the military frame the footage the correspondents had filmed.

Ultimately, the with the interjection of commentary and opinion into the nightly news, Americans decided that they were not willing to pay the price of winning. Vietnam was lost when, because of the media, the country began to share the widespread belief that the war was not worth the costs and therefore would not support its military’s actions there. As a result, the
military would have to take a long hard look at how it might work with the media in future conflicts, but those who remained adamant that the media lost the war were certain that drastic changes would be made next time there was a conflict to cover. Vietnam was the first conflict that truly hardened the relationship between the media and the military and the effects would be felt for years to come as the two would continue to struggle to share the appropriate amount of information with the public.

**The Persian Gulf War: 1990-1991**

In August of 1990, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion and occupation of Kuwait, alarming neighboring Saudi Arabia and Egypt who called on the United States to intervene (History.com Staff, 2009). Saddam reportedly invaded the small, oil-rich nation “in order to pay off debts incurred during Iraq’s eight year war with Iran” (CNN Library, 2016). In November of 1990, the United Nations Security Council authorized “the use of all necessary means of force against Iraq if it did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991 (History.com Staff, 2009). After Hussein denied the United Nations Security Council’s demands to withdraw from Kuwait, the United States, along with an allied coalition of other countries, initiated an air strike offensive on January 17, 1991 known as Operation Desert Storm, consisting of “relentless attacks” (History.com Staff, 2009). In mid-February Operation Desert Sabre sent troops from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait and southern Iraq allowing coalition forces to encircle and defeat the Iraqi forces as well as liberate Kuwait allowing for President George H.W. Bush declare a ceasefire ending coalition attacks against Iraq after 42 days (History.com Staff, 2009).

Arguably, the Persian Gulf War was a decisive victory for the coalition. Kuwait was liberated and the demands of the coalition were met. However, Iraq suffered large damages and Saddam
Hussein was not removed from power, leaving him to continue to brutally end uprisings by both the Kurds and Shi’ites (History.com Staff, 2009). Conditions of the peace terms included Iraqis cooperating with UN weapons inspectors who were to ensure all illicit weapons were destroyed and removed, but refusal to admit weapons inspectors into Iraq, led to a brief resumption of hostilities with Operation Desert Fox in 1998 (History.com Staff, 2009).

Instability would continue to categorize the region and despite the declaration of “no fly” zones over Iraq, Iraqi forces would continually exchange fire with U.S. forces (History.com Staff, 2009). At this point it was almost certain that the conflict would again escalate to terms of war in the coming years.

**Broadcast Coverage of the Persian Gulf War**

As a direct result of the media’s handling of Vietnam, reporters of the first Gulf War were imposed with what some would describe as a complete “denial of access to the action” when compared to access Vietnam correspondents were given, as President George Bush stated in 1990 that “media coverage of the Gulf War would ‘not be a new Vietnam’” and U.S. forces would be protected from negative coverage from the frontlines (Ewers, 2003). Likely in reference to the failures of the Vietnam War, Bush continued, “our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world and they will not be asked to fight with one hand behind their back” (Hoskins, 2004, p. 34). With the onset of the Persian Gulf War, the Pentagon took decisive action to ensure that the media could not lose another war by its negative, subjective, and unrestricted coverage of the conflict. In an attempt to protect the operational security of its forces, the Pentagon created new policies that strictly limited war coverage more than any other time in U.S. military history.
The First Media Blackout

In 1991, just three weeks into the war and with the start of the ground assault, the Department of Defense announced the first ever 24-hour news blackout in U.S. military history insisting, “modern communications technology necessitated the blackout” (Biagi, 2016). Correspondents vehemently objected with cries of overbearing censorship. Twelve hours into the blackout however, “U.S. officials partially relaxed their ‘blackout’ on news of the ground invasion of Kuwait...as some officials conceded their restrictions had gone too far and initial reports showed allied forces faring well” (Kurtz, 1991). In attempt to let some positive news filter through from military officials to the media, the administration moved quickly to host a press conference with General Schwarzkopf, commander of the U.S. gulf forces, who announced the allies were having “dramatic success” (Kurtz, 1991). Following the blackout, Defense Secretary Cheney appeared on CBS’s “Face the Nation” in attempt to offer context to viewers and frame the news from an official military perspective stating, “the resistance has been light all across the front” and that casualties were “extremely light” (Kurtz, 1991).

A correspondent himself, Howell Raines, reflected on the blackout believing Department of Defense officials were using “legitimate security concerns ‘as a means of imposing the blanket management of information of a sort we’ve never seen in this country’” reflecting the feelings among many correspondents that the military had effectively put together a system of coverage where they were able to “block out bad news” and “keep good news in the forefront” (Kurtz, 1991). While The Washington Post reported polls showed 80 percent of the public
“backs military restrictions on the press,” the media continued to struggle to do their jobs, resent the restrictions imposed upon them, and looked for any other way to bring the story to the home front (Kurtz, 1991). It is significant, however, that the nation seemed to be more understanding this time of the fact that there are certainly instances where the military needs to maintain its operational security in order for it to achieve success and complete its missions. The majority of the public’s initial response to the media blackouts suggested they understood leaving the military to do their work without immediate interference from news correspondents looking to find a story resulted in meaningful successes for their troops who were risking their lives fighting the war.

**Press Pools**

Following the attempts at a media blackout, additional limitations were put on reporters as they were expected to comply with new Department of Defense policy that required any reporters who wanted access to American forces or to get near to the troops to travel together in groups, known as press pools, that were put together and escorted by military public affairs officers (Berke, 1991). The days of unescorted roaming and unregulated reporting characteristic of Vietnam were over, and frustrations of correspondents sent to cover the Gulf War were increasing. With its forces again involved in foreign armed conflict that appeared to be going seemingly well, the military struggled to regain its ability to not only frame the context of the images and interpret them for viewers as it had in the early years of Vietnam, but also extend its control over the media by carefully hand picking correspondents who would be allowed to visit strategically chosen locations on the frontlines.
In a set of ground rules and supplementary guidelines for press pools, the Department of Defense made clear the fact that the press would not jeopardize operational security and lives of the troops they were being sent to cover. Further, it was made clear that members of the press pools would not expect the military to in any way help them cover a story instead of focusing on their operations. The DOD released clear expectations of those selected for pools as a preliminary step in setting up the pool system in January of 1991 called “Operation Desert Shield Ground Rules and Supplementary Guidelines” (Dennis, et al, 1991, pg.100). For example, the news media personnel were told they would be required to carry and support their own gear including protective cases for their gear and they would be expected to remain with military escorts at all times (Dennis, et al, 1991, p 100). Press pools were expected to follow military direction and accept that any instruction from a military escort was, according to the Pentagon, “not intended to hinder reporting,” but rather intended “to facilitate movement, ensure safety, and protect operational security” (Dennis, et al, 1991, p.100). The military made it clear that allowing press back into its operations was not necessarily convenient for either party, but continued to make an effort in order to ensure proper information was being sent home to keep Americans informed.

The Cost of Censorship

In 1991, the Pentagon’s chief spokesman, Pete Williams, defended the new media restrictions put in place for coverage of the Persian Gulf War stating they “have served to protect the lives of troops and the security of military operations” because without them “masses of reporters would try to wander through the war zone, risking their lives and the lives of troops”
The press restrictions included the Department of Defense's issuance of twelve official new ground rules concerning “information that should not be reported because its publication or broadcast could jeopardize operations and endanger lives” (Patterson III, 1995). A new conflict had certainly emerged. It appeared that this brief era of U.S. involved conflict would be characterized by a secondary ‘war’, one between the media and the military. As Cragg Hines, Washington bureau chief of the Houston Chronicle, put it, "It is only the lightest form of exaggeration to suggest that the U.S. military is also at war in the Persian Gulf with the news media" (Berke, 1991).

Arguably, due to restrictions in so far as access and what information was actually sent home for broadcast, the Persian Gulf War was largely under covered leaving people on the home front much more uninformed about the actions of their military than they previously had been during the Vietnam War. Furthering the frustrations shared by the media, pools were allegedly a “cooperative arrangement designed to balance the news media’s desire for unilateral coverage with the ‘logistical realities’ of the military operation,” meaning not every correspondent that wanted to be included as a pool member was authorized by the Department of Defense to join one (Boydston, 1992, p. 1087). The Department of Defense was essentially only allowing access to those correspondents it trusted to give favorable coverage of military actions. Correspondents felt that because of these tight restrictions on who was allowed to travel in a press pool the flow of information was being heavily blocked, impeded, and diminished. The media was quick to blame the new policies implemented by the Department of Defense for shorting the people on the home front of information the press believed they had a right to know as their military worked abroad.
Not long after the implementation of the press pools a letter from 15 news editors to the Secretary of Defense claimed, “Pools did not work. Stories and pictures were late or lost. Access to the men and women in the field was interfered with by a needless system of military escorts and copy review” (“After the War, 1992). A pool member, Michael Getler, claimed he learned more about the war in the two weeks following its conclusion as he covered follow up stories than he did his entire time being “right in the middle of the war” and as a result, “the American public got only the military view of this war” due to the lack of access to get “independent information” (MacArthur, 2004, p. 159). Correspondents sent to cover the Gulf War longed for open access to American troops and the imposition of various forms of censorship were only successful in furthering the strain of the complicated relationship between the military and the media. It was clear that while the public was not completely concerned either way, and had a generally favorable overview of the information they were receiving, the press and military certainly would not be able to maintain this type of relationship for long.

Further, correspondents likely resented their restraints and the use of censorship because of their inability to make use of the latest technology that was changing the speed at which news could be shared with viewers at home. Sweeping improvements in technology characterized the early 1990s creating a new definition of news and a new era of more constant coverage of events as they were happening live. Journalists who were sent to cover the Gulf War were privy to equipment that “was light years ahead of anything used in Vietnam” such as “costly satellite uplinks” that could fit into suitcases, “laptop computers, satellite telephones, fax machines, and infrared cameras (Gottschalk, 1992). ABC News was able to successfully integrate “remotely
sensed images with maps of the Persian Gulf region linking digitized and colorized images with computerized mapping software to create graphics for their specials” (Dennis, et al, 1991, p. 37).

The new technology and the advantages it gave to the correspondents of the era would play a large role in shaping how breaking news was covered. Feasibly, the Persian Gulf War “heralded the public’s acceptance of 24-hour TV news, the essence of the modern concept” (Goodykoontz, 2011). Cable news was not only making it possible to watch at any time, but also made it more of a mainstream habit to almost casually tune in to the war zone to watch a continuous plot unfold at the viewer’s convenience. The future of war correspondence pointed toward an era when viewers on the home front could click on their television set at any time to get a glimpse into the war zones rather than wait for the scheduled nightly news broadcast.

One Message Creates a More Unified Nation

It is reasonable to suggest that the military won this era of conflict with the media. Public perception of media coverage of the Persian Gulf War was largely satisfied as “an overwhelming majority of Americans supported military censorship, while also saying that they had the information they needed” (Dennis, et al, 1991, p. 83). To the surprise of the press, public discontent with the information they were receiving was largely nonexistent despite the tight restraints put on the media throughout the entirety of the conflict. It is significant to note, “the press’s complaint about censorship never became the public’s complaint” and despite the restrictions and the feeling of being at the mercy of military officials, the public thought the media “told enough of the truth, even though it basically acted as the military’s microphone” (Dennis, et al, 1991, p. 83). Unlike Vietnam, the war and its coverage by the press had not been
cause for major division amongst the people on the home front and had, despite censorship, felt like they got the information they needed to be informed citizens. While this era of conflict proved to be of some improvement from the broadcast coverage of Vietnam, the media would continue to strive to serve the public with more than solely the military’s information and supply them with the more upfront and personal news they thought those home on the front lines had the right, and the desire to witness as well.

**The War on Terror: 2001- Modern Day**

On September 11, 2001 as four hijacked planes turned into missiles and as terrorists attacked significant locations on the home front, such as the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, directly, it was clear that the next era of armed conflict was upon the United States. With feelings incited among citizens that paralleled those felt after the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Americans came together, angered, yet united, and braced for another war.

One month after the attacks President Bush stated, “The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st century. A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them” (“The Global War on Terrorism”, 2001). In the executive summary that comes from the State Department’s Global War on Terrorism’s First 100 Days report, it is stated that along with increasing America’s homeland security, a worldwide coalition would be established to: destroy al- Qaeda’s hold on Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power, disrupt al-Qaeda’s monetary efforts, destroy al-Qaeda training camps, support local civilians in recovering from the terror inflicted upon them by the Taliban, and help the people of
Afghanistan form a new government that represented them all, including women (“The Global War on Terrorism”, 2001).

Operation Enduring Freedom began in October of 2001 with American air strikes in Afghanistan. In 2002 as instability and violence amidst the region continued, Hussein was instructed to step down from power and exit Iraq within a 48-hour time span under threat of war. As Saddam refused to leave and as weapons inspectors were again called into Iraq to search for weapons of mass destruction, the second Persian Gulf War, more commonly known as the Iraq War, began 3 days later (History.com Staff, 2009). By March of 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom began with airstrikes in Baghdad, and by May, only two months later, President Bush declared “Mission Accomplished” as “major combat operations” in Iraq had ended (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). In December 2003, Sadam Hussein was finally captured near Tikrit and in January 2004 Afghanistan adopted a new constitution (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). After these events, it appeared that President Bush’s goals outlined in the first 100 days executive summary were being met.

In 2007, 20,000 more troops were sent to Iraq as part of “the surge” in attempt to make and maintain peace and protect neighborhoods and civilians (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). After the administration changed with the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, the U.S. military continued to have a large presence in the Middle East as he authorized deploying another 30,000 troops to Afghanistan (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). In 2009, Special Forces killed Osama Bin Laden in his compound in Pakistan seemingly bringing the events of the past 8 years full circle.
Today, the number of troops in Iraq alone hovers near 5,000, but the U.S. military declares, “U.S. forces in Iraq are not engaged in combat” and that those who are sent to Iraq are there with the intent to train Iraqi fighters who lack skills in intelligence, aviation, and logistics so they may become prepared to take back territory seized by ISIL (Thompson, 2016). Air strikes continue to target strongholds of the Islamic State and U.S. forces continue to plan missions that will eliminate ISIL of their key leaders. It remains to be seen the extent to which the U.S. military will have a presence in the Middle East, but as ISIL continues to pose threats and reign terror upon key regions, it is likely the U.S. will have some level of involvement in the mission to stop Islamic terror.

**Broadcast Coverage of the War on Terror**

In 2003 under the Bush Administration, 600 journalists working for news agencies across the world were given a new kind of unprecedented access to soldiers in Iraq. Just as President Bush had predicted this would be a “new and different war” in his earlier address to the nation, it was clear that the media and the military were looking for a “new and different” approach to covering the conflict. In an attempt to show the world the actions of the military and allow the media the access they had so long longed to regain, the Pentagon approved an embedded program allowing reporters to attach themselves to military units as they invaded Iraq (Lindner, 2008). Aware of the need to pacify the still unstable relationship between the media and the military, the Bush Administration saw this as an opportunity for reporters to gain “intimate access to soldiers’ lives”, but media watchdogs remained hesitant seeming to believe reporters would only produce “rosy stories about soldiers’ courage and homesickness” (Lindner, 2008).
Not surprisingly, correspondents and networks were initially skeptics of an embed program feeling as if it was another attempt for the military to only tell its own one-sided story. After the censorship rules they endured during the Gulf War, many members of the press saw the embed program only as an attempt for the administration to use the media to build public support and sell “the American mission” in Iraq (Lindner, 2008). However, the military’s strategy was to change the correspondents’ viewpoint of the frontlines by giving them protected access to the action. The Department of Defense believed by allowing a correspondent to live like a member of the military unit they were placed with, stories would remain more focused on the horrors facing American troops rather than turn the public against the war by criticizing military actions. Embedding, to the military, was the best attempt at righting the wrongs of their excessive censorship during the Gulf War without regressing to the unregulated and uncensored journalistic practices of correspondents who covered Vietnam.

The Making of an Embed

In an attempt to work together appropriately and find a solution to the media confines of the Gulf War without compromising too much information to the media, in 2002 the Pentagon announced weeklong “Embed Boot Camp” programs as the first step for reporters who wished to cover Iraq from within a military unit (Lindner, 2008). At the boot camp, reporters were familiarized with military protective gear, slept in barracks, and ate in the mess hall with U.S. service members to familiarize themselves with the units they could be placed with. Most importantly, however, correspondents were given intense training and attended classes led by
Marines who educated them in military jargon, tactical marches, direct fire protocol, and combat first aid in preparation for living in the field (Lindner, 2008).

According to Brigadier General George Flynn, who ran the training commend, these so called “wannabe war correspondents” were introduced to the rigors and realities of the military with the hopes that they would leave training at the Marine base in Quantico, Virginia able to let their units complete successful missions without interference or becoming a burden to the units they would eventually be attached to (Jacobs, 2003). His message to the correspondents was frequently summarized throughout the rigorous training provided for the future embeds as he reminded them of the dangers of becoming a liability to their units stating, “nothing impedes victory like a bleeding reporter” (Jacobs, 2003). The creation of the embedding camps was a clear attempt to change the culture between the military and the media on the Pentagon’s part and rid the feelings of mutual distrust in a greater attempt to work together.

**Embeds on the Frontlines**

The Pentagon’s new cooperative efforts to work with the media were due heavily in part to the widespread media criticism of restriction in prior conflicts. As a result, it is reasonable to state that in its efforts to open up the front lines and military movements to cameras, the Department of Defense had its own larger, self serving mission in mind as well. Knowing that censorship and limiting the media to military briefings results in negative coverage, military officials agreed to step away from censoring embeds on the frontlines while expecting them to “omit place names or troop numbers if such information compromises the secrecy of an operation” in hopes to gain more favorable press coverage from the media (Jacobs, 2003). While
“storied victories” of the first Gulf War were lost and never shared by broadcast outlets to viewers at home due to censorship, this time, the Pentagon clearly hoped the omnipresent television cameras would beam “triumphal clips to living rooms across the country” (Jacobs, 2003).

Embedding journalists on the frontlines and cutting back on censorship was a large chance to take for the military. The Pentagon’s director of press operations, Colonel Jay DeFrank, said, “We’re pushing the envelope here” when asked about the presence of correspondents living within military units on the frontlines (Jacobs, 2003). The Pentagon was clearly taking a chance on the media by restoring this level of access to the frontlines of war. Despite the positive outcomes the Pentagon likely saw for itself, it would still prove difficult for military officials to relinquish the censorship they felt most comfortable employing against the press in earlier eras of conflict coverage.

It had been relatively easy for the Pentagon to secure favorable prewar coverage by allowing cameras into helicopters, hosting show and tell sessions of high tech weaponry for the cameras, allowing the press to drink with the Marines who had been welcoming and hospitable, and completely immersing the correspondents in a military lifestyle. Not surprisingly, such tactics of welcoming the media into the military environment so openly created initial “warm and fuzzy feelings on both sides,” suggesting that this type of coverage might lead to a different kind of distorted news from the frontlines that inevitably favored the military. It was thought that the press would become so enamored with their units, and in feeling like a complete member of the group would report favorably on its military operations, much to the pleasure of the Pentagon
(Jacobs, 2003). However, initially it appeared that both the members of the press and the military were at least somewhat in favor of working with the embed solution.

To prevent the stories from becoming too narrow as a result of the correspondents’ already close relationships with military units that inevitably would become closer in the field under fear, strain, and pressure, networks like NBC assigned unilateral reporting in northern Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait, relied on outside reporters in Cairo, Doha, London, Moscow, Washington, Paris, Berlin, and Baghdad among other prominent locations, and to complete a holistic picture of the war coverage, invited military officials to add context and allowed anchors to add perspective (Verdi, 2004). The networks saw these actions as necessary steps in adhering to an ethical code of journalism that seeks to tell the entire story complete with all of the facts and not skewed one way by pure emotion resulting from strong bonds formed on the frontlines. It is significant to note that despite the resistance to giving the military the ability to again control the context of the images that the correspondents were capturing, the networks still invited military officials to weigh in on the air, perhaps in effort to maintain relationships and show commitment to sharing a complete picture. While the military was no longer relied on completely for contextualization, they were still welcomed by the media to add their specific input, acknowledged as experts in their fields, but not given complete control of framing a story captured by an embed on the frontlines.

Adding varied sources of additional coverage to the conflict in this way also added more journalistic perspective to counter the fact that the Pentagon had solely predetermined the unit the journalist was seeing likely knowing the types of missions it would be able to gain coverage
of from reporters strategically placed in those units. It seemed that this attempt at a solution was working for the press and the military during the time of U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon had succeeded in sharing a more complete live picture of the action the units it hand picked as appropriate for the press to join, and the press appeared to be satisfied with the restoration of its access to the frontlines. While embed access was not unregulated, correspondents were having great successes reporting and sharing more complete and compelling stories live as they were happening.

Unique Opportunities

Following the creation of the Pentagon’s embedded journalist program, the media correspondents who were chosen to spend time living and traveling with military units were continually made aware of the fact that they had been given the opportunity and the access to make the conflict in Iraq the most thoroughly covered in history. These chosen and trained correspondents were put in unique and important roles as the first war reporters of their kind able to bring their cameras into the very core of the military units fighting the war. At the completion of the training camps, more than 500 American and foreign journalists were prepared to embed with units as they engaged the enemy on the front lines (Jacobs, 2003). As these journalists were placed within units and traveled across the region witnessing the reality of war, it was clear that their job was not to be taken for granted.

While it was made clear that embedding was a dangerous mission and that “a plume of VX gas does not differentiate between combatants and correspondents,” correspondents consistently proved their loyalty to their own news gathering and broadcasting missions
highlighted when during a question and answer session with Pentagon press officials, correspondents seemed only concerned about the continuance of their access and the promise of no censorship (Jacobs, 2003). Notably, not one correspondent voiced a concern for his or her own personal wellbeing or safety while on the job (Jacobs, 2003). Eager to live up close and personal with their assigned units and forget the days of taped day-old reports, the embeds clearly recognized this mission was life or death. For military officials and the networks alike, it was encouraging to see the embedded journalists work to the best of their ability to change the public’s expectation of war coverage forevermore despite the continued, obvious, and frequent risks.

**Emotions on the Home Front**

The footage that was caught on cameras by embeds on the frontlines was the most real, up close, emotional, and personal video that viewers at home had ever been able to see broadcast into their living rooms. While Vietnam provided viewers with similar shocking and horrific images, the difference in this conflict was the raw emotion found in the stories broadcasted by the embedded correspondents. With embeds feeling and appearing as much of a member of the units under fire as the service members next to them, the stories that were sent home took on a new and more emotional tone. The knowledge that reports were often coming to living rooms live had the ability to turn fascination on the home front to fear as the embedded correspondents let the cameras record the horrors that accompanied the gunfire, explosions, and screams around them.
The correspondents and the viewers watching on the home front in their living rooms became a collective ‘we’ experiencing first hand the lives of U.S. service members through the constant stream of live coverage, the chaos of gun battles, the “horrible anticipation of the unknown incoming round,” and the rush of adrenaline and alarm from being told “through the filter of a gas mask that the warning sirens had sounded” (Verdi, 2004). For the first time the country had a glimpse at what everyday life was like for those serving in the United States military. For many, the harsh realities of war became clear when the coverage being sent home included the tragic loss of soldiers, civilians, colleagues, and friends. Embedded reports brought a new element of emotion into the stories that made it home allowing viewers to become more personally invested in the reports from the frontlines.

Evaluating the Embed Solution

In September of 2003 following the introduction of the embed program during Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States Army War College’s Center for Strategic Leadership conducted a workshop for members of the military and the media titled “Reporters on the Ground: The Military and the Media’s Joint Experience During Operation Iraqi Freedom” to discuss questions concerning how well the embed program worked, what went right, what went wrong, and what could be done in the future to create a program that better informed the American public (Pasquarett, 2003). The first panel, the tactical panel discussion, gave an equal voice to the military and the media as they discussed the importance of ground rules and building or breaking trust between soldiers and the correspondents (Pasquarett, 2003). Recurring concerns on both sides included determining if the familiarity between an embedded correspondent and the
military members in the hosting unit could detract the American public from the “total war story” and the idea that embeds fell into the “soda straw approach” and missed the big picture by only reporting from one unit (Pasquarett, 2003).

However, in noting that the American public responded positively to this new method of reporting having been able to watch the war through the eyes of their favorite and most trusted reporters as they traveled to the frontlines of the conflict and discussing important points about ground rules, objectivity, and trust the first panel agreed in almost universal agreement that “the embedded reporter model is the way to cover future conflicts” (Pasquarett, 2003). In an effort to place more emphasis on communication between the military and the media, the panel not only agreed that the already existing “eight page list” of ground rules was too lengthy for practical use, but also agreed that simple discussions between public affairs officers, commanders, and embeds could identify “workable parameters” (Pasquarett, 2003). Additionally, media and military representatives recommended toughening up pre-deployment media training and making it available quarterly for potential embeds who would then be certified to deploy on short term notice (Pasquarett, 2003).

In a separate reflection two years after the United States Army War College’s workshop, Sarah Dodd, an embedded journalist for a CBS News affiliate based out of Houston, Texas reflected on her own experiences from the frontlines. Dodd, who traveled with the Fourth Infantry Division into Baghdad, mirrored the conclusion from the Army War College’s panel discussions in her belief that from a media perspective the embed program was a “definite success” (Sylvester and Huffman, 2005). Dodd echoed the feelings of many reporters in her belief that embedding journalists created positive, lasting relationships between the military
and the media, unlike any other relationships that had been established in a war zone before (Sylvester and Huffman, 2005). The positive relationships that were created between the military and the media were a result of the correspondents’ commitment to proving they could remain fair and accurate in their coverage of the conflict when their access to the frontlines was reestablished through the embed program. Further, the media’s active role in maintaining sensitivity in regard to security in dangerous areas where revealing too much information could ruin a mission and a general willingness to abide by the conditions and expectations set by the military did not go unnoticed by military officials.

**The Fight Against ISIS**

Modern day U.S. involved conflict abroad has been centered on the fight against the terror group known as the Islamic State in Iraq, or ISIS. ISIS, a splinter group of al Qaeda, aims to create their vision of a pure Islamic state across Iraq, Syria, and beyond (CNN Library, 2016). Considering themselves the Islamic Caliphate, the group has established “a reign of terror second to none” in regions where it has taken control by employing the use of jihadi terrorism to carry out genocide, suicide attacks, various “ethnic cleansings”, and the institutionalization of slavery and rape (Cassis, 2015). Largely a result of the Syrian civil war, ISIS had a “breakout moment” during the summer of 2014 when an offensive group led a successful mission to capture territory from Mosul in Iraq to the borders of Baghdad allowing them to demand the allegiance of all Muslims they encountered (Cassis, 2015). Significantly following this event, other terror groups such as Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sharia began to pledge allegiance to ISIS furthering its spread to other countries across the Middle East (Walt, 2015).
The United States has had an active role in the fight against ISIS in recent years supporting Iraqi troops from outposts around the region on the ground and leading coalition airstrikes from above (Kolinovsky, 2016). On the ground, the U.S. has taken less of a combative role and supports the mission by conducting surveillance, intelligence, and reconnaissance from aircraft overhead (Kolinovsky, 2016). The most recent fight for a stronghold has taken place in Mosul, a city in Iraq that ISIS has proved it will go through many desperate lengths to maintain control of using everything from suicide bombs, IEDs, and booby traps in its fight (Jones, 2016). The fight for Mosul remains complicated and different from any fight for other ISIS controlled territories. The city sees frequent ambushes and leaves no mercy to civilians desperately seeking safe haven and coalition fighters have frequently found disturbing discoveries that attest to the brutality of ISIS.

**The World Watches from Social Media**

**Facebook Live**

As methods of communications have continued to adapt to the needs of its audience, correspondents sent to cover the fight against ISIS have found new and unprecedented ways to share information from their frontlines. Employing the use of social media to broadcast their images, sometimes even in live time, correspondents have moved toward putting their footage on social media where it can more easily be picked up quickly by users and shared instantaneously with the click of a button. Sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat, all which allow for live streaming, have recently change the way networks and correspondents are targeting their audiences and sharing their footage. Knowing that many people maintain a regular presence
online, and more specifically on their social media sites, it has become more common to see live clips of newsworthy events streamed live on social media platforms.

Not long after the launch of Facebook’s live feature over the summer of 2016, users began seeing war in a whole new light. Social media had created a new way for the war to be broadcast, and correspondents were quick to adapt. As the so called “Battle for Mosul” got underway, Al Jazeera’s English Facebook page began streaming a live feed showing footage of distant battlefields and “up-close shots of jittery soldiers holding flags and visible wincing at gunshots and plumes of smoke” (Kollmyer, 2016). These live feeds of war zones can make for challenging viewing as any moment could turn into chaos “with real gunfire and possibly death appearing unfiltered” (Kollmyer, 2016).

As the social media generation meets the reality of war, events such as the Battle for Mosul as portrayed on social media appear to have captured a similar interest to that of reality TV with this younger generation. It is still to be determined how willing people on the home front are to receiving war coverage in this new way. News organizations will likely grow their social media presence through live streaming features knowing that as technology evolves, people are regularly spending more time on their devices than in front of a television set to watch the nightly news.

**Snapchat’s “Live Stories”**

Also working to cover live footage of the events in Mosul was the social media app Snapchat. A team for the company, thousands of miles away from the frontlines, put together a nearly five
minute long “Live Story” titled “Attack on ISIS” that was accessible on the app for 24 hours worldwide. However, since Snapchat collects live submissions and puts them together into one long video before releasing, Snapchat was able to differentiate itself from Facebook’s live coverage of Mosul by collecting clips of not only the frontlines in Iraq, but also President Obama and other U.S. officials who could address the nation about the attack (Flynn, 2016). The footage chosen also showed “U.S. army members boarding trucks, smoke rising above ISIS camps, humanitarian relief workers dispensing food, and citizens of Iraq wishing good luck to the soldiers” creating a diverse story with various perspectives of all aspects of a war zone, not just the battle ground (Flynn, 2016). The piece, created by Snapchat, is a prime example of how social media is adapting to provide growing audiences with informative news in an interesting format that targets changing audiences.

Collecting coverage has been a large effort for the company but as qualified organizations attempt to influence the way those live images are framed for the larger public, it has become more recognized that audiences’ changing habits require adaptation on their part as well. For example, ABC news foreign correspondent Alexander Marquardt submitted updates to Snapchat for 3 days while covering the fight against ISIS and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees submitted videos and information to Snapchat for the first time in hopes to be featured in the “Attack on ISIS” live story in the app (Flynn, 2016). However, some concern of using Snapchat to stay informed includes the fact that the team at Snapchat filters through all of the information submitted and creates its own news piece by picking and choosing what will be shown to viewers. This essentially allows Snapchat to frame the news much like the military
once did in Vietnam, as they select what viewers will see, which commentary to pair with it, and which high ranking officials to feature based on their commentary of the news.

However, Snapchat claims, “For us, it’s less about giving people information and facts in a traditional third-person way and much more about bringing people into a news event firstperson” (Flynn, 2016).

**Moving Forward**

In many ways the new attention on live streaming and social media coverage of war zones is a natural progression in the evolution of how news is shared with the public. The media have always adapted to the needs and interests of the public it strives to inform and this “real time information age…adds to the ongoing debate of what is acceptable to broadcast” (Datoo, 2016).

It is important to remember that live footage has always been valued and the only thing that has consistently changed are the channels through which that live information is disseminated, viewed, and shared. During the early 1990s CNN “broke new ground by broadcasting live audio of bombing raids” and brought live coverage of the Gulf War to living rooms across the nation (Datoo, 2016). Initial bizarre feelings of being able to switch on a television in the 1990s to see live images of war mirror those of being able to watch war live on a smart phone during a commute.

However, eventually as different forms of communication progress it is likely this format of receiving live breaking news through various forms of social media will become the new normal. Social media offer an even more raw perspective on live coverage and have the potential to make stories of war feel more content rich. It certainly will be interesting to see how
major news networks that have covered U.S. involved conflict for over 60 years will adapt to changing trends and where the military’s role will be in this new kind of storytelling moving forward. The media and the press will continue to have to work together to tell complete and balanced stories that educate the public without compromising safety, especially as new tactics of war and new enemies emerge.
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