

Media: a Line of Operation for Urban Combat on the Operational Level

A Monograph

by

MAJ Erik Krivda

U.S. Army



School of Advanced Military Studies

United States Army Command and General Staff College

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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MAJ Erik Krivda

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Approved by:

Darric M. Knight LtCOL(USMC)

Monograph Director

Kevin C.M. Benson, COL, AR

Director,
School of Advanced
Military Studies

Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

Director,
Graduate Degree
Programs

Abstract

MEDIA: A LINE OF OPERATION FOR URBAN COMBAT ON THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL by MAJ Erik Krivda, Army, 46 pages.

Understanding and leveraging the media has become critical for operational level commanders conducting urban combat operations. The insatiable public appetite for information has created conditions where tactical actions can have severe strategic repercussions simply based on media reporting. In the 21st century, the operational level commander conducting urban combat operations must clearly understand the influence the media has on the success of operations. Media influences on world public opinion can now change the traditional model of warfare described by Clausewitz's trinity. World public opinion, influenced by the media, is now a fourth factor in influencing war modifying the trinity into a diamond. Therefore, operational level commanders must address the media in their planning and operations. Adding the media as a line of operation for planning and establishing media crisis teams will allow the commander to consider media coverage, or the media battle space, throughout an operation. This ensures planners will develop the media battle space as an integral part of the urban kinetic fight and ensure success in the global environment. Examining Hue and Fallujah as historical examples through the lenses of reporting cycle, public perception, and doctrine will demonstrate the new significance of the media in 21st century urban combat.

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INTRODUCTION

On 31 March 2004, four American contractors took a shortcut down Highway 10 moving through Fallujah. This movement occurred at the discretion of the contractors and was not coordinated with US Marine Corps security elements. Prior to the contractors reaching the bridge over the Euphrates River, insurgents approached and fired at point-blank range killing the contractors.¹ In an instant, the town of Fallujah erupted into a fury of hatred as a mob threw gasoline on the bodies and vehicles setting them on fire. Other people within the mob pulled the burning bodies out, and hacked them with picks and shovels reducing the corpses to small-blackened shapes. Not only were the Marines unaware of this convoy, but also they did not expect this reaction from the residents of Fallujah.²

Lieutenant General (LTG) Conway, the MEF commander, made the decision not to commit Marines into the city to recover the bodies immediately. Conway advocated tactical patience to allow the crowd to calm down and give time for the Marines to capture the mob ringleaders at a time of his choosing. However, within hours, the media³ were already comparing the day's events to Somalia in 1993. The President and his national security council directed a quick reaction to the incident, now inflamed by the media reports. A military response would demonstrate that the insurgents could not get away with this assault on the US citizens, and would publicly exhibit the U.S. resolve to the insurgents and the world.

The President, Secretary of Defense, Head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), and Joint Task Forces (JTF) commander all agreed on immediate combat operations into Fallujah.

¹ Pg 3-4. West, Francis J. *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*. New York: Random House, 2005.

² Pg 3-6. West, Francis J. *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*. New York: Random House, 2005.

³ The term "media" throughout this monograph will specifically refer to print and television/cable news reports. Although the internet is considered, it will only be addressed if used by newspaper reporters

On 2 April 2004, the MEF headquarters received orders for Operation Vigilant Resolve, a tactical assault into the city. What started as a successful insurgent ambush at the tactical level, now transformed into a strategic event that disrupted the military planning and judgment of the tactical commander largely due to the impact of the insurgent's media campaign.⁴ As Marines began to organize for attack, the insurgents began their counter offensive in the media.

Within days, the Marines were in position to seize the entire city. However, at the same time US combat forces moved into the city, the Arab media network Al Jazeera began reporting on the devastation to the civilian population inside Fallujah.⁵ Most 24-hour news networks tied into Al Jazeera's coverage of the battle inside Fallujah. There were no Western media outlets or correspondents reporting from inside the city or traveling with Marines.⁶ Al Jazeera began making false claims that US forces were conducting genocide and war atrocities on innocent civilians within the city.⁷ These reports were successful in stopping the planned assault by Marines. Al Jazeera brought world opinion against the American military through the drumbeat of false media attacks.

Graphic images of dead women and children shown hourly on news programs around the world turned public opinion against the US efforts to capture the city. In response to these damaging media reports, a cease-fire tentatively began and negotiations started with various insurgent groups. As the Marines remained on the defensive in and around the city, the insurgents' media campaign on Al Jazeera continued. Hourly reports from the hospital in Fallujah showed excessive suffering of the Iraqi people inside the city. This distorted media campaign by the insurgency began to pay off and by 16 April 2004 even British Prime Minister

through official newspaper websites. This monograph will not consider private citizen, soldier, or activist group blogs when referring to the term media.

⁴ Pg 4. West, Francis J. *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*. New York: Random House, 2005.

⁵ "The Fighting in Fallujah Continues" *Al Jazeera*, later re-printed in *Xinhua*, 21 April 2004.

⁶ Pg 39-40. Ballard, John R. *Fighting for Fallujah: A New Dawn for Iraq*. West Port: Praeger Security International, 2006.

⁷ "The Fighting in Fallujah Continues" *Al Jazeera*, later re-printed in *Xinhua*, 21 April 2004.

Tony Blair called on George Bush to stop the fighting in Fallujah.⁸ The insurgents, lacking the military means to defeat the Marines in the city, clearly relied upon an asymmetric approach of false media reports to cripple the planned American operations. Al Jazeera reports estimated over 600 dead and over a thousand wounded civilians throughout the city, and made claims that Marine snipers were shooting randomly and killing innocent civilians.⁹ This allegation was repeated hourly and daily causing huge outrage with not only the Iraqi public and Arab world, but also in the entire international community.

With the Arab and international community outraged over alleged abuses of force by the U.S. Marines in Fallujah, the White House decided not to take the city militarily. On 26 April, LTG Conway struck a deal with a former Iraqi army general allowing them to rearm a brigade of former soldiers and take over security of the entire city. Marines would immediately pull out of the city and the US military would provide supplies, weapons, and ammunition to former Iraqi regime soldiers. The newly formed Fallujah Brigade promised to secure the city of Fallujah. With the diplomatic solution reached, the planned American assault came to a halt. The insurgent's strident media campaign achieved a military victory. It brought one of the world's best trained and equipped military forces to a halt just as it was ready to storm the city.

Operation Vigilant Resolve is an example of how the media's influence has had a dramatic change on the operational level of combat. The Marines succeeded on the tactical level, but failed on the operational level to win the public opinion battle in the media environment.¹⁰ LTG Ricardo Sanchez, the Corps Commander, failed to develop a specific line of operation to plan for a new area of combat called "the media battle space."¹¹ In failing to take into

⁸ Pg 156-160. West, Francis J. *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*. New York: Random House, 2005.

⁹ Pg 225. West, Francis J. *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*. New York: Random House, 2005.

¹⁰ Payne, Kenneth. "The Media as an Instrument of War," *Parameters*, Spring 2005

¹¹ Media Battle Space is this writer's new term defined as the environmental factors and conditions which must be understood to successfully apply military resources to support positive media

consideration this new onslaught from the enemy, Sanchez could not positively diffuse the media hype from world sources and negate the propaganda from the insurgents. Sanchez's command was unable to provide specific and timely information to counter the insurgent media attacks. LTG Sanchez should have reacted by using combat camera teams to provide documentation on the insurgents' war crimes. This would have countered claims that the Marines committed genocide. LTG Sanchez should also have allowed embedded reporters to travel with Marines to provide the public with first hand information about Fallujah. Finally, if he formed a media crisis team, as proposed in this paper, LTG Sanchez would have had the ability to address events in a timely manner with enough level of detail to satisfy the US and the world public. Without this deliberate media coordination and execution on the operational level, commanders could win the urban tactical battle, but lose on higher levels for failure to secure positive public support.

Understanding and leveraging the media has become critical for operational level commanders conducting urban combat operations. The insatiable public appetite for information has created conditions where tactical actions can have severe strategic repercussions simply based on media reporting. In the 21st century, the operational level commander conducting urban combat operations must clearly understand the influence the media has on the success of operations. Media influences on world public opinion can now change the traditional model of warfare described by Clausewitz's trinity. World public opinion, influenced by the media, is now a fourth factor in influencing war modifying the trinity into a diamond. Therefore, operational level commanders must address the media in their planning and operations. Adding the media as a line of operation for planning and establishing media crisis teams will allow the commander to consider media coverage, or the media battle space, throughout an operation. This ensures planners will develop the media battle space as an integral part of the urban kinetic fight and ensure success in the global environment. Examining Hue and Fallujah as historical examples

coverage, determine what needs to be covered by the media, and how to best provide the public with the

through the lenses of reporting cycle, public perception, and doctrine will demonstrate the new significance of the media in 21st century urban combat.

This dramatic shift in media influence over operational level combat is still relatively new, and its impact has not yet been fully understood or embraced by the military community. In order for commanders and planners to begin to develop plans to address the media, doctrine and training need to be adjusted to reflect this change. During Vietnam, doctrine did not address how to interact with the media. The public affairs (PA) section specifically dealt with reporters; however, there was no requirement for commanders to address the media. In 2004, doctrine addresses how commanders should plan for both PA and Information Operations (IO); however, it fell short on planning for the new media battle space. Both Hue and Fallujah will demonstrate the requirement for operational level commanders to plan for the media as a specific line of operation, and provide media crisis teams to ensure responsiveness to specific reports in the media.

Using the media as a line of operation allows the operational level commander to commit resources and ensure the unity of effort required for success in urban combat. During the urban combat of Hue in 1968, the operational level commander GEN William Westmoreland¹² failed to understand the significant changes in the media reporting cycle and its ability to influence public perception of the war. In addition, the military doctrine during that time did not require commanders and planners to shape the media battle space in order to ensure successful media involvement during urban combat operations. These factors contributed to the perceived failure

military's story (i.e. using combat camera teams, PAO officers, embedded reporters, or press briefings)

¹² Although the operational level of combat was not specifically developed until after the Vietnam War (in unclassified doctrine) during the Air-land-Battle doctrine, GEN Westmoreland was the commander in charge of U.S. forces within South Vietnam. In addition, GEN Westmoreland was the primary source for media inside South Vietnam. However, GEN Westmoreland did not control any of the operations outside of South Vietnam, and it can be argued that the Pacific commander, due to his control of naval, land, and air forces in the Pacific region (to include operations over North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) could also be named as an operational commander for the war in Vietnam. This monograph does not look at the leadership in Pacific command due to the focus of media coverage towards MAC-V Headquarters and not the Pacific command.

of American military forces in Hue. Better understanding of the effects of media, would have allowed Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MAC-V) to develop a specific approach to better influence public opinion and exploit the military's success in Hue.

Commanders thirty-six years later re-learned these lessons the hard way during Operation Vigilant Resolve. They did not react quickly to the distorted reporting coming from insurgent controlled media. Its images and messages overwhelmed the military planners with its speed and frequency. This counterattack from the insurgents was unanticipated and unexpected. It successfully stopped the first attack. However, learning from these initial mistakes, LTG Metz adjusted his planning and the joint doctrine to shape the media battle space and win the November 2004 assault into Fallujah. The victory was a success not only on the ground militarily, but also in the realm of world public opinion. Lessons from both Hue and Fallujah can provide the examples required to demonstrate the necessary changes in doctrine and planning on the operational level for future urban combat operations.

However, before discussing Hue and Fallujah, the question of how the media has gained significant influence on the employment of military power, and why the operational level commanders should focus on the media will be addressed. Many commanders would argue that by addressing IO in planning the commander has determined his media priorities. To understand this new paradigm, the environment must first be better developed. The next chapter will initially examine why media operations should not be listed under IO, why the operational level commander, not the tactical commander, is affected, and finally how the media has changed over the years.

THE MEDIA, OPERATIONAL LEVEL COMMANDER, AND URBAN COMBAT

Commanders at the operational level need to understand that failure to specifically address the potential effects of media reporting in planning and execution of urban combat operations can directly result in the failure of the overall operation. For commanders in the information age, public opinion (local, national, and world) play a major factor in the success or failure of an operation. If a commander wins all tactical engagements but fails to provide the media with access and information on what occurred and why on the operational level, the combat mission may fail. This failure can occur from the enemy successfully misrepresenting the military's actions or friendly media not accurately reporting what happened. Clausewitz's trinity describing war as a balance between the government, military, and the nation's public must now change to reflect media's global impact.¹³ The traditional Clausewitz-ian trinity should transition into a diamond to represent the expanded influence of media and the effect on world public opinion.

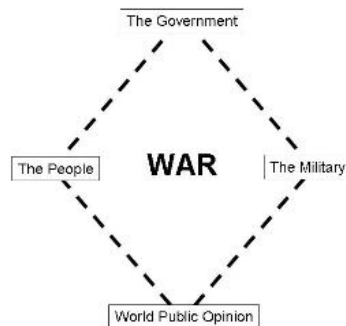


Figure 1 The modified Clausewitz's trinity¹⁴

¹³ Pg 89. Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*. Trans. and ed. By Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: University Press, 1984.

¹⁴ This is a change in the concept of Clausewitz's trinity adjusting into a diamond is taken out of its original context of the 1995 war college monograph by LTC McCallum. Initially the change was to

Clausewitz's description of war being a balance between the hypothetical magnets of the government, military, and people is the main idea of his trinity concept. If one of the three corners of the trinity pulls the war out of the center of this balance, then the war's outcome may not result in reaching the initial plan. This change from a triangle to a diamond is necessary to understand the concept of how the media's influence on world public opinion can pull a war into a different direction or outcome than initially planned. False reports or misrepresentations can create a distorted perception of combat actions, leading to an invalid conclusion concerning the operation.¹⁵

This fundamental shift in strategic understanding of war and its balance between government, the military, the people, and now adding world public opinion should help operational level commanders. Explanation of this diagram and how it should be used could easily encompass an entire monograph in itself. It is not the purpose of this paper to justify changing the Clausewitz-ian trinity. However, the new diamond provides the reader a graphic description of the significance of media on urban operations. Commanders must keep in mind how the media influences urban combat and ensure their planning encompasses this new dimension. Some commanders will argue that by having IO as a line of operation the problem is addressed. However, IO encompasses too many other operational concepts and capabilities to describe, understand, and potentially use the media effectively.

As the military adjusted to the end of the cold war, a new functional area developed to affect the enemy's information and information systems while simultaneously defending our own. This functional area is entitled IO. However, as the need to influence not only the enemy's

represent the requirement of the UN to authorize any new deployment of American military forces. However, I have modified the diamond's use to reflect the role of world public opinion in reference to how the media portrays urban combat operations.

informational systems, but also host nation, American, and world public opinion the term IO has broadened to encompass too many forms of information, systems, methods, and technology. Commanders use the term IO loosely, encompassing computer network attacks, frequency jamming, psychological campaigns, and any other use of information during military operations. This use of the blanket term of IO confuses many commanders with too many tasks tied to one military term. In addition, it is illegal for American military commanders to combine PA and IO.¹⁶ IO is a specific tactic to influence a population, and the American military is not allowed by law to use IO on the American public. This creates a problem when commanders use the blanket term of IO to encompass all media operations. Therefore, commanders need to delineate their IO campaign from their media campaign. By treating the media as a specific line of operation, commanders can better hone their resources to shape the current battlefield environment.

At the tactical level of operations, the media has not changed how commanders fight battles. Combat units will still conduct attack, defense, and security missions whether under media observation or not. However, the distinct change occurs at the operational level of war where the Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander's headquarters affects policy on the overall military action in theater. It is at this level where a commander must plan for a specific line of operation concerning the media. The operational level commander determines what he wants to accomplish and how this action should look in the media. This determination of operational end state will then drive the military actions on the tactical level, and shape the media is reporting of the operation to the American and world public. In addition, the operational level commander must develop a specific means in his headquarters to address false or misleading reports by the

¹⁵ Although Clausewitz refers to the three factors, as “violent passion, chance, and reason” for the sake of this monograph the paper will generalize the author’s interpretation of the trinity referring to “the government, the people, and the military.”

¹⁶ The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 prohibits any US Government agency from conducting operations to influence US citizens.

media or the enemy. This allows the operational commander the flexibility to adjust to the changing reports in the media. An ability to react quickly provides limited time for the media to sensationalize a story, a tactic commonly used to attract more viewers to their network or publication. It is imperative that the commander shapes public perception in the same manner he shapes the battlefield kinetically.

In contrast to military operations, media outlets are influenced by their business model, and this may at times conflict with their information role. Most media outlets are trying to gain a larger share of the information market for viewers or readers and in turn make a profit. With few exceptions, the media outlets are driven by profit motives. For the media, urban combat rivets the viewers to the screen and generates high ratings and greater revenue. Reporters' footage of military operations can be quite graphic and impact the viewers profoundly. With the current technology, these images are almost instantaneously projected to the world. If combat images are distorted or misleading, they can shape public opinion in a manner that may have a negative effect on operations, objectives, or the military end state.

As the media technology grows, the reporter's ability to influence the public also grows. Media outlets may be headquartered in one nation but they are no longer tied to that nation politically or socially. Technological advances allow one media corporation to provide the public with television, satellite, internet, or print news virtually on demand. The media has become a "transnational" element of the world political environment. Using satellite and computer technology, one reporter alone on the battlefield can now conduct the business of an entire newsroom. Individuals can capture fighting on video, edit the video (or not), send digital pictures and provide the audio or written summary of events to the world public all from one location. If the reporter is covering urban combat, the graphic nature alone is enough to sway world public opinion against anyone perceived as the aggressor. This ability to have near immediate access to ground combat around the world dramatically increases the public's appetite for information.

Today, the public can access news on television cable, the internet, newspapers, cell phones, and ipods twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This over saturation of news outlets increases the need for media outlets to fight for ratings by sensationalizing the story. Editors comb through pictures and video to get the most result from the least commitment of resources. This is either one picture or one video clip that can easily portray suffering and destruction instantly when seen by the viewer. This has the tendency to slant the media coverage to support one side over the other. In addition to the change in traditional media network coverage, internet blogs now exist critiquing news stories or world events. Blogs are the most recent addition to overall media coverage of events. Although bloggers may not be trained journalists, they do have an impact on media coverage. As the media reporters submit stories of the day's events, bloggers around the world provide commentary on the topic and sometimes even further investigate the facts of the report. Stories that do not see any traditional news coverage or reports that are incorrect fill countless blog page reports. Blog reporting may increase to such a volume that it demands that the media cover an event, or correct an error. However, since this aspect of media is still relatively new, this paper will not address blog reports or bloggers as a legitimate form of media. Bloggers and blog pages are primarily commentary on traditional media reporting. The traditional media still sets the agenda in event coverage.

With the advances in modern communications, the news media is an important source of information for the public concerning US military operations. The public wants and demands to know "what is going on?" Since Vietnam, there has been an explosion of media outlets both in America and throughout the world. The advent of new technology has altered the reporting cycle of the media. In Vietnam, there were two mediums for the media to inform the public: print and television. The traditional print media had a news cycle of 24 hours. Reporters had a printing deadline to produce stories before the daily newspapers were published for the next day. In this form of reporting, it took about 24 hours to publish a story. The second form of media was through nightly television news broadcast. At the time of the battle of Hue in 1968, this medium

was still relatively new and its ability to impact society unknown. Most television footage for the nightly news took up to two and a half days to edit and fly back to the American television studios for broadcast.¹⁷ With the increases in satellite and camera technology, a reporter in Iraq could broadcast on site with less than a two and a half second delay in reporting a story directly to the public.¹⁸

A reporter in 2004 can now do the work of an entire newsroom from remote field locations. This dramatic increase in the rapid spread of a news story over the past thirty-six years dynamically changes how the media can influence public opinion when covering military operations. Technology has now reduced the time when an event occurs to when it can appear on a television screen. This creates the requirement for operational military commanders to engage the media to ensure the proper explanation of events. Failure to shape what the viewer sees may cause a misperception of what happened. Therefore, a successful military operation may be reported by the media coverage as a failure. It is imperative that the operational level commander be aware of this media power and develop plans to inform the media. In Hue, the color television pictures broadcast on nightly television news for the first time allowed the American public to witness the realities of war within a few days of it occurring. Although shown for a few minutes of the nightly news broadcast, these reports had tremendous impact on the attitudes toward the war. In contrast, reporters during the November 2004 attack in Fallujah also only reported a story for a few minutes; however, the reporting was repeated throughout the day, not only just once during the nightly news show. The video images were replayed continually on 24-hour news channels immersing the viewers in the graphic images of the fight. Viewers also had the ability to access the internet and read newspaper reports, along with viewing pictures, and videos on demand at anytime of day. This dramatic shift in the ability to affect public opinion quickly, both

¹⁷ Tufts University: The Fletcher School. "Ted Koppel and Journalists Examine Media Coverage of Foreign Affairs" <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/news/2006/04/koppel.shtml>, 2006.

in visual and written form, must now alert military leaders to consider the media's potential impact on the battlefield.

The operational commander, understanding this potential impact on the operation, must commit the resources and planning to ensure success. In 1968, operational level commanders did not have the tools, experience, or conceptual understanding of the potential influences of the media on urban combat operations. By examining the reporting cycle, media influence on public perception, and current doctrine, the next chapter will demonstrate why the media should be its own line of operation for operational level planning and how it could have been used to create a different outcome in Hue during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Failure to consider the media can lead a tactical success into a perceived operational level failure.

¹⁸ Tufts University: The Fletcher School. "Ted Koppel and Journalists Examine Media Coverage of Foreign Affairs" <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/news/2006/04/koppel.shtml>, 2006.

HUE 1968: A TACTICAL VICTORY PERCEIVED AS AN OPERATIONAL DEFEAT

Vietnam was the first war fought in America's living room. As such, it brought the sometimes shocking, graphic images of modern combat home. Based on viewpoints of the reporter, the TV became very significant in influencing and shaping the perception of the American public. The Tet Offensive, and particularly the battle of Hue city, provided an unrivalled opportunity for this new medium, given the intensity of urban combat. When the surprise attack occurred, the speed of the media reporting cycle and the initial distorted message affected public perception of what occurred during the Tet offensive and particularly the battle of Hue. The military did not have the doctrine to address how commanders should plan for and engage the media to tangibly affect mission accomplishment. It also did not have a media crisis team to deal with the media. The combination of these factors contributed to the perception of an operational failure by the military during the Tet offensive, despite the tactical victory of the battle of Hue.

Television reporting from Vietnam was America's primary source of information. This was the first time the American public could view real combat, as television became a household item for most Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As television ownership increased, the television networks adjusted to capture the increase in viewers. In the early 1960s, the three major television networks shifted from 15-minute news broadcasts nightly, to the current format of a half hour of news in the evenings.¹⁹ This increase in news began to affect how Americans were receiving their news. In the first survey of its kind in 1964, people were asked where they received the majority of their news information. Both newspapers and television almost tied,

¹⁹ Pg 2-10. Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

58% to 56% respectively²⁰, with neither significantly higher than the other as the primary news medium. By 1972, a similar survey showed a dramatic shift with 48% of Americans viewing television news compared with only 21% reading newspapers²¹. The major increase in television is attributed to two responses from the survey: the personal nature of the news broadcaster and the use of pictures and video to portray the story.²² The color images seen on television of the war in Vietnam allowed viewers to not only hear the narrative of the story, but also experience the images of combat for themselves.

The evening news reported combat action for the previous twenty-four to forty-eight hours.²³ The news cycle of the evening news broadcast encompassed written reports sent in by correspondents and read by the news anchor and additional correspondent narrated video reports from the field. A majority of the camera footage taken had to be flown back to the US in order for networks to broadcast the reports. This at times allowed a breaking story time to develop for one or two days before camera footage could get out to the public. This new method of reporting combat provided the public with lasting images that influenced their perception of war.

Media Effects on Perception of Urban Combat

Initially media coverage from Vietnam was openly supportive of military efforts. In addition, there were no restrictions on what the media reported. However, with the impact of the Tet offensive, a change in the media slant occurred adding a negative bias toward war coverage. Reporters began to exaggerate damage reports and became very skeptical of any US military

²⁰ The survey allowed more than one response to where people received their news, therefore the percentages add up to over 100% since multiple responses returned with both newspaper and television tied.

²¹ This survey was similar to the 1964 survey, however only multiple sources were not allowed, survey respondents had to rank order their source of daily news. The other 31% received their news from either radio or magazines.

²² Pg 172-174. Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986

²³ Tufts University: The Fletcher School. "Ted Koppel and Journalists Examine Media Coverage of Foreign Affairs" <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/news/2006/04/koppel.shtml>, 2006.

report on success. The Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attacks throughout South Vietnam also limited reporters' freedom of movement in South Vietnam. Therefore, some reporters only reported on their immediate surroundings, and made assumptions about what was happening in other areas of Vietnam without actually verifying their accounts. This was seen in two different reports about the destruction within the citadel's Palace of Peace.

One reporter, Charles Mohr of the New York Times, traveled with U.S. Marine units and reported exactly what he witnessed: "*Damage in the palace area was relatively minor despite sporadic artillery and mortar shelling by South Vietnamese troops in recent days.*"²⁴ Another reporter, not traveling with military units, wrote an article that was published the same day, by the associated press. He based his description on assumptions of what he thought occurred, since he was not physically at the citadel. "*Elsewhere in the Citadel, which measures a mile and a half on each side, the devastation was almost total. ... crumbled walls, damp, decaying bodies, burned vehicles, and trees shattered by shells... The inner wall surrounding the Imperial Palace ... was damaged severely.*"²⁵ Both reports apparently described the same incident. The reporter traveling with the military recorded the accurate story. The reporter, who did not, reported a false impression of what occurred in Hue. The Citadel, in reality, had minimal damage primarily caused by small arms fire, and the inner wall was virtually untouched. After the battle, the South Vietnamese and the U.S. Military determined that only 40% of the housing within the city was destroyed.²⁶

Power of the television image had a direct impact on the public perception of the war. In a survey conducted in the 1970s, only 1.2 percent of the viewers who watched the nightly newscast could remember specifics from the previous newscast. However, when stories about

²⁴ Pg 205. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

²⁵ Pg 205-206. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

Vietnam were shown that contained video footage of fighting, around 10 to 20% of the viewers remembered the story due to the graphic nature of the footage. If not put in the proper context by the operational military commander, these images could negatively affect the public perception of the war. Military commanders in Vietnam did not grasp the power an unrestricted media had. MAC-V allowed reporters to travel around Vietnam without restrictions and when confronted by questions, failed to provide the media with truthful explanations of military actions. Throughout Vietnam, military commanders withheld information from reporters and even at times did not tell the truth to the media.

The U.S. Military could have positively influenced the media reporting about Vietnam. Two briefings a day were held in Saigon to report significant events to the media. In fact, a majority of the press working in Saigon used these briefings as their sole source of information on military operations in Vietnam. However, officers at MAC-V distrusted the media and therefore failed to provide timely and complete reports. Eventually, the daily briefings were nicknamed by the press "*the five o'clock follies*"²⁷ due to the lack of meaningful information given on military operations. This created skepticism in the media about the truthfulness of any military briefing. This distrust between elements in the military and media provided a reason for the media's anti-military slant in reports.

At the outset of the Tet Offensive, reporters were looking for quick stories to give to viewers and readers. When the Communists initially seized Hue, a massive campaign of retribution got underway. Over 3,000 South Vietnamese citizens and foreign aid workers were executed in the first few days of fighting due to their support for the South Vietnamese government. Hue's mayor and the U.S. Embassy officially addressed the issue at press conferences. However, due to the lack of trust between the media and military, the reporters

²⁶ Pg 196. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

looked at the story as mere anti-communist propaganda, and therefore minimally covered the story.²⁸

Similar to a successful marketing campaign for a commercial product, the business end of the media pushed reporters to quickly and concisely market their story. This also led to the news media trend to focus on sensational news in order to sell newspapers and draw viewers.²⁹ One technique used was a catch phrase or slogan that resonated throughout the media. Using this method, reporters and editors summarized an event to their audience. Therefore, if a catchy phrase or saying can accomplish the objective, it will be used. One particular phrase was captured by AP reporter Peter Arnett, from an anonymous US Air Force Major after a battle in Ben Tre: *“It became necessary to destroy the town to save it,”* This became the press corps’ favorite cliché to summarize many engagements during the Tet offensive.³⁰ With the media reporting on the U.S. efforts to save South Vietnam, many reporters were appalled by the use of conventional military force against cities, towns, and villages causing more destruction and death of friendly South Vietnamese property and people. During a report on Hue, ABC news even used Arnett’s catchy phrase to describe the fighting. *“... the going is rough and Marine officers concede that it may be necessary to rip apart, destroy the beautiful Citadel in order to save it.”*^{31,32}

The dangers of reporters using clichés or sound bites to support their story may overly simplify a message that may be more complex and thus lead the viewer or reader to an incorrect

²⁷ Pg 15. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

²⁸ Pg 201-206. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

²⁹ Pg X. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

³⁰ Pg 177. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

³¹ Pg 211. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

³² During the course of the monograph, the articles used by Peter Braestrup and Daniel Hallin in their books were read in their entirety (when available) to ensure no bias by either author.

perception of the war. As reporters' stories adjusted toward the negative during and after the Tet Offensive, so did American attitudes and perceptions. Before Tet, 48% of Americans thought the war would be over within the next two years, after Tet only 35% of Americans believed the war would be over in two years.³³ This even translated to the nightly news reports on the US military's morale. Surveying news reports before Tet, nightly newscasts ran on average four positive references to soldiers' morale in Vietnam with no negative references. After Tet there were on average two positive stories to fourteen negative stories referring to morale in the Military.³⁴

The increase in negative reports on Vietnam began to shift American public opinion about the war's ultimate outcome. Reporters continued to use Hue as the backdrop and a symbol for the overall Tet offensive weeks after the fighting concluded in the streets. Many stories, after the fighting, focused on the human suffering of the South Vietnamese people in Hue.³⁵ This impression of devastation in Hue had an effect on American public support for the Vietnam War, coming to a climax on 27 February 1968. Walter Cronkite hosted a news special about Vietnam and stated the following: "*But it is increasingly clear ... that the only rational way out ... will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.*"³⁶ Due to Cronkite's popularity of the time, this had a sizable impact on the American population accepting the idea that America could not win in Vietnam.

The daily coverage of war in the news directly influenced American public opinion. Nightly news reports top stories were the war in Vietnam. Two social scientists at Yale in the

³³ Pg 173. Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986

³⁴ Pg 180. Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986

³⁵ Pg 208-209. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

³⁶ Pg 493. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

1980s, Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder in their book *News that Matters: Television and American Public Opinion* discovered that the frequency of nightly news coverage made a difference in public opinion and political priorities. The study determined that even something as simple as the frequency of a report and the location in the news program line up could dramatically affect public opinion on a news topic. Iyengar and Kinder conducted numerous studies focusing on the nightly new broadcasts, requiring different test groups to receive the daily news from one source. The researchers used typically three different groups: one group watched an unedited nightly newscast, the other two groups watched newscasts with different lead stories and types of stories. Their results showed that the importance a viewer sees in a news report correlates with both the story's order in the newscast and the amount of times a related story re-occurs in a given week.³⁷

During the Tet Offensive, the fighting in Vietnam was the lead story, and the story painted a picture of disarray for the U.S. military in Vietnam. MAC-V did not consider how the media would react to what was happening in Vietnam. It did not have a plan to address the media's own incursion into Vietnam. This was a failure of military training and doctrine to address the importance of engaging the media. Other than regulations for the duties of a public affairs officer (PAO), there was no specific doctrine explaining how commanders should integrate a plan for the media during combat operations. Without this doctrine, GEN Westmoreland and his staff failed to focus part of their effort toward public perception in urban combat in Hue. Therefore, the interpretation of what occurred and why it occurred was left to the non-military members of the press corps. Their interpretation left out any possibility for the military to influence the story of combat operations in Hue, leading to a perception of operational failure in Hue.

³⁷ Pg 33. Iyengar, Shanto and Kinder, Donald R. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Media and the “What If’s” of Hue

If GEN Westmoreland had employed a specific line of operation directed at the media, then he could have countered the false reports given during Hue and provided factual documentation of what actually occurred. In addition, the military needed to provide control measures on the media access, allowing the proper interpretation of the images to the public. GEN Westmoreland could have easily influenced the press reports by providing timely and accurate reports during his daily press briefings. This would have provided the media with a concept of what occurred in military operations, and what intent the military had for future operations in Vietnam. Military public affairs officers could have addressed each aspect of the North Vietnamese’s attacks and propaganda with detailed accurate information to promote the American and South Vietnamese’s success.

Finally, MAC-V should have employed media crisis teams to cover events like the massacre of civilians by the NVA in Hue. This would provide the media and American public with quick and factually documented information on what occurred. Without a media crisis team, Westmoreland failed to influence the American public opinion about this tragedy of war that occurred during the occupation of Hue by the North Vietnamese.

Failing to plan for media as a specific line of operation allowed the media to control the media battle space, reporting whatever the press deemed important without any military input. During and after the Tet Offensive began, the media reported the war on their own terms and questioned military commanders credibility. In addition, lack of detail and background in military statements given to the press gave room to both editors in Saigon and in the U.S. to provide their own interpretations of the day’s events to fill out their Vietnam reports. Therefore, without media planning, the public impression of the battle for Hue turned against military commanders on the ground, leaving Americans to think Hue was lost.

Even if the military's doctrine did not address media planning in the 1960s, Westmoreland could have created specific procedures or policies for media involvement. If GEN Westmoreland had a full understanding of how the media affected Clausewitz's trinity, he could have recognized the impact the media would have on the war in Vietnam. This theoretical concept on how war can be distorted by one of the diamond's four corners is the simplest way to understand the media's new influence, and why the operational level commander needs to address the media. Using this theoretical model, GEN Westmoreland could have developed procedures to influence positive media coverage of military actions. This would have allowed MAC-V to maintain a positive sway in the media.

In Hue, the American public saw the first major urban combat since Korea. Due to a rapid news cycle, distorted perception from the media, and failure of military doctrine to deal with the press, the tactical success of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces on the ground was overshadowed by the failure to exploit this success in the media coverage or the media battle space. The failure of MAC-V to relay to the American public the successful battle outcome rapidly and accurately and to counter both the world media and the North Vietnamese claims resulted in a perception of tactical defeat in Hue. This perception in the media facilitated the theater strategic victory of the NVA in the Tet Offensive, as that battle was one of public opinion, waged in the living rooms and streets of America.

Thirty-six years later, the U.S. Military in Iraq faced a similar urban battle. However, in 2004, the operational level commander's knowledge of the media's impact provided an example of how to conduct urban operations and influence a positive outcome through the media. LTG Metz's skill in planning for media on the battlefield provided the U.S. Military an operational victory during the November 2004 attack into Fallujah.

FALLUJAH 2004: AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL VICTORY THROUGH MEDIA PLANNING

The attack on Fallujah in November 2004 was the first urban combat operation fought on television in near real-time. Understanding the influence of media, LTG Metz deliberately planned for media coverage before the fight. Learning from the media failures during Operation Vigilant Resolve, LTG Metz planned the use of media and provided specific guidance to his subordinate commanders. In comparison to combat in Hue, there were drastic changes in the media reporting cycle, perception of the public watching the battle, and doctrine changes that influenced the battle's conditions.

Fallujah, in comparison to Hue, was a success on both the tactical and operational level in part due to LTG Metz's planning for the media. As stated earlier in this paper, the ability of reporters to transmit real-time video and commentary from remote locations dramatically affected the reporting cycle of the media. Therefore, repeating the discussion of information technology and how it relates to the reporting cycle is unnecessary. This section will look at the doctrine in 2004, at what LTG Metz adjusted to ensure success, at the insurgent attempt to influence the media, and finally at some examples of positive and negative perception management by the US Military. This chapter addresses these issues to demonstrate how the operational level commander can influence positive media coverage to ensure successful perceptions through an urban battle.

Influencing media coverage to ensure a positive impact on combat operations is not discussed in any doctrine. Even urban operation doctrine does not address media planning or considerations. The new Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning, address the need for integrating strategic communications into planning, but does not specifically address the media. Strategic communications encompasses IO, information directed at enemy forces, and PA, communicating the military's intent to both internal and external audiences; therefore, an

assumption can be made that the media is included.³⁸ JP 5-0 discusses integrating strategic communications into all aspects of the Geographic Combatant Commander's (CCDR) planning of the theater strategic/ operational levels. "... *plans will include a Strategic Communications annex ... contain[ing] a proposed strategic communication strategy, ... synchronized information objectives, audiences, themes, and actions...*"³⁹ However, this is the level where doctrine stops discussing the need for integration of a message in all planning and operations.

LTG Metz understood that the current doctrine did not consider the media requirements for ongoing operations in Iraq. Therefore, he devised his own procedures for dealing with the media for the Fallujah battle. It is unclear if Metz conceptualized the media's input on war in a Clausewitz-ian diamond model; however, due to his deliberate media planning an argument can be made that he understands the media's influence on modern combat. LTG Metz specifically planned the perception of the operation in world public opinion, the use of combat camera teams to exploit positive coverage, the potential need to change tactical objectives to prevent insurgent media exploitation, and the absolute requirement for rapid tempo for the operation to limit negative coverage.

In Fallujah, to ensure a successful media campaign, LTG Metz, LTG Sattler, and their planners considered four questions while planning every phase for the attack: 1.) how do Iraqis see this action? 2.) is it culturally acceptable? 3.) can the Iraqis sustain this effort? 4.) does it help in a transition to full Iraqi control of their country? By answering each of these questions for every phase or action that III Corps and the MEF planned, planners were able to adjust operational objectives to gain positive media coverage.⁴⁰ Without the support of world public opinion, the US loses legitimacy in the eyes of the world, potentially having a very negative

³⁸ Pg II-2, II-3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. 11 April 2006.

³⁹ Pg II-3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. 11 April 2006.

effect on combat operations. The way to win public support on the operational level is through planning and preparing for the impact of media. LTG Metz planned for media operations based on honest and open disclosure to the media. This countered the insurgent attempt to use false reports in order to skew the world public opinion against the American government and its military operations.

To counter the enemy's successful propaganda during Operation Vigilant Resolve in April, the military planned some objectives solely to deny insurgent propaganda. On 7 November 2004, special operations forces and a light armored reconnaissance unit seized the hospital and western bank of the Euphrates River. These actions one day prior to the scheduled ground assault misled the defenders as to the location of the main attack. The insurgents in the city focused their combat power mainly in the west and south as the probable direction of attack. More important than deceiving the insurgency on the location of the attack, seizure of the city's hospital denied the insurgency the hospital for propaganda purposes and potential media exploitation. During the April battle, the Marines by-passed the Hospital as a non-military objective, however the insurgency used the wards of children and civilians as centerpieces to support their media claims of American atrocities. Therefore, to limit the insurgent spin on the November attack, the first objective coalition forces needed to hold was the hospital. This was not the only action developed to counter insurgent propaganda. LTG Metz and his planners developed a media exploitation capability within friendly units.

During the battle, combat camera teams attached to each battalion fighting in the city sent PowerPoint slides through the 1st Marine Division and MEF HQ's PA channels to III Corps summarizing key events or activities. Once a unit encountered enemy war crimes, found bomb-making factories, torture facilities, or other situations, combat camera teams documented the sites with pictures and a few brief explanatory statements. For quick approval and release by

⁴⁰ Pg 45. Ballard, John R. *Fighting for Fallujah: A New Dawn for Iraq*. Westport: Praeger

commanders to the press, these slides were sent immediately to all levels of the chain of command via email. LTG Metz coined the term “bite-size” vignette to describe the requirement for military PA to provide the media with a quick ready-made sound bite of information to broadcast.⁴¹ The use of these bite-size vignettes provided reporters with targeted information about ongoing combat operations to both satisfy the public’s demand for information on the battle and to counter the enemy media messages about US military atrocities.⁴² To prevent claims of all reports as military propaganda about the attack, embedded reporters traveled alongside combat forces entering into the city. This allowed cable news channels to report via satellite exactly what they witnessed, providing video footage and commentary on the spot as the fighting occurred.

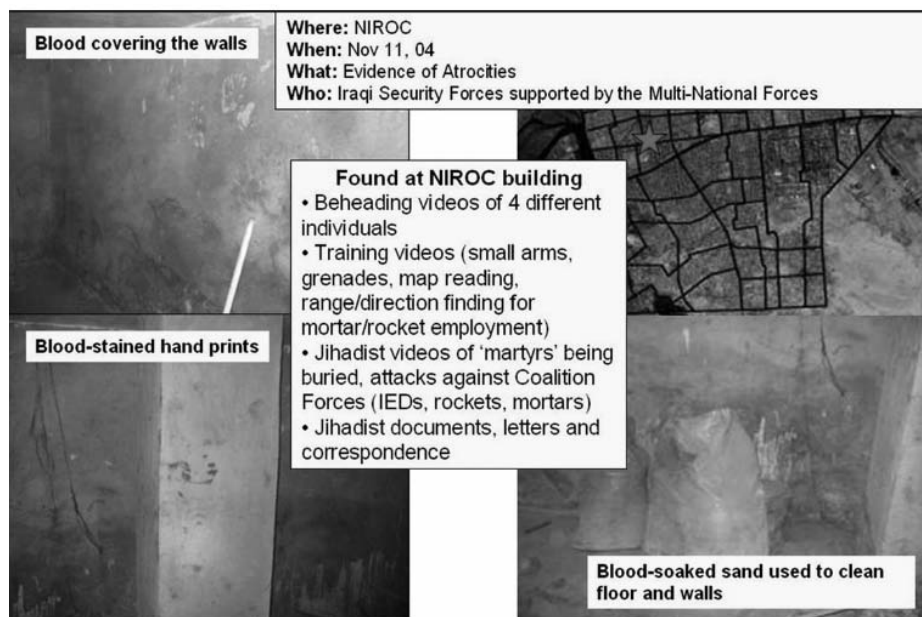


Figure 2 A bite-size vignette used during the Fallujah November 2004 battle⁴³

Security International, 2006.

⁴¹ Metz, LTG Thomas F. and Hutton, LTC James E. “Massing Effects in the Information Domain: A Case Study in Aggressive Information Operations,” *Military Review*, May-June 2006.

⁴² Metz, LTG Thomas F. and Hutton, LTC James E. “Massing Effects in the Information Domain: A Case Study in Aggressive Information Operations,” *Military Review*, May-June 2006.

Embedded reporters gave the U.S. Military transparency and promoted positive public opinion. To promote this transparency, the Coalition forces allowed the opportunity for any reporter willing to embed with Army and Marine units during the attack. Over 50 Iraqi television and newspaper journalists lived in Camp Fallujah to report on the attack to the Iraqi population. In addition, approximately forty media reporters from news agencies around the world were allowed to embed with Army and Marine battalions.⁴⁴ This open access to the ground combat along side US and Coalition forces attempted to counter the false claims that were occurring from the insurgent media reports. During combat operations, insurgents consistently used mosques and minarets as fighting positions against Iraqi and US forces. Embedded reporters were able to show, within hours, TV pictures of insurgents firing from holy sites within the city. This gave credibility to the US military actions and showed military commanders using limited force to destroy enemy forces while still protecting holy sites in the city. Similarly, the Fallujah plan for civilians was specifically geared to show American and Iraqi concern over fair treatment and care of noncombatants. As US forces cleared city streets, civil affairs units established food distribution points to provide food and medical care to civilians trapped inside the city. Iraqi army units conducted joint patrols with Marine Corps elements in the rear area to allow civilians to remain in their homes and begin to rebuild their lives immediately after combat forces cleared out insurgents. Embedded media with US military were not only told of these actions, they filmed and took pictures of US forces passing out food and medical aid to civilians within the city. This automatically countered all claims from Arab media that the US was conducting genocide within the city. The impressive technological ability of the reporters ensured no matter what soldiers did on the ground, the world instantly could view or read what happened. This

⁴³ Metz, LTG Thomas F. and Hutton, LTC James E. "Massing Effects in the Information Domain: A Case Study in Aggressive Information Operations," *Military Review*, May-June 2006.

⁴⁴ This count of embedded reporters is from the author's memory. MAJ Krivda served as the TF 2-2 IN Executive Officer during the battle of Fallujah in November 2004.

change from Hue to Fallujah required planners to factor in how to use the media in combat operations, which helped shape how the world public perceived America's actions.

Not only would units allow embedded reporters, a press pool was established at Camp Fallujah and after the first few days of fighting, daily press releases were made to tell the Marine Corps story. To counter Al Jazeera claims and to ensure that a repeat of the April media defeat did not reoccur, Marine and Army planners stressed speed was the key. By ensuring a quick push of Marines and Army forces from north to south, military planners insured that public opinion would not have time to turn against the American effort. Embedded reporters and steady daily briefings showing positive, hard evidence of insurgent war crimes supported a negative image of the enemy in Fallujah. Moreover, US and Iraqi forces establishing order within the city provided the positive media coverage required to maintain public support for the attack.

The Insurgents defending Fallujah planned to use the media to support their operations as well. The insurgents inside Fallujah made it clear to the media that they could come to the city of Fallujah and embed with insurgent elements. Journalists inside Iraq did not accept this offer. Although in the March- April 2006 edition of *The Humanist*, a writer named Michael I. Niman claims that an Alaskan freelance journalist, Dahr Jamail, along with a camera crew from Al-Jazeera did embed in Fallujah. Niman discusses in his article the vast American military atrocities Jamail witnessed first hand. Niman explains how US Marines intentionally targeted Jamail with artillery, tank, and small arms fire in an attempt to cover up any reporting on U.S. war crimes. In further research, the personal blog and web page of Dahr Jamail makes no mention of his embedding and actually reports his blog and printed articles from the time of the battle as living in a Baghdad residence during the November 2004 battle. Therefore, it is probably reasonable to say that the insurgents inside Fallujah did not have real embedded reporters. The insurgents only influenced the media outlets like Al Jazeera using cell phones and the Internet. This allowed the insurgents to report false atrocities in an attempt to destroy the legitimacy of the coalition's attack on Fallujah.

Responding accurately and timely to a media report can directly impact the legitimacy of the operation. During Fallujah, two such crisis's occurred providing examples of the positive and negative effects. During the battle, a Marine cleared a local mosque of enemy activity finding only bodies. However, once he moved to the next building, he received fire from the same mosque. The Marine returned and again found only bodies. As soon as he left the mosque a second time, he again received fire leading him back to clear the mosque for a third time. Once he returned inside, the Marine determined one of the bodies was an insurgent playing dead. The marine shot the insurgent and went on to continue his operations. This action was caught on camera and the media began to portray the US military as shooting wounded personnel, a clear violation of the Geneva Convention. Immediately, Marine leadership seized upon this report, explained the rules of engagement, and detailed to the press that a review of the situation would be conducted. Once the review was completed, and the determination that the rules of engagement were not violated, the Marines again held a press conference to discuss this with the media. This action did not become a major problem in media relations due to the honesty and outright openness of the Marine Corps leadership. However, elements of the command were taken away from their focus on the current battle. To prevent an unnecessary tension in the staff, a media crisis team could tackle the problem, allowing the staff to concentrate on the current fight.

The second action shows how an unaddressed report can destroy the legitimacy of the military. During the initial artillery barrage and within the first few days of combat in Fallujah, US forces entering the city used white phosphorus artillery shells. The shells were used to obscure insurgents view and protect US forces as they entered into the city. After the Fallujah operation was complete, an Italian news agency reported that white phosphorus was used to deliberately burn people and civilians. The incident was framed as the US Military causing undue suffering to Sunni Iraqis. When asked by multiple journalists about the use of white phosphorus, the US European Command (EUCOM) and the US Embassy in Italy stated white

phosphorus was never used. After a few months, the military changed its official statement and admitted white phosphorus was used to obscure insurgents view during breaching operations into the city. This immediately caused doubt that the US's official story regarding all aspects of Fallujah were valid, and led to rumors of an attempted cover up by the U.S. Government.

By not being direct upfront, US commanders on the ground failed to maintain a positive relationship with the media. This mistake led to a break in world opinion that now has some of the public skeptical on operations in Fallujah. During an interview with CNN reporter Jane Arraf, the topic of the white phosphorous story was brought up, and her impression was: *“As you know, rule number one in dealing with the media or the public, as soon as you’re found out to have lied – even if it’s because you were misinformed – nobody ever trusts you again.”*⁴⁵

The failure in both the military and state department’s response to this claim shows the need for all elements of Strategic Communications to remain integrated. The story of the chemical weapons use was first claimed by the Iraqi insurgency on the internet. The US military in Iraq’s PA officials immediately countered this claim to the media with the truth. However, in Italy, members of the State Department Public Diplomacy (USPD) and EUCOM did not know about the use of white phosphorous in Fallujah, and when asked about it by Italian media, quickly denied its use. Therefore, a break in message occurred creating a fresh scandal for the media, and placed doubt in public confidence.

Since Vietnam, doctrine now addresses a commander’s interaction with the media. However, it still does not fully articulate the media’s impact on the operational level. Therefore, due to the increases in reporting cycle and effects on public perception, the military requires a change in doctrine. The change should specifically detach the media from IO as a new line of operation. Making this change in doctrine, and following some of LTG Metz’s media planning considerations, success for the operational level commander during urban combat can translate

into successful perception of operations by the world public. This will allow both a tactical and operational victory for future US and coalition forces.

⁴⁵ Pg 8. Combat Studies Institute, "Interview with Jane Arraf," interview by Matt Matthews, 3 April 2006. Operational Leadership Project, <http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/contentdm/home.htm>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

21st Century technological changes to communication and the newfound closeness of globalization ensure that the media will now be a concern for operational level commanders during urban combat. The public's quick access to information, ability to see video and read news on demand can create dramatic repercussions for the operational commander if he does not deliberately plan for the media to gain and maintain legitimacy for his operations. By creating a specific line of operation for the media and creating media crisis teams, the operational commander can ensure a positive impact on the next urban combat operation. Both Hue and Fallujah provide specific examples through the lenses of reporting cycle, public perception, and doctrine that demonstrate the significance of the media in 21st century urban combat.

Understanding the rapid reporting cycle of today's media, the operational level commander can focus the PA effort in reports, providing the media pools with quick sound-bite products to report operational successes, counter false media reports, or shed light on enemy war crimes. American commanders must exploit their successes in the media to prevent or counter false media claims created by the enemy. In addition, embedding of the media in U.S. combat forces builds trust and allows the transparency required to prove, to both the international and American public, the military is not falsely reporting information about combat operations. Embedding should not lessen the effects of the military's use of the PA officers and combat camera on staff to provide sound-bite information. The operational level commander must be aware of the importance of the media's impact in the world of public opinion and ensure, as best as he can, the proper perspective is given during the use of the graphic video displayed in urban combat.

From false or misleading statements, to re-using video footage from past battles, the media can influence a story that fits their agenda. Military commanders and public affairs

officers need to challenge the media when this occurs.⁴⁶ Since the November 2004 battle of Fallujah, the media pool footage of soldiers fighting in the streets is played daily during nightly broadcasts. Typically, this footage is run without even mentioning that the footage is ‘file footage’ from the November attack. This leads many viewers to believe that daily intense urban combat is a common occurrence in Iraq. The Multi National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I) Commander should engage the media, and the public explaining the misuse of video footage instead of passively allowing this to continue to occur.

A routine news report on Iraq using graphic file footage, can lead viewers to gain a false impression of what actually happened. No matter what is said by the reporter during the broadcast, it is the image that has the most dramatic impact. With television news the primary source of the world information, video images are now dominating the news media and heavily influencing public opinion. Consider the following example:

CNN opens their broadcast with pictures of dead American soldiers being pulled out of buildings while other American soldiers are engaged in a heavy firefight. At the same time, the announcer discusses the casualty toll for the week, and mentions the war against insurgents in Iraq is continuing. These images alone portray to the American public a graphic representation of combat. Even without listening to the words of the reporter, the images alone tell the story of the horrors of war.

Now consider a different scenario:

CNN opens up their newscast with another report, not focusing on Iraq, and closes the nightly news with pictures of US soldiers passing out school supplies for children. At the same time, the announcer broadcasts the casualty toll for the week and mentions the war against insurgents in Iraq is continuing. The difference in both story placement and visual representation portray a completely different message to the viewer. News stations like Al Jazeera consistently

⁴⁶ Pg 226-227, Zinsmeister, Karl. *Dawn Over Baghdad: How the U.S. Military is Using Bullets*

attempt to gain the most graphic footage of combat to show Arab suffering worldwide. This is consistent with Al Jazeera's claim that blood sells. In addition, Al Jazeera claims the reason why they have high ratings throughout much of the Arab world is that they show the suffering of Arabs around the world; therefore, drawing people to tune in nightly to their broadcast. The insurgency in Iraq sees this as their key to winning the war in Iraq. Before his death, Al Zaqawi made a statement on 9 July 2005 saying: “... *I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.*” This is the insurgency's asymmetric warfare against the American military. To counter this media avalanche on the other side, winning the information war now becomes a critical element for the operational commander to plan for in all urban combat operations.

Daily engagement and feedback to the media will develop a rapport between the operational level commander and the media. This rapport should be grounded on truth and should develop trust between the two organizations. In dealing with the media, stating the truth is consistently the best policy and is required by law. Since Vietnam, the U.S. military has had a very steady distrust of the media. This leads to commanders unwilling to provide information at times to reporters, or not allowing access to military operations, soldiers, or units. Any contentious relationship with the media can lead to a failure of the military to tell its positive story. If ignored, the media will go after negative reports or even accept the deception by the enemy about military operational outcomes. In his book about the media covering the Tet offensive, Peter Braestrup provides an insightful reason why the press turned against the United States government and consistently reported only the bad news.

Braestrup's analysis on the media reaction to the Tet Offensive is what commanders can use as a guide. The media, in the face of a new event, requires information about what happened

and Ballots to Remake Iraq. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004.

and a plan of action by the forces involved. Media in essence is trying to make sense of what is or has happened. The enemy use of the media can provide a distorted view or the friendly forces involved can provide their version, but in either case, a story will be given to the public. As the deadlines near, editors and reporters will search for answers to write their stories. If military commanders do not provide truthful, accurate, and timely information to the press, the reporters will interpret their own story, which may not be positive or may even be wrong about military operations. They may fill out their stories with non-facts. Therefore, to ensure a successful media campaign, in addition to the urban combat operation, operational level commanders must plan for providing the media information.⁴⁷

Braestrup talks about the President requiring a plan, however this can easily be translated down to the JTF Commander on the operational level of war.⁴⁸ The General in charge should have a clear and distinct message to tell the press that is timely, grounded in truth, and open for the press to observe. The US military, as well as the US government, is a product of the Constitution. The Constitution not only rests on the freedom of press, but it specifically lays out that America is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This requires that the US military be accountable to the American people. To ensure an open and honest report to the American public, a plan for the press observing and recording all of its actions in combat should be developed.

The current military policy of embedding is a necessary response to American and world public demand for information about military operations. Embedded reporters can travel along side US soldiers and show the actions of the military while the fighting occurs. Senior leaders in the military must understand that their bias against the media needs to be tempered enough to allow embedding access. Preventing media access will surely provide an enemy the avenue to

⁴⁷ Pg x-xi. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

misrepresent US actions. This exploitation of the media by the enemy is an asymmetric approach to deny the American military the moral high ground. Therefore, similar to the critical importance of tactical planning, operational level leaders now need to ensure key terrain in the media battle space is considered. Commanders and planners need to deny the enemy's ability to gain the moral high ground through distortion of events in the media.

However, embeds are not the sole solution. The public affairs and combat camera units are now, more than ever, an important part of the operational commander's exploitation team. These soldiers, trained in journalism, can travel along with combat units to report stories about enemy war crimes, counteract false or misleading media reports, or cover military events that media outlets could not or have not reported. Combat camera teams can package events into video reports, sound bites, or radio stories and provide these reports to the media to highlight an event the operational level commander wants the public to see. To maintain control of the media battle space, commanders must have a deliberate plan for providing media with needed information to cover the event. In addition, similar to operational planning, the commander and his staff need to have a contingency plan for reacting to a specific media report to ensure it does not create a negative effect on world public opinion.

When developing the operational level media plan, planners need to consider events that may require specific attention due to a media claim that misrepresents what is occurring on the ground, or to address false claims by insurgents during the fighting. To provide the flexibility needed, a media crisis team should be ready to address these problems. This crisis team is an ad hoc organization that forms when necessary to provide focused and quick public response on a given situation. The team needs to be quick to respond to any media, have a direct ear to the operational level commander, and be able to analyze and release information regarding the problem directly to the media. Forming a media crisis team should depend on the specific

⁴⁸ Pg xi-xii. Braestrup, Peter. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and*

incident. However, the quality of the officers selected should always be some of the best on the commander's staff to ensure competence. At a minimum, the team should include a PA officer that already has a familiarity with the press involved, a judge advocate general (JAG) officer able to discuss the legality of the incident, and a combat arms officer able to grasp and relay the context of what is occurring in urban combat. If the situation has a special circumstance that requires technical knowledge, a specialty officer can also provide input into the crisis team.

Proposed Media Crisis Team

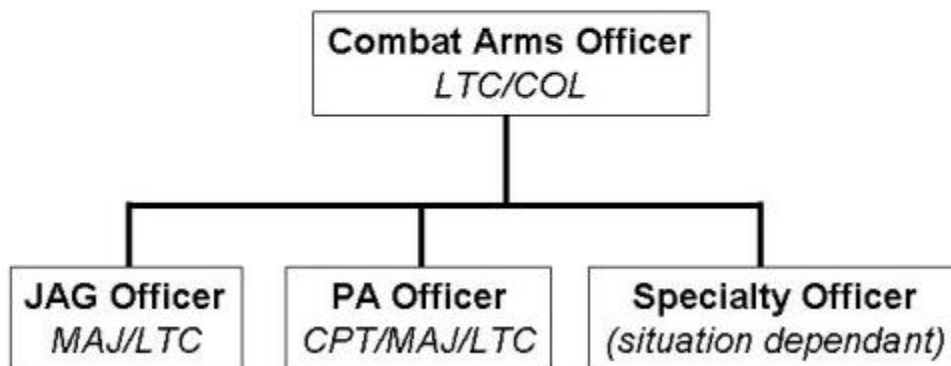


Figure 3 Proposed media crisis team organization

Using this media crisis team simultaneously during the urban fighting provides the commander with the flexibility to address specific concerns during the battle without tying up the entire staff. In addition, this provides the media with quick and accurate responses that can provide their viewers with more accurate and detailed information on a specific topic. It can also respond quickly to the enemy use of this new important battle space and prevent any damage coming from this means of asymmetric attack. Using these new ad hoc media crisis teams provides the operational level commander the ability to communicate to the media what occurred

Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington. Abridged ed. Novato: Presidio Press, 1994.

in order to get the story out to the public. In the 24-hour news world, mission success on the operational level depends on positive American and world public opinion.

To assist in changing military leaders' concept on how the media can affect operations, officer training could develop the concept of Clausewitz's revised trinity. This would allow leaders without training in IO or PA operations to understand the fundamentals of how media influences warfare today. In addition, commanders could see how they must now consider more than just the tactical execution of urban combat. Commanders should look at the media and the images used in reports to ensure the proper message is getting out to the public. Training in how to plan for controlling the media battle space is key to influencing world public opinion and counteracting hostile media reports. Understanding the adjusted Clausewitz-ian diamond will allow military officers to grasp the significant effect of the media. Planning for and addressing the media is now the obligation of the commander to ensure mission success.

Military commanders not only have an obligation to the soldiers under their command and to the commander-in-chief to accomplish the mission given to them, but an obligation to the people of the United States. This obligation is for honest and lawful actions to win America's wars. Commanders who have a detailed and clear focus for execution of their military operations now, more than ever, need to translate this focus to the American and world public. Commanders that provide a clear focus to the media through a specific line of operation and, when required, use media crisis teams will influence positive reporting of important military operations. Having a plan and organizing to deal with the media, commanders can sway public opinion in favor of the urban combat operation. In a world of 24-hour news channels, US commanders at the operational level must battle not only the enemy, but also be aware of, and influence world public opinion. Success in world public opinion will only be gained if US military commanders are aware of the power of the media, open to the press, and able to provide them with honest and clear responses. Being defensive or suspicious of the media may be warranted; however, US commanders have a responsibility to get the military story out and work in this new media battle

space. The media in response to the insatiable public appetite for information, particularly in urban combat, has placed significant challenges on the operational commander. In fact, these challenges have forced commanders to formulate schemes of maneuver to facilitate media, counter potential propaganda, and get the news out first. Lines of operation and media crisis teams provide the commander with the tools. These tools need to be codified in doctrine.

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