

Example of military and media essay

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Military and Media

Introduction

Ever since there have been military operations there has been someone carrying the news back home. The last decade has seen some big changes in the modern relationship between the military and the media. For example during the Iraq war 700 journalists were embedded with the troops in the field (USAF Public Affairs, 2003). The journalists learned about safety issues and they wore the correct gear. Instead of guns and ammunition they carried computers and notepads. They traveled and lived with the troops. Other 'unilateral' journalists (approximately 2, 000) were in Iraq reporting on their own (USAF Public Affairs, 2003). Events stateside happen that are of interest to journalists.

The best way to handle an inevitable interview with a journalist is to be prepared. Three goals will assist me with my military officer duties. Those three goals are 1) to better understand the relationship between the military and the media, 2) how to develop media plans, and 3) how to prepare for media interviews.

Discussion

General Journalists cover battle situations either embedded with the troop or as unilateral reporters (working independently of the troops). The news cycle is 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week because satellite and wireless communications are available. In the States news organizations accept videos and photographs from amateurs who may have something about the military troops or bases that is they gauge as newsworthy. Unfortunately

before the facts are known, a lot of speculation hits the airwaves before causes and effects can be determined.

General Sherman complained about reporters on the battlefield during the Civil War (Lacey). Reporters were on the battlefield in Normandy with the troops. The reporters did their best to send reports back home. During the Vietnam War reporters had more freedom than embedded journalists during the Iraq War. (Payne, 2005)

The reason the media is involved is because people have a legal right to know what is happening. The Constitution provides for freedom of expression. We have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution. Citizens trust and support the Air Force. They want to know about the missions, what happened on the missions and if we are using natural resources efficiently not wastefully (USAF Public Affairs, 2003).

A lot of pressure is on members of the military to know how to communicate clearly and honestly with journalists who are reporting to the people. As inconvenient as it may be, you must be prepared to take an interview. When possible the best way to handle the situation is to be in control by setting up the time and place for interviews and scheduling press conferences.

Dealing with Embedded Journalists James Lacey had a unique position as an embedded reporter during the Iraq War because he was is a member of the Army Reserve. He states,

“ The media will always get the story out; it is the military’s responsibility to make sure the story is informed and correct. It is useless for officers to scream in frustration that the media got a story wrong, particularly if they did nothing to help journalists get it right.”

This seems like a very good point to remember for two reasons. Number 1, this gives military personnel a clear cut motive for dealing with the media. Number 2, I understand that I have a responsibility to stay informed and to control the situation.

There are a number of things I can do to make sure the facts of the story are correct. I can't do anything if the reporter or journalist doesn't understand or doesn't report the correct information. But at the least I know that I have done the best I can do. I also can contact the Public Affairs Office to let them know what facts they were given and how the facts were misrepresented.

I can have control of the situation by staying informed and prepared. In the article by Lacey he also says " There is no reason PAOs should be sitting back waiting for journalist inquiries or requests for interviews." This comment is important because it is a reminder that once we formulate a message we can make sure the information gets to the " messengers." If done correctly then good news and positive progress that is being made can be shared. The media people probably won't even think to ask, " What went right." It doesn't seem to matter whether they are embedded or not. They have a habit of perceiving situations from a negative point of view. PAOs have to help the reporters understand that a minor setback such as a change in the weather can be just that a minor setback. (Lacey)

Embedded reporters have a view of day to day movements. What a reporter does or does not understand is important to a PAO. The PAO must be responsible for teaching military acronyms and giving historical background for missions if necessary. Assuming that a reporter will do his or her research

does not have a place in the PAOs preparations for working with reporters. Not that this is meant with disrespect. Maybe they don't have access or don't know how to access the information they need the most. It's also important to treat embedded journalists " as you would like yourself to be treated." (USAF Public Affairs, 2003)

I think a big problem with embedded journalists would be their wanting information when you still have to find out facts. A short, firm and respectful response about needing more time would be a good idea. Losing your cool would be easy to do so having a short but sweet saying ready is a good idea. It would help to arrange to be interviewed later and then be sure to meet up with them.

Embedded journalists can have a good, bad or no influence at all. In the case of a battle being cancelled in Fallujah, I don't know if it is reasonable to make the media responsible. They are part of the equation troops have to work for in meeting goals. If they are embedded then they are an in-your-face part of the equation all the time. Battle decisions should not be based on their presence. (Payne)

Payne (2005) states there are two important reasons for the military to embed reporters. 1) The reporter can only report on their unit's progress instead of making statements about broader battle plans. 2) The reporter will relate to the troops better and understand the daily circumstances.

Conclusion

For the military the age old adage “ Be prepared” is the best tool learned in this lesson. A PAO needs to be proactive too. Once the important points have been decided upon, the PAO can work on a good presentation. After that there is no sense in waiting for the reporters to think of the question you want to answer. When questions are asked that aren't to the point there are ways to get your point across by bridging, flagging and hooking.

Using General Caldwell's 4 B phrases are a good habit to develop.

- 1) Be honest
- 2) Be responsive
- 3) Be proactive
- 4) Be relevant

It's hard to say what to do about bad media reporting. Because of this type of difficulty taking responsibility for the message is a good strategy.

Bibliography

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