

WAR REPORTING

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Technological advancements have allowed war reporters to provide their fellow citizens with updated news and propaganda for hundreds of years. From the telegraph in the Civil War to viewing real-time bombing from our home televisions, war reporting has forever changed and allows us to literally watch a war being fought. However, behind the technology and trained military are journalists risking their lives to bring us the war live as it takes place. War reporting has advanced with the current electronic technology, but has become so dangerous that the risk assumed by reporters has costs more lives than we should be willing to lose.

From telegraph to videophone, journalists have always relied on the latest technology to get closest to the story and relay it out to the public as quickly as possible. The United States saw huge technological improvements in journalism during the Civil War. The telegraph set the stage for the Civil War newspaper coverage, which sometimes shocked the readers of the 1860's with timely accounts of battles that had taken place only a day or two earlier. "Most of the battles weren't far away from metropolitan areas," said Don Ross, senior editor at The Newseum, an interactive exhibit of journalism artifacts funded by The Freedom Forum. "When the battle was over they would jump on their horse and go to the nearest city that had a telegraph. Any decent-sized town would have one. Anywhere there was a railroad stop, there would be a telegraph." But before Northern correspondents' stories made it to their editors, they made a quick stop at the War Department Telegraph Office. "Every single telegraph went through the Secretary of War's office," said David Mindich, chair of the journalism department at St. Michael's College. "When (President) Lincoln wanted to get news

about the war, he would go to (Secretary of War Edwin) Stanton's telegraph." The amazing new technology had created a central funnel through which all news was sent, making the censorship extremely easy. The Civil War was also the first U.S. war to be documented in photographs. But technology did not yet allow photographic reproduction in newspapers — only occasional engravings of photographs appeared. Those who viewed Matthew Brady and his company's famous images did so mainly at gallery showings, Ross said. And photographs of combat in action were out of the question, due to the long exposure times required by the cameras of the day.

By 1914, when World War I began in Europe, technology advances had significantly improved both photography and newspaper production. Motion pictures, the telephone, and radio had also all been invented. But it was the laying of the trans-Atlantic telegraph cables that really had an impact on war coverage, letting U.S. audiences read daily news from across the Atlantic for the first time. But British censorship was aggressive and when British agents cut Germany's trans-Atlantic cable, the line in London was left as the only one connecting Europe and America. Once again, a central funnel for information made the censor's life easy. By the outset of the war, millions of American homes and businesses, including newsrooms, had telephones. But while the first transcontinental phone call took place in 1915, trans-Atlantic calls were still years away, so the devices were of little use to U.S. war correspondents abroad. The most important advance in photography by World War I was that shooters no longer needed to cart entire darkrooms behind them into the battlefield. But severe censorship kept almost all non-military photographers away from the front lines, limiting visual coverage of the war. Most surviving images were taken by combatants, and were either

controlled by the government or didn't surface until after the conflict. The government didn't just control radio — the United States actually shut down what nascent radio service existed in the country once it entered the war in 1917.

By the outset of World War II, two decades later, radio had exploded in popularity. Americans across the country sat in their living rooms, riveted by Edward R. Murrow's rooftop reports of the Battle of Britain. Backpack short-wave transmitters allowed radio reporters to report from the field, but such live reports were rare, according to broadcast historian Elizabeth McLeod. Most field reports — like audio from the invasion of D-Day — were recorded. This was partly to appease censors, and partly for practical reasons. “You couldn't risk your correspondent being killed live on the air,” McLeod said. Often, sound bites were taped on a clunky 50-pound device called a wire recorder, which contained a reel of magnetic coated wire. Photography also made its mark during the war. Joe Rosenthal's image of the Iwo Jima flag raising is perhaps the most famous picture of all American war photography. But Rosenthal didn't know for weeks that the picture had caused a stir, Ross said. In fact, photographers almost never saw their own work — they simply sent their undeveloped film via couriers back to military bases for developing. But once developed, getting war images into daily newspapers across the country was much easier by World War II, thanks to the invention of the “photo wire.” Wire transmission of photography had been developed in the late 1920s, and perfected by Bell Labs in the 1930s. Rosenthal's picture was transmitted through an AP Photo Wire line in Guam, and made it into newspapers around the country the next day. But not every war saw such technological progress. Correspondents covering the Korean War in the 1950s faced the challenge of operating outside the

technology-rich West. Phone lines in Korea were scarce, severely hampering efforts to deliver the story home. In some cases, news was slower to get out of Korea than out of Europe during World War II. And while the first nightly news broadcasts on TV were born in the late 1940s, by the early '50s, there were still only 10 million sets in American homes, most in or near New York City. The only video available was from government sources, and war coverage remained dominated by newspapers and radio.

The Vietnam War changed all that as national nightly newscasts brought the combat right into American homes in the 1960s. Regular correspondent reports were a fixture of the newscasts. But while AT&T launched the first retransmission satellite into orbit in 1962, correspondents still had to film their reports, and send the film away from the front for developing. “Doing any TV reporting involved at least three people, all hooked by wires a lot of cables, and batteries,” Ross said. “Because of the weight of the batteries, you wouldn’t be carrying too many with you ... and you didn’t have many lengthy reports.” Early in the war, it could take some 20 hours to get video from Vietnam to U.S. news desks, but satellite transmissions were used later in the war to cut the transportation time.

The worldwide proliferation of fax machines during the 1980s again changed the way journalism worked. In a precursor to the power of the Internet, faxes allowed simple one-to-many communication, turning anyone with the right hardware into a publisher. Suddenly, ordinary citizens inside the Soviet Union, East Germany and China could both organize their uprisings and then tell the world about them. Much of the early news about the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Tiananmen Square uprising came courtesy of fax machines. “The news flow was able to sidestep the

Chinese government,” said Mindich. “This is an example of the leveling effect of technology. China could not censor the news because many people had faxes ... It’s the opposite of Stanton’s system of making all telegraphs go through him.”

While the United States invaded both Grenada and Panama in the 1980s, press access was completely restricted and there was essentially no combat journalism from those conflicts. The next significant advance came in 1991, at the start of the first Gulf War. What Edward R. Murrow did for radio in 1940, Peter Arnett and Bernard Shaw did for cable news fifty years later. TV viewers sat riveted as, for the first time, they watched a war begin on live television. But while mention of CNN’s Gulf War coverage evokes images of instant global video storytelling, those memories aren’t quite accurate. In fact, the key to CNN’s success was decidedly low tech — and radio-like. Arnett, Shaw, and producer Robert Wiener had made arrangements with the Iraqi government ahead of time for a special “four-wire” line, essentially a dedicated, point-to-point phone line that didn’t require routing through normal telephone switching stations. So, when the local phone system went out, Arnett was still able to talk to CNN headquarters. Initially, viewers only saw still images of Arnett and Shaw’s faces, while they essentially talked to the world over a telephone line. The first live images of the war didn’t arrive until hours later.

The 1999 war in Kosovo saw the advent of the Internet war correspondent. MSNBC.com, Slate, Salon, and ABCNews.com all had Web-based journalists in and around Yugoslavia when NATO began its bombing campaign. Do-everything journalists like MSNBC.com’s Preston Mendenhall sent back everything from magazine-style feature stories to video packages from the war zone. Mendenhall even managed to score an online chat with notorious Serb paramilitary leader Zeljko “Arkan” Raznatovic. The

Internet also enabled media outlets to circumvent even the strictest government censorship. When upstart radio station B92 was temporarily shut down by the Yugoslavian government, producers began rebroadcasting over the Internet. Again, efforts to stop the free flow of information were foiled by a worldwide, inexpensive one-to-many distribution network.

Satellite phones (think cell phones that work almost anywhere on the planet) were introduced in the first Gulf War. But they were bulky, unreliable, expensive and delivered only a scratchy audio signal. Useful for staying in touch, sure, but of limited utility for live, on-air reporting. The technology got new life late in the 1990s, however, when satellite phones were married to a laptop computer and a small video camera. When combined with better compression techniques, videophones allowed war correspondents to beam live video from anywhere. They caught on like wildfire. Dozens of reporters filed stories from Afghanistan with the technology, and now hundreds are using all manner of contraptions to air live reports while traveling with U.S. troops on the move. There appear to be cameras everywhere in this war, even some behind the lines in Baghdad. Television networks can “go live” to anyplace a correspondent can get to; though much as radio reporters did during World War II, some Iraq War correspondents are still finding value in taped segments. Meanwhile, Internet publishing has evolved since Kosovo. The proliferation of “blogs,” a sort of combination diary and personal newspaper, gives the world thousands of private perspectives on the war. There are even blogs written by members of the U.S. military, and one allegedly authored by an anonymous Baghdad resident. “This is the democratization of information,” Ross said.

The advent of the videophone-enabled war correspondent has ushered in yet another era of combat journalism — instant, visual access, all the time. For many observers of war correspondent technology, the videophone is the holy grail, finally allowing journalists to bring viewers as close as possible to the front lines, letting people see for themselves the war as it unfolds. But there are hazards, too, said Mindich — we might in fact be too close to the action. “We have opened up a great new window onto the war ... but we can be beguiled by these new windows,” he said. “That this technology affords us a new view is true, but we also might not have the context we need.” But ultimately, Mindich said, he believes it was the invention of the videophone that ended the Pentagon’s heavy-handed treatment of journalists which began with the Grenada and Panama invasions and ended with the combat-zone blackouts of the Gulf War. Given the reality that journalists worldwide had the ability to make their own way into the Iraqi combat zone and beam pictures back to a variety of 24-hour news channels, the Pentagon had no choice but to invite journalists to the front lines this time, he said. “There were hundreds of journalists out there who said, ‘Well, we’re just gonna walk around Kuwait and Iraq with our technology,’ ” he said, leaving the Pentagon no choice. “Technology has leveled things a lot.”

The new technology that allows live broadcasts from the front lines, coupled with the Pentagon's willingness to allow reporters to accompany troops into the thick of battle, has made this generation of television war reporters instant celebrities. They not only seek the excitement of being in the battle, but the instant fame and celebrity status. They desire to be the next Peter Arnett. Arnett won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the Vietnam War and became a household name during the 1991 Gulf War for his dramatic

on-scene reporting in Iraq. He was actually fired from CNN in 1998 after the news network received pressure from the Pentagon in response to a "documentary in which Arnett alleged that U.S. commandos had used sarin gas on American troops who had defected to Laos during the Vietnam war." Arnett worked for NBC and National Geographic until late March of this year when he was fired for (as he says) "telling the truth." He gave an interview on an Iraqi television network and basically said the US failed in their initial attacks and also talked about how war is increasingly dominated by propaganda. Due to his fame and celebrity status, Arnett was immediately hired by Britain's Daily Mirror less than 24 hours after being fired. The tabloid's banner headline said: "Fired by America for telling the truth...hired by Daily Mirror to carry on telling it." Piers Morgan, an editor for the Daily Mirror, told CNN, "Peter is one of the most respected journalists in the world, and we are delighted he is joining us to expose the truth about a war increasingly dominated by propaganda."

Geraldo Rivera is another journalist made famous from his war reporting. Unlike Arnett, Geraldo was already well known from his television and talk show fame. FOX used his popularity to attract audiences to follow his war reporting. Geraldo went to Iraq as an "untrained" journalist who was not part of the Pentagon's embedding program. Apparently, he got down on one knee, sketched the location of various coalition forces in the sand and described a plan by one unit to "join in the surrounding of An Najaf." Before the Pentagon could kick him out of Iraq, he voluntarily left, but he had already given real-time information about a unit's location, their mission and their pending activity, things "which would clearly aid the enemy." Not only has this reporter put himself in danger, but also thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Many war reporters have much more to worry about than being fired or getting temporarily asked to leave a certain country. Stanford Alumnus and Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and killed by Islamic extremists in Pakistan while researching a link between Richard Reid (arrested in December after trying to blow up an airplane using bombs hidden in his shoes) and Osama bin Laden. One of the suspects in Pearl's abduction said Pearl had been targeted because he's "a Jew" and according to his abductors, presume he is automatically "working against Islam." Reporters constantly put themselves in great danger by trying to get a little closer to a story.

Journalists are easy targets and constantly put themselves in dangerous situations. A British reporter overheard a US army major talking to a reporter on a cell phone and asked if the voices he heard were English or Arabic. The reporter answers Arabic and the army major tells the man to lay flat on the ground and turn his phone off. He tells him to stay there all night and when he hears US forces get up, wave something white in the air and keep his hands up. He also asks if there is any message he wants the major to pass along to the reporter's family if he doesn't make it out alive. Situations like this seem to be more dangerous than necessary. Journalists will put themselves in situations where the risk exceeds the danger just to get a story.

During one day in early April, many journalists were killed by the U.S military while they were simply in their own hotel rooms. These journalists believed they were relatively safe in their makeshift offices at the Palestine Hotel (their temporary quarters since they evacuated the al-Rashid and Mansour Melia hotels). A 34-year-old Jordanian national and a reporter for al-Jazeera, the Qatar-based satellite TV network, died when he

and his cameraman, were killed when U.S. missiles struck al-Jazeera's office in Baghdad. The nearby office of Abu Dhabi TV, a rival of al-Jazeera, was also hit during the morning missile. Hours later, on the same day, it was the turn of the Palestine Hotel which houses some 300 journalists. The 15th floor of the large hotel was hit by a U.S. tank shell, which struck the offices of the Reuters wire service. Six international journalists and cameramen were killed from this tank shell and many others were wounded. The US military claims it was returning fire from inside the hotel, but Western journalists said they saw the tank pointing its barrel at the hotel and heard no explosion or fire prior to the attack. Al-Jazeera reporter Taysir Allouni said the journalists at the Palestine Hotel were now almost certain that it was the U.S. military that fired at the balcony of the 15th floor where Reuters cameraman Protskyuk and other cameramen were filming. Allouni said Arab and Western journalists were in a state of anger, wondering what they should do. "We are only witnesses of events we want to document and transmit to the world," he said. "They (coalition forces) want these witnesses to disappear so that no one can testify to the actions they commit, whether a small or big crime." An Abu Dhabi TV correspondent, shared Allouni's fears but said "they want us out and we are considering mass withdrawal but we should all stay." Dozens of Jordanian journalists staged a sit-in outside the Jordan Press Association in the capital, Amman, chanting anti-American slogans and calling for an end to the "massacres of journalists and civilians" in Iraq. The Jordanian syndicate accused U.S. forces of "targeting the media as part of an effort to block media coverage of the crimes, massacres and barbaric destruction these forces are committing." Lebanese President Emile Lahoud condemned the U.S. bombardment that targeted journalists in Baghdad, saying it was an attempt to prevent them from

"transmitting the truth." The head of the information department at the Syrian Foreign Ministry, expressed sadness for the killing and injury of journalists in Baghdad, which she said "this is part of the war to hide the truth from the British and U.S. people who if they were able to witness what is going on in Iraq will not support this war."

Dozens of journalists are losing their lives to try to get closer to the war in order to provide a more accurate picture of the events. However, a major poll conducted in the U.S asked thousands of people which media outlets they trusted the most about telling them the truth about war. Only 5% said the United States, 12% said the United Kingdom, 18% said continental Europe, 1% said Iraq, 4% said Arab countries near Iraq, 11% said some other source, and 45% said they didn't trust any media. With thousands of journalists putting themselves in life threatening situations for stories that most people don't believe anyway seems like a risk greater than the reward.

As an attempt to lessen this risk, the US Department of Defense held its first ever weeklong boot camp for war reporters last November. Fifty reporters attended this workshop in order to be better prepared to live with the troops during the War with Iraq. The problem is, there were thousands of journalists from the United States alone out in Iraq and only 50 attended this workshop. The idea behind the journalists' boot camp is positive, but not enough to significantly impact the loss of life.

War technology has forever changed the way journalists report wars. Technological advancements have allowed viewers to watch wars being fought live before they can even make an intelligent decision on exactly what is happening and why it is happening. Governments, such as the United States, has decided to allow select journalists to literally accompany military units during battle. With 95% of U.S. citizens

not trusting the U.S. media and 45% not trusting any media in the world, it seems unnecessary to risk the lives of these innocent people. Having non-military personal in a tank can also be a burden on soldiers attempting to perform their jobs. It seems human life is such a high price for a slightly better shot on the evening news.

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