1. BRIEF OF THIS INSTRUCTIONAL UNIT.

This 2-hour conference and 1-hour seminar is to describe and discuss the current relationships that exist between the US military and the collective communications media. Current defense policies of the US will be discussed as they are interpreted by the guest speaker. The role of public opinion in the shaping of US foreign policy and the effect of contemporary communications on that public opinion will both be examined. The impact of adverse publicity on the military and the alienation of the military from society as a result will also be addressed.

2. OBJECTIVES.

a. Lesson Objective. The student discusses the impact of the communications media on foreign policy, national security strategy, and US assistance programs with a media representative.

b. Training Objectives. Using the material presented by the guest speaker, the student must be able to accomplish the following training objectives:

(1) Describe the current image and role of the US military, as outlined in contemporary communications media.

(2) Explain the influence of the communications media in the shaping of public opinion about US defense policies, foreign policy, and US assistance programs, as outlined in the presentation.

(3) Outline changes in defense policy which might improve or damage the contemporary media-military relationship, in accordance with the principles addressed by the speaker.

3. STUDY ASSIGNMENT.


b. READ: Seminar Guidance (Appendix 2).

Mar 74 (Supersedes advance sheet 4938, dated Apr 73)
4. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS.
   See Appendix 2 - Seminar Guidance.

5. ISSUED WITH THIS ADVANCE SHEET.
   a. Appendix 1 - Capt. Terry McDonald, "The Media and the Military."
   b. Appendix 2 - Seminar Guidance.

6. MATERIALS TO BE ISSUED.
   None.
APPENDIX 1 to Advance Sheet.

"The Media and the Military"

Captain Terry McDonald, USCGR

This article appeared in the Air Force Times (Family Magazine), dated 15 August 1973.
By Capt. Terry McDonald, USCG

**Time for peaceful co-existence?**

In 1966 the New York Yankees were a power in the American League. During 1971 they struggled to finish in the first division. Over a 10-year period, regular news accounts described the change. A star retired, a trade worked out unfavorably, games were lost, averages slipped. And the once-powerful world champions became a team of "helpless giants."

Did the news media cause the decline? Did a conspiracy of blackened newsmen succeed where the best efforts of opposing teams had failed? It is not likely that any rational man would make such claims, especially since the Yankees seem once again to be a powerhouse. Yet, when we consider the current plight of the armed forces, too many military minds seem ready to lay the prime responsibility for the services' problems on the news media.

Every day we rely on the news media for knowledge of the hard facts about the world around us. The wire services dutifully and dependably relay the newest things on world traffic fatalities and political developments. And around the world, military men and women read, listen, or watch such news without question. But late-l~y, when the subject of the news concerns the military or naval affairs of the United States, the average American in uniform is prone to think the news media are attacking our military structure. Any adverse report is presumed to reflect badly on the service's that has been attacked. And sometimes, news reports may be in error, or the facts may be slanted, warped or staged as part of a huge conspiracy to undermine our nation's defense posture. Since this knee-jerk reaction is so likely, we must operate under threats of shutdown or punishment by the public.

In 1962 the New York Yankees were a powerhouse. In 1971 they were a team of helpless giants. But that is a different argument, one that involves the preservation or erosion of the basic rights guaranteed by our constitutional government. Unfortunately, out of love for the armed forces, or a misguided sense of dedication to duty, many people in uniform give the impression they are ready toipur- fabric of our Constitution in order to stop the "attack" on the military which have been disseminated by the news media. Sometimes this attitude is the result of particular individuals, sometimes in a particular medium and sometimes at the news media in general.

While we should note that such feelings do exist, let us assume that such views are held only by a small though vocal minority and do not reflect accurately the general attitude of people in the military community. It would be fairer to characterize the majority feeling as one that understands the need for a free press but is frustrated and concerned with how that freedom seems to work to the disadvantage of the armed forces.

In recent years for example, the major news events that concern the military seem to have had a negative impact. Consider the capture of the Pueblo, the My Lai incident and the Calley trial, confusing reports of discipline, drug addiction and race relations problems in the armed forces.

Most of the important military stories of recent years have presented a picture of the services that contradicts the heroic stance we would like to see portrayed. We are proud of our history of service and traditions of bold, courageous actions. We cite the nobility of our record—the brave Americans who have fought and died in previous wars have always been the "good guys." We have collected souvenirs while the enemy pillaged. We have wooed and won the fair maidens while the enemy raped and murdered. We have precision bombed only military targets while the enemy destroyed churches and hospitals. Fortified by the repetition of American heroes in war movies and popular novels, and indeed in new media accounts as well, the public has been shocked by reports of American actions that don't fit the pattern. But when the actualities of previous wars are examined, we discover that little has changed except the way in which the image of the American fighting man has been portrayed in the media.

The basic reason for this difference seems to lie in Vietnam, for the first time, we engaged major U.S. forces without a declaration of war or national emergency. Without such a declaration, there were no effective government controls on the substance of new reports, and no means of stifling dissent at home. 

When the level of fighting reached a peak during the 1968 Tet offensive, the harsh realities were bitter medicine to an unconditioned public. Without wartime censorship we could not be sheltered from the truth. Vivid television scenes depicted facts we did not want to witness. Timely, colorful and dramatic reports didn't fit the "Hollywood version" of Americans at war. Vietnam quite suddenly became a subject of dominant national interest. Prominent critics of our involvement,

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forces after a one-year tour in Vietnam. This brought a hard-nosed reporter who had not wanted to fight and who carried their disillusionments back to civilian life. In previous wars our troops had come home only after the war was over. Then the flush of victory and the joy of homecoming were a convenient target. Since the newsman was the most visible and most persistent, he became in many minds the prime reason, the essence of our difficulties. Some blamed newsmen for prolonging the war. Some tried to minimize the dimensions of antiwar sentiments by attributing them to the exaggerations of newsmen. Others privately chose to "black out" the criticisms by refusing to read news accounts or watch TV news "because they’re all lies anyway."

Such reactions are common human behavior, and I am not suggesting that newsmen were selected as scapegoats through a carefully contrived Pentagon policy to swerve the tide of public criticism. But in any case, the antipathy between the military community and the world of news media developed and was nourished by repetitive anti-comment from military sources. Stung by what they considered unfounded attacks on their professional conduct, newsmen had to relate the story, newsmen had to report events as they happened. We are given glowing apologies by leading military and civilian officials who predicted early solutions or spoke of the rapid progress being made ("the light at the end of the tunnel"). And we saw scenes depicting prospects South Vietnamese mechanics prefiguring the growing American pay-off. At home, we saw unprecedented demonstrations by war protesters. That some of these accounts contained inaccuracies could hardly be denied. But that is a hazard of the news business, not an indication of irresponsibility or vindictiveness on the part of newsmen. Even official military reports are often found to be inaccurate in essence, and there have been instances when omissions or misstatements are said to have been deliberate. In short, news reports are no more infallible than military reports prepared under similar circumstances.

The historic role of American editors is not to seek the popular cause or to publish only the palatable news. On the contrary, they have a long tradition of exposing incompetency or abuse in the news. John S. Knight, chairman of the Knight newspaper chain, has said, "The unvarnished truth is frequently unpleasant reading since it so often differs from the reader's preconceived notions of what the truth should be."

Unfortunately for the military image, when the policies and practices of the armed forces came under the intense scrutiny of news media, too often the "unvarnished truth" was indeed "unpleasant reading" for military men. Rumblings at post-exchange, contempt overruns on the CIA, surveillance of political activities by military investigators, high level officers involved in black markets and drug traffic—all these stories have certainly been damaging to the esteem of the armed forces.

But what were newsmen to do? Were they to ignore events and write fairy tales? Should they have stayed in their editorial offices and meekly accepted the handcuffs of public affairs officers? Should they have sanitized their reports to avoid critical accounts? Such is not the proper function of the news media in our free society, though it is common practice in authoritarian regimes. It is ironic that we saw in South Vietnam, where we have fought for that country's freedom and self-determination, our ally has not really relaxed rigid controls.
...But aside from understanding the general meaning of the news media, it is important to be aware of the limited span of attention of the average public. Just as space and time limitations require that the news media filter out most of the daily flood of news, so, too, the news media must tend to concentrate on only a limited number of topics.

Each of us is keenly interested in every aspect of the military world. Such topics as our strategic position, next year's budget, new hardware, morale problems, pay levels and our image with the public command a large share of our attention. But to the general citizen, military subjects are of only peripheral interest. In a complex world where people are beset by personal cares, high taxes, determination of cities, increasing crime rates, and environmental problems, is it any wonder that the average citizen doesn't know or care much about military affairs? The armed forces historically have become a prime and long lasting interest only when patriotic fervor is at an abnormally high pitch, such as immediately after Pearl Harbor.

But, normally, military affairs are in direct competition with a wide variety of public interests. News media must cater to those more pressing, local politics, school affairs, economic and social ills, and athletic events all claim their share of attention. In a public way news media may cultivate public interest in a certain subject. But most clearly, news editors are not educators or crusaders attempting to sway minds or establish opinions. On the contrary, they are merely purveyors of a product—the daily news. Take a menu in a restaurant, news content is determined by customers' appetites, not by the wishes of the manager or proprietor.

So when we are concerned about lack of military news or of what seems to be an overemphasis on ridiculous or "bad" news, let us realize this only serves to keep serving up what the public wants. So long as editors are simply exercising their personal bias or demonstrating an antagonism to the military, with keen competition between the media—and between individual outlets within each medium—there is the public demand that results. It is quite apparent that news editors shoulder a heavy burden of responsibility. The news they discard today may well be the future's news tomorrow.

...
The Vietnam War increased from 10 percent to 60 percent. The Tet offensive probably marked a turning point in public attitudes toward American involvement in Vietnam. Yet, from a month before Tet until three months afterward, the number of Americans who thought the war a mistake increased only three percentage points, from 42 percent to 45 percent. More erosion variations have sometimes been noted in such a short term. In one instance, President Johnson's "favorable" rating spurted from 42 percent to 72 percent after his nationally televised speech on the Tonkin Gulf resolution. But viewed historically, such marked changes fit into long-term cycles that seldom are changed quickly.

In recent years, public appreciation of the military probably peaked after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. There was a large degree of public pride in the ability of our forces to compel a Soviet withdrawal. New, more than 10 years later, we may be just past the high point of anti-militarism. But while we can deplore present attitudes, we must remember that it is a situation not unique in American history.

The United States is not a militaristic nation. It is almost instinctive with us to cherish personal freedoms and to distrust any form of regimentation. During the Civil War, there were anti-draft riots. Pacifism was a phenomenon but a recurrence of a latent feeling deep in American public. Visually, too, we can adopt a down-to-earth attitude. Photos of the relaxed, friendly smiles of our leaders in open-neck shirts should replace the formal portraits that often make them appear as set-jaw tyrants in insignia-litter executive swivel chairs.

Fourth, we must realize that American news media provide the only effective means we have of communicating with the American public. Visually, too, we can adopt a down-to-earth attitude. Photos of the relaxed, friendly smiles of our leaders in open-neck shirts should replace the formal portraits that often make them appear as set-jaw tyrants in insignia-litter executive swivel chairs.

So what we are experiencing today is not a modern phenomenon but a recurrence of a latent feeling deep-seated in American attitudes. Tempering these attitudes, and improving our public image, are essential because our whole military structure relies on broad public support. Somehow we must convince the American public that strong defense forces are a valuable asset and not a liability.

How can we do it? How can we earn the respect and recognition we are deserved? How can we claim our rightful place in American society and a fair share of the national budget? First, we must exercise a high degree of patience and understanding. Our critics are fellow Americans—our friends and neighbors—not a foreign foe. They are entitled to the same respect from us that we expect from them. Attacking their motives or challenging their patriotism may give us some self-satisfaction, but it certainly won't help change anyone's attitude. We should make a calculated effort to answer charges and
APPENDIX 2 to Advance Sheet

SEMINAR GUIDANCE

1. SEMINAR OBJECTIVE

This seminar is designed to provide students with an opportunity to
discuss further the impact of the communications media on foreign policy,
national security strategy, and US assistance programs.

2. SEMINAR GUIDANCE:

a. What is the contemporary image of the US military displayed in
the majority of the public media? Is it flattering/unflattering; fair/
unfair; correct/incorrect? How would you change it?

b. What is the desirable role of the media in informing the US
public about the intricacies of US foreign and/or defense policies?
What interpretations or explanations should be allowed? What qualifi-
cations should a Washington correspondent have?

c. Is there a diversity of opinion between newspaper and radio/
TV comment on the military? Should there be?

d. How does the military react to criticism? How would you respond
to the article by Capt. Terry McDonald?