

TRAINING OF MEDIA AT OPERATIONAL LEVEL

During the development of conflicts, high demand of information by the media requires immediate response and the media need to satisfy the need of knowledge of international audience that many times does not believe in strictly official announcements and statements. Training of media at operational level will ease their performance.

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INTRODUCTION

After the Vietnam experience, US military conduction realized that current wars are won or lost with public opinion, an opinion that General Schwarzkopf had especially considered during the Gulf War.

Being a major in Vietnam, he understood that there is no military commandant or governor that may deal with an adverse worldwide public opinion,

Schwarzkopf learned this from his family. One of his sisters, Sally, was a leader of the most important anti-war demonstrations.

Moreover, he understood that management of public opinion is the most important aspect of political conduction of war. If political conduction of war is poor, war will be lost before it starts.

The set of videos with press conferences and presentations by General Schwarzkopf produced during the Desert Storm Operation became a great Manual of Communication Techniques that was used as reference by different organizations at international level.

As we go up in the level of conduction of forces, the more difficult it is to deal with different issues that are inherent to war. In this way, the role of the organization that will be in contact with the media at operational level becomes more different. The same occurs with the information to be given, which is clearly sensitive.

The conduction body at operational level needs to be aware of the importance of this issue to the extent that the Commandant of the Theater of Operations must have some organization that advises them in a convenient manner and that is as efficient as them when interacting with journalists so as to try to satisfy their demand and, thus, favor conduction of operations.

As from digitalization of data and the possibility to access the Internet from anywhere in the world, a person may have access to a piece of news, an image or video broadcasted in real time or pre-recorded, which may be consulted as frequently as necessary so as to be able to analyze their content in detail.

Therefore, this “easy” access to information has influenced on the way to make war as the public opinion has become a highly decisive factor for acceptance and legitimacy of current wars.

As an example, we may mention the Vietnam War in which it was clear how the media played a role in such a manner that they affected not only the US public opinion, but also the conduction of operations and management of war at strategic level.

This was enough to give importance to the training of media at operational level and their correct organization, at moments in which television became the favorite media. Moreover, progress in communication technology gave more speed to activities to search news.

Therefore, this “easy” access to information has influenced on the way to make war as the public opinion has become a highly decisive factor for acceptance and legitimacy of current wars.

At the beginning of said war, a reduced and simple group of media followed the conflict both from Saigon and the Pentagon and, after some months, the media started to complain that authorities were deceiving them. It was then when they could prove once again the famous expression “the first victim of war is truth” and the relation media-military men weakened during the rest of the conflict causing emptiness in their relationship.

Journalists, who try to give news that are not those given from the military context, started to try to get information from other places. Just to mention one case in particular, the coverage of the Tet Offensive, organized by military men, was particularly negative and deceitful, and we may say that as from that moment, this became a turning point in the US people’s support to war.

The publication of a picture showing the killing of a member of the Viet Cong by the South Vietnam Police Chief, together with the high cost in terms of lives implied by military operations for Americans, led the public opinion to be against the involvement of their armed forces in this war.

This case shows that a cooperation relationship between the media and conduction body at operational level of war is key for both of them to do their work.

In this sense and as regards military operations, this will be possible if military staff that will be in contact with the media is conveniently trained and an organization that works properly is formed, which will help them adapt to different situations.

Based on this, we may state this question: how should training and the media organization be at operational level to contribute to the conduction of operations in the best possible manner?

In order to answer this research topic, this article focuses on making a proposal that includes training of the media body at operational level and its organization.

As an initial hypothesis, we may state that *the detailed training and organization of the media body at operational level will contribute to optimize conduction of operations.*

The intention is to make a contribution that helps to mitigate the lack of doctrine allowing for the deepening of concepts mentioned to contribute to improve the status of the question.



TRAINING OF THE MEDIA BODY AT OPERATIONAL LEVEL

The complex world of war

War is a complex social phenomenon and, based on the different perspectives with which it may be dealt with, there is the need for news to be properly given so that there are no effects contrary to what has been expected without being far from truth.

Inappropriate or badly- timed information or information which is subject to different interpretations will have highly negative consequences both for the future development of operations and public opinion.

Based on this, we can identify two groups with interests that are normally opposite. On the one hand, military men whose main interest is to attract public opinion favorable to the development of operations as it is necessary to support the war effort and its consequences.

On the other hand, there are the media, the interests of which are focused on keeping the audience informed, being the economic and professional ethics the most relevant ones.

These different perspectives to approach the issue of relationship between the media and military men are a difficult scenario.

How should training and the media organization be at operational level to contribute to the conduction of operations in the best possible manner?

With respect to his, journalist Tom Shanker states the following:

I have always had the impression that the relation between the Army and the media is like a marriage relation. It is sometimes a dysfunctional marriage – just to say something- but we are together for the kids. For you (a military man), soldiers are your “children” and you serve them as commandant. In my case, I serve readers, citizens of this Nation who support to a great extent the national and most valuable treasure, they support your children, siblings and spouses. They need to know what is happening in the Army and the statement of security policy¹.

TRAINING OF THE COMMANDANT AT OPERATIONAL LEVEL

It is very important for the highest authority of the Theater of Operations to have some abilities to communicate and satisfy information demands of citizens from their country

1. Shanker, Tom and Hertling, Mark, "The Military- Media Relationship. A Dysfunctional Marriage?", Military Review, January- February, 2010, p. 15.

It is necessary to train them with postgraduate courses in civil matters that allow for an interaction with press media and management of information that is relevant to be published.

and the whole world. In some cases, the commandant will have to be able to inform the audience about the progress of operations, while in some other cases, they may use their second-in-command or a spokesperson trained for such purpose.

Therefore, as they are not communication professionals, the commandant needs to be advised and trained by their press team. In order to do this, many aspects must be taken into account, the most relevant of which are the following:

- › The main thing to be considered is that preparation for an interview is crucial². Making a detailed analysis of different variables found in a meeting of this nature helps to considerably reduce the possibility for the interview to have a negative result for the interviewee. It is important to get as much information as possible about the journalist who will carry out the interview, analyzing prior audience, even that which does not have any relation with the topic to be dealt with but that allow to get closer to the approach of the interviewer, questions style and comments about the answers of the interviewee³.
- › It is important to try to prepare questions in advance: the press body of the commandant has to prepare a series of polite questions, uncomfortable questions and some difficult questions. Having these questions will allow the interviewee to have more appropriate and right answers.
- › With the purpose of preventing an excessive amount of information in memory and, also, taking into consideration that the commandant has many concerns that prevent them from taking the necessary time to prepare in an efficient manner, it is useful to show charts, maps, official documents or even graphics to support their explanations or responses. If they have this type of support material, it is advisable to have a copy in case the interviewer requires one.
- › It will be appropriate to practice for the interview, record it and then analyze it in order to discuss with the press team or other advisors as to how to improve the general performance or any other issue in particular.
- › It is essential to develop the message. The commandant needs to know clearly the message to be delivered orally

or in writing. The question to be made is: if I had to write the title of the article, what would it be? Among other things, this may be achieved by keeping in mind what the message to be delivered is, which allows to guide and control the interview. It may be useful to have them in writing and develop them during the interview so that when it finishes, the commandant may have had said everything they planned before. Even when they are not asked about them in particular, they must have the ability to take their answers to the issues they are interested in.

- › Last, two very important rules need to be taken into account: they do not have to say anything they do not want to be published and they must think their answers by preventing to answer in a hurried manner.

TRAINING OF THE PRESS BODY AT OPERATIONAL LEVEL

As stated before, it is important to have a media organization that allows the commandant to have a conveniently trained organization to properly interact with the media.

Moreover, the officer in charge of media has to be able to act as spokesman of the operational commandant as well as to control and supervise responsibilities of their body.

Therefore, staff must be trained as:

- › Head of Department and Spokesman for the Commandant
- › Specialist in graphic and printed media
- › Specialist in television and radio
- › Specialist in social networks
- › Specialist in management of correspondents on the field

Head of Department and spokesman of the commandant

The spokesman of the commandant has great importance and it is necessary for him to be a person considered as reliable by the commandant of the Theater of Operations⁴, they must have great communication power and they cannot leave aside the vision and intention of the commandant, both in military and political terms in order to spread the necessary information to different members of the media.

There are some articles that discuss whether a spokesman must be a professional journalist or a skillful expert in the area in which they need to carry out their activities or if it is necessary to be a military man properly trained to do that advised by journalists.

2. Shea, David, J. & Gullick, John F., Media isn't a four letter Word. Electronic Industries Association. United States of America, 1994, p. 1.

3. Boylan, Steven, "The relation that exists between the Armed Forces and the social media. An exercise of strategic patience", Military Review, Hispanic version, 2001, p. 39.

4. Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, Manual of Strategy and Planning for Joint Military Action, MC 20-01, "Operational Level. The Campaign, Buenos Aires, 2013 revision, p. 23.

It is necessary to organize an office whose members are the responsible for establishing the relationship with graphic media.

The main advantage for the spokesperson to be a journalist is that they have knowledge in communication and its different techniques. In that case, their training has to be focused on learning military vocabulary, knowing what is happening in the Theater of Operations and what the military world is like. Therefore, they will make an effort to stand in military's shoes to give a precise message.

Many times civil population wants to listen to news from the military, for which case the officer acting as spokesman has to be especially trained on how to perform their responsibilities with the media.

Moreover, those who want to be spokesmen of the commandant have to be fully aware of the activities being carried out in the campaign and they need to be aware of the fact that information delivered will be taken by the audience as the commandant's own voice⁵.

Specialists in graphic or printed media

It is necessary to organize an office whose members are the responsible for establishing the relationship with graphic media.

With relation to knowledge and training to be received as to the media with which they need to interact, it is essential to know that it is necessary to be updated as to publications that are covering military operations in order to monitor what the perception of the conflict is and what messages to focus on.

When giving an interview to a graphic media, the press team must be trained to talk with the commandant or the spokesperson and advise them as to the techniques to successfully carry out the interview.

The key is to wonder: what title would we like to see published in the graphic media?

In order to communicate what we want, the message to be delivered must be defined beforehand.

It is convenient to record the conversation to assure that concepts expressed are then transcribed⁶.

To do so, the press team must establish a series of rules to put some framework to the interview and to state how it will be conducted and then how information will be published:

- › Record the interview: this gives some relief to the journalist as they will be able to use all information given at the time the commandant or spokesman may rely on such information for their own relief.

- › Not to record the name of the interviewee (optional): the interviewee gives information but it is not possible to mention their name or position. An expression that may be used in this case would be: "a higher authority source from military conduction of the conflict stated that (...)".
- › Off the record: this expression refers to the fact that some things that were discussed will not be edited. This cannot be a reason to make a parallel interview before or after starting the interview as the message to be delivered may be affected. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account that many journalists consider that the interview starts at the moment the interviewee welcomes them: image, body language, mood and appearance of the commandant or spokesperson is a key element for what will later be written.
- › Once the interview started, there is no space for comments such as "actually, this is off the record (...)". This is a huge mistake and we cannot make this type of comments.
- › We cannot lie because, once something has happened, it will not be possible to change it although there may be some control over how the audience will get to know about that⁷. Truth is the basis for the relation-trust there must be between the media and military conduction of the conflict.
- › Do not express anything that we do not want to be published: we cannot give answers that are precisely the ones we tried to avoid before. The commandant and the spokesperson are not obliged to answer to certain aspects about which they do not want to talk. For that, it is necessary to take the answer of a likely undesired question to the message intended to be delivered.
- › Main issues at the beginning: those things with which we would like to close a presentation may be addressed at the beginning and the rest of the ideas about which we talk may support that and give coherence to those main things. Expressions like "the main issue here is (...)", "the key for success is (...)" or "we cannot forget that (...)"⁸, may be useful tools or expressions to answer to an uncomfortable question with the message desired to be delivered.
- › We cannot repeat negative expressions from journalists: any negative comment may be turned into a positive expression and it must be done in such manner. The commandant has to be careful not to address topics with a negative expression, but a positive one.

5. Smith, Rupert, *The Utility of force, The art of war in the modern world*, Vintage Books, New York, 2007, p. 401. Author's translation.

6. Shea, David J. & Gullick, John F., *op.cit.*, p. 13. Author's translation.

7. Shanker, Tom & Hertling, Mark, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

8. Shea, David, J. & Gullick, John F., *op.cit.*, p. 20. Author's translation.

- › It is important to be careful not to talk about potential or hypothetical situations: anything that may happen or that is likely must be replaced with facts unless they are part of the communication plan previously established. Expressions like “I’d prefer not to speculate with the possibility (...)” or “facts show that (...)” may be helpful to avoid this type of questions.
- › Avoid the use of abbreviations or acronyms when talking: journalists do not know their meaning and they are frequent for a member of the force.
- › Short answers to questions: unless it is a topic that has been previously planned as essential in order to deliver a message, we cannot add information to the scope of the question as it may get confusing.
- › It is frequent that at the end of the interview, a journalist asks if there is any aspect that should have been dealt with, and at this moment, it is advisable to develop some key and important ideas for the commandant in case they have not been previously mentioned and he desires to do so.
- › Last: the interview ends with the journalist or team that is with him goes out of the place. The press officer must tell the commandant so that they are not relaxed just because the recorder is turned off⁹.
- › Preparation is key for all interviews although, in this case, it becomes very important as the first rule to be taken into account is that live broadcast is short unless it is a report or a press conference during which times may be extended. If the interview will take place at one’s own facilities, the place must be properly selected and has to be part of the message to be delivered.
- › It is convenient for the interview to be first recorded and then broadcasted, although this is not used any more. With satellite advantages, the rule is live broadcast which makes it necessary for proper preparation to reduce the number of mistakes as much as possible.
- › Television is media that involves vision so presentation is essential. Some experts state that of the total message presented on television, 7% is composed of the content of what is said, 38% is the way in which it is transmitted and 55% is what is called non- verbal communication¹⁰.
- › During the interview, the commandant must address the journalist and avoid looking at the camera, upwards or downwards as this will show him as undecided or evasive. With respect to position, they must not show themselves as uncomfortable or nervous, for example by crossing arms or move legs unnecessarily. Body language is crucial.
- › Answers must be previously practiced for the most difficult questions, a positive message must be established and it is necessary to be focused on controlling the interview, which is essential.
- › At some times, when ending the interview with an

Specialists in television and radio media

Specialists in this type of media need to address some of these rules for the media but there are some new aspects to be especially observed:



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answer, it may happen that the journalist makes a pause causing a feeling of dissatisfaction with the answer in the interviewee. They have to try not to be weak and be confident as to what they said without adding any other information.

Specialists in social networks

New communication technologies and Internet boost have changed the manner in which institutions or whoever desires to communicate with their context¹¹ changing one-way communication to two-way communication in which in most opportunities the addressee has the last word.

This is why the use of social networks before, during and after conflicts is a very powerful tool in the hands of the commandant for the dissemination of information to the public.

Specialists in social networks must be especially trained in giving advice as to the scope and power that social networks have nowadays, taking into account

that information given through that media is a direct channel by the person producing it as it will not be published by journalists who may add some bias to information.

Currently there are many courses given by universities with respect to this topic and it is necessary to train staff at the best institutes to be able to take advantage of knowledge during the development of operations.

Specialists in management of correspondents on the field must feel the need to be close to media body of the Theater of Operations in order to get important and timely information for the public. For this reason, it is important to have an area for such purpose.

With respect to the manner through which correspondents have access to information, there are several positions: there is the option to involve them in combat groups, sharing tents, food, action moments and rest. This has very positive results for both parts and, also, allows to mutually understand needs¹². Another option is to train one's own staff as correspondent on the field integrating combat groups so that they can later issue news releases about the different events in which they took part.

In one way or another, the Press Body must allow war correspondents to enter to authorized places and give them the necessary aid to have the minimum work conditions.

Training and expertise of military staff will allow to properly coordinate this group and to have the knowledge and experience to apply to rules for their conduction that are contained in the guidelines and orders given by higher authorities.

This work relation will promote reliability among the military and journalists which will be favored due to the permanence of the latter for long periods in the Theater of Operations.

It is particularly difficult to get confidence from the members of the military press body when journalists constantly go in or out from units to which they are assigned. Not staying enough time among combatants does not allow journalists to appreciate their work or share reality in which they are involved¹³.



9. Shea, David J. & Gullick, John F., op.cit., p. 25. Author's translation.

10. Shea, David J. & Gullick, John F., op.cit., p. 32. Author's translation.

11. Ministry of Defense of Spain, "Conflicts, public opinion and the Media. Analysis of a complex interaction", Cuaderno de Estrategia N° 148, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies. Mixed Center of the Universidad de Granada- Training and Doctrine Command of the Land Army. Granada, 2011, p. 135.

12. Shanker, Tom & Hertling, Mark, op.cit., p. 17.

13. Shanker, Tom & Hertling, Mark, op.cit., p. 17.

14. Aukofer, Frank & Lawrence, William, America's Team. The odd couple, The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, United States of America, 1995, p. 101.

For this reason, it is necessary to permanently train them to make them adapt to combatants' lives. This is essential to understand difficulties of the case and to deliver this to the public in a precise and exact manner. This work relation will start to promote trust among the military and journalists, which will be favored by their permanence for long periods of time in the Theater of Operations.

In fact, the former US Secretary of Defense, Richard Cheney, highlights prior work with the media as something very important at the beginning of the conflict which allowed the armed forces to get experience and know the different journalists' profiles, thus leading to an acceptable mutual confidence level¹⁴.

CONCLUSIONS

Training of the organization has to do with essential aspects that are inherent to it although there are no doubts as to the fact that training of staff and structure are essential.

It is possible to see the weakness of military staff training in the context of graphic media, television and radio, social networks and management of war correspondents and it is necessary to train them with postgraduate courses in civil matters that allow for an interaction with press media and management of information that is relevant to be published.

With respect to the inclusion of civil advisors or journalists in specific issues of communication, this has limited acceptance as those journalists who want to take information to the public as regards military activities need to be informed by those who are considered experts in the subject: the military.

The commandant has a great responsibility in this sense, thus, their training in terms of relation with the media and attitude to successfully interact with journalists who have a great influence to get a favorable public opinion and, consequently, allow for better management of the conflict.

As regards the press officer who may also be the spokesperson, they have to be with the commandant in most activities he carries out for the purposes of meeting information requirements from the media.

Complexity of the problem that is part of the context of war and facts as well as the need to give a clear message to

national and international people require staff trained in this subject to deal with the issue in an efficient manner. These features help to deeply know the context in which they are involved and, also, to have tools to foresee problems and try to be one step ahead.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that regardless of the conflict in question, the military must understand that they do not have monopoly over control of information on the field where operations are being carried out.

New technology has come into privacy that existed decades ago. This is a reality and a true challenge as to how to manage different tools available to prevent proliferation of information without control, especially the one affecting staff security, development of operations and perception that the enemy has of their own conduction.

Apart from this, journalists must be willing to acknowledge that in many opportunities, it will be necessary to respect certain rules as to the release of certain information. It is essential that this is understood in terms of staff security, development of operations and the surprise to be given with the adversary. The military also have to understand that it will not be possible to build a trust relation if the information they give is not relevant or does not describe the main events that are taking place.

For these reasons, it is very likely that rules to be implemented in this relation between both of them have certain degree of flexibility and some need to allow the possibility to negotiate among parties. This implies the need for the staff to be trained in negotiation techniques in order to get acceptable results for the parties.

This trust relation that must exist between the military and journalists is strengthened to the extent both can promote their advantages. In this way, troops must also be ready to interact with this reality and can see journalists as an opportunity to show citizens the sacrifices they are making for national interests.

Military success properly communicated by the media may cause a multiplier effect on the results.

Another aspect that is equally important is coherence of the message. Due to the different nature and great diversity of manners to give information through different media (graphic, television, internet), it is important that there is no inequality or incoherence as to what is shown in the different media. On the contrary, there must be a sense and analogy in the vision of the problem. This is not easily achieved and a great part of the press body effort must be focused on that.

The press body must have great training and knowledge of the different dynamics of the complex world of media. This will make it possible to conduct an efficient organization to carry out their functions.

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