

I: I am not really writing about the coverage of the war in Iraq as I am writing about embedded journalism as a concept. That is my focus here, but I am going to ask you in regards to the war in Iraq, because that is the only example we have so far.

BW: It's not, but we can go back to that at any time that you want to. I would tell you that embedding is not a new concept. That the US military has embedded journalists throughout conflicts for a long time but never to the scale that we did in Iraq.

I: You started embedding when?

BW: I am not the best student of history, but you can go back to WWII. On D-day there were 30-40 journalists that went ashore with US forces and travelled with US forces and reported. There are a number of reporters back in WW II. You know reporters have always travelled with military units, even in our own civil war here, I am reminded by one of our famous generals, General Grant, that became famous for saying that he would never again command an army for the United States if he had to carry along spies. And he was referring to journalists at the time. So you can see the United States Military have long history of having journalists with it.

I: You still talked about it before, there is something new, what was the new part of embedded journalism that we experienced during the war against Iraq?

BW: I think there are a lot of things that made this different. One is that never before had we put the type of numbers that we put into the field. And down to the levels that we did within our military units. Journalists have typically been at higher-level headquarters and not with squads, not with platoons, not with companies but at the brigades and at the divisions and the cores. I think that the results are different, is the nature of how people get their news, the technology that exists today for reporting is different than it ever has been.

I: So technology did play a role in this? Things were possible now that weren't possible before?

BW: If you take a look at what embedded journalists were able to do on the battlefield a year ago, you compare that with, just say for example that we wanted to replicate what we did a year ago in 1991. The technology for the news media didn't exist. You didn't have the portability; you didn't have the bandwidth, you didn't have the durability of equipment, you didn't have the transportability. The technology of news business doesn't stand still in time either. It continues to develop and I don't know in ten years exactly how people will be receiving their news. And I don't know how the technology that will bring them their news will be in ten years.

I: What is your opinion on embedded journalism? Can you talk about the pros and the cons from your point of view?

BW: I think that it is always important when a nation goes to war, that it goes to war with the full knowledge of the complexities of warfare. And one of the things that embedding permitted was an opportunity for the world, and particularly the American people to see exactly how their military carries out these very dangerous responsibilities that they have in warfare. It gave them an opportunity to see exactly how professional they are, how careful they are to avoid civilian casualties and avoid collateral damage. They also gave the American people the opportunity to see what they had invested in over the past thirty years; this year is the thirty-year anniversary of the all (...) force. And you can't spend any time with a US Military unit, and not walk away with a deep appreciation for, how well trained, how well equipped and how well led they are.

I: I talked to an American journalist who said the exact same thing.

BW: More and more people in American society, that don't have a brother or a sister, a father or an uncle, that served in the military, this gave them some insight into what this country has invested in over the past thirty years.

I: So, in this specific case with Iraq, they were given a lot of insight into to a specific platoon or group of soldiers? Did the journalists embedded with the American troops have an overview of the war?

BW: No, not at all. I think they would tell you that too. They only got to see what was happening right around them but there were hundreds of people that were seeing that was right around them and then there were other places that provided the context for what you were seeing from these individual reports coming in. you had the command center in Qatar, you had the Pentagon here, you had other capitals around the world in the UK and other places that were briefing on the participation of their coalition forces too. I don't know of any news organisation that tried to cover this exclusively from the embedded journalists. It was way too narrow and they understood that.

I: Do you think the viewer understood that, were the media good enough at explaining that this was a specific kind of journalism used to show parts of the war?

BW: I think so; although you could look towards examples it was easy of perhaps a misimpression of what was going on. Let me give you an example, looting in Baghdad. So we have pictures coming in live from Baghdad and you see this looting and repeatedly you see looting in Iraq and Baghdad. And it is easy to make a kind of take a global

perception that this is occurring all over the country when in fact it was occurring in Baghdad, it wasn't occurring in Mosul, in Basra or other places. So it is important to be able to provide the context to what people are seeing and that is done by folks by me and also provided by the news managers, the bureau chiefs, the editors, the people that are making decision on what to air and what to write about for a given day and for a given story. They have to be able to step back and say okay we have this happening here but we have all of these other activities going on too.

I: So this was the best coverage of the war in Iraq that the Pentagon could have wanted?

BW: The best coverage... I don't know if I look at it in terms of good or bad. I am concerned about accurate coverage. This department made a decision very early on that we were going to make truth an issue in this campaign. We were dealing with an adversary that we knew was a practised liar. And that he was going to use disinformation, misinformation, he was going to deceive the world to the best of his ability as to what was going on. So one of the ways that you are able to mediate that and to make truth an issue is to put hundreds of independent trained observers out there on the battlefield to report what is actually going on and what they are seeing.

I: And in this you succeeded?

BW: Well, measures of success. There are not simple answers to any of these questions. There are a couple of different measures of success that I would use to measure success or lack of success. Let me just give you three quick ones and I am sure there are many others. The first one is from the perspective of the journalists, whether or not the journalists had the kind of access and didn't have the kind of restrictions that compromised his or her integrity and their ability to report objectively from the battlefield. That the framework, that the ground rules did not inhibit them or required them to compromise their journalistic ethics. Journalists are best to answer that, but I think for the most part, the feedback that I have gotten, is that, that they didn't find it too restrictive for them to be able to do their jobs, they understood the need for us to protect operational security matters, didn't want to endanger anybody's lives but yet they were given the kind of access that they needed to be able to tell their stories and nobody told them they couldn't report on this or that or whatever.

I: They didn't feel restricted in any way that they couldn't tell what they wanted to tell.

BW: Now from the other metric that one could use, whether or not we achieved any of our goals in trying to mediate that his information that we knew would exist out there. And I think there is ample evidence that we did. I will just give an example, one vivid example that comes to mind, is from when Baghdad was falling and you had the minister

of information, some people referred to him as Baghdad Bob, was on TV saying that no the Americans had been repelled, there was no attack on the airfield, we will take you down there, we just have to clean it up a little bit and split screen on that you saw M1A1 Bradlees rolling down the streets of Baghdad. We would have had that independent verification if you didn't have news media there with the ability to report in real time or near real time. Another example of that is that there were frequently allegations, we knew that we were going to be faced with allegations of indiscriminately killing civilians for example, and I can pick many examples, but one that I always remember, is where a reporter was with a military unit that was manning this checkpoint and a van full of individuals approached the checkpoint and they tried to stop it because they didn't know what it's intentions were and they didn't yield and they ended up having to fire on the van eventually for their own safety. It turned out that they were innocent civilians in that van and many of them that were killed. The headline, whether or not the reporter was there or not would have been the same, because we report these things. There would have still been six innocent civilians killed by US forces today. But by having the embedded journalist there, the embedded journalist was able to write about everything that they had done and their procedures. How they had tried to stop the van and how they were able to then, to also write about the emotions of the event, and how badly these individuals had felt and how it was the lowest point in their life, that they had been unsuccessful in being able to stop this van and that innocent people had to die as a result of their actions and their counter actions. And so, by the end of the day, the situation was the same, six innocent civilians were killed by American forces today, without that journalist there you wouldn't have gotten the insight into the care that US forces take when they are on the battlefield.

The third metric I think that you have to use, and like I said I am sure there are many more, were the American people well served by having reporters out there. And again that is not really for me to answer. It's better for individuals that you know, your own family, your friends, and whether or not they felt they were better informed and whether or not this helped them understand the conflict better. And I think you will find some people who think that reporters were providing too much information. But I think that for the most part you will find that the American people appreciated having the ability to have that kind of coverage and to see what the military was doing.

I: I think the Americans were very pleased with the coverage. Do you think the rest of the world felt rightly informed of the war in Iraq?

BW: It always depends on where you sit, how you view the war, what you are being told by your own news media that are reporting on that conflict. Roughly about 70 % of the embedded journalists were US domestic organisations. 30% were national. So clearly, by the nature of how many embeds I was able to have from, pick your country, with US

forces, it was much more limited. I think that you did get a different image of the war depending where you were in the world and what you were watching or reading.

I: Talking of the ground rules, they are necessary because before anything else the American troops were trying to win a war. Did you find that the ground rules were enough and not too much, was there a good balance, would you write them differently next time?

BW: I would tell you that I think that the ground rules, the framework, worked well. They worked well for a number of reasons. They worked well because I involved the news media, the bureau chiefs in the process, before the conflict. We worked together to fashion a set of rules that would satisfy our concerns as well as their concerns. And they were guidelines and they were broad and they were, you know when you boil down all those pages of ground rules, even as lengthy as they were, you could never predict every situation that would occur on the battlefield. But those guidelines really went two major themes, and the first being that we didn't want to do anything that was going to compromise a mission and jeopardize the people that were conducting that mission. And so most of the ground rules that you saw governed what we call operational security. The other thing that they covered was casualty reporting, because in the military that is the most sensitive issue with respect to real time reporting. Nobody want their loved ones that they have been injured or forbid killed by a news media report before the military can get to them and tell that. And so there were ground rules in their designed to preserve the next of kin notification process. They weren't there to try to prevent reporting on casualty because the defence department knows and understands that casualties are a very real part of war and it is important for the American people to know that there is going to be casualties because no nation should ever enter into conflict except as a last resort. There is ugliness in war and there are casualties in war but there is also a very strong commitment to the families of those men and women who are willing to provide, to give the ultimate sacrifice and we owe it to them to make sure that we treat them with dignity and respect, should something like that happen. And so those were kind of the two major emphases within the ground rules that we wanted to cover. There is nobody in the news media that I know, at least personally that wanted to compromise a military operation. When those things occur they are always (...) an accident. I have found, okay. And so accepting those ground rules with those two major concerns in mind will stop something that was terribly difficult to do.

I: How much control did the Pentagon over the flow of information? Did you have any control?

BW: No, Quite frankly the method of control that I have is that somebody is violating the ground rules; I'll remove them from the battlefield. One thing that sometimes people don't

understand is, that United States military is always going to control the battle space in which it is operating in. and it is never going to permit anything to occur in that battle space that is going to compromise their operation or endanger their people. And that extends well beyond just journalists that includes anything that interfering with an operation that they are conducting. And so the journalist, like any other civilian out there or any other entity, that is compromising their mission is going to be removed from the battlefield. So that is I guess the control that one has. If you compromise a mission or you endanger people we are not going to allow you to stay with that unit. It's that simple.

I: I want to talk a little bit about the relationship between the press and the Pentagon. As I understand this relationship hasn't been that good since the war in Vietnam and all the way through the first Gulf War. But it seems that the relationship has changed since then. Would you care to comment on that?

BW: Well, gosh I wish I could take credit for it all. No, sure I mean, I like to think that the military is a growing, learning institution all the time. I will also tell you that the relationship is reflective of an enlightened military in terms of our people in the military today and our commanders out there, know and understand the importance of a free press in a democracy. And they understand the importance of being able to work with the news media in a way in which they can accomplish their mission without compromising theirs, I guess if there is one lesson that is learned here, the big overall arching lesson, I suppose, the military and the media can work together, in a way in which you don't compromise the military mission and the military don't compromise the journalistic.

I: What made it change, my theory might be 9/11, but I might be wrong.

BW: I don't know that I can point to a certain point of time. I mean this is a relationship that has developed over time, with ebs and flows.

I: But we do agree, that it wasn't that good, of course after Vietnam, but also after the first Gulf War?

BW: Well, I guess it has continued to improve, I think and I hope it continues along that same trend. There is always going to be a natural friction between the media and the military. And I think it is healthy friction. You know, members of the media wouldn't be doing their job, if they weren't pressing for as much information as possible on any, whatever it is that they are writing about, about their subject, about the topic, about the individuals, whatever it happens to be and the American people are also telling our allies to provide the maximum information that can be provided but they also don't want us to compromise the national security of this country.

I: So what you are telling me is, that the troops and the soldiers actually understand how important the media is and the y might not have done that before this embedding process.

BW: I think that anytime that you are able to form a relationship between two entities that typically don't work together and you get a greater understanding of each other's profession, that a healthy respect develops out of that for each other. And we have now; hundreds of journalists that have a new found appreciation and respect for the US military. We have hundreds of commanders, thousands of soldiers and sailors and marines that have a new found respect for what journalists are willing to do to carry out their important mission, informing the people.

I: The Pentagon has been criticized for not being that informative in the briefings in Iraq. Is that critique fair or was that also based on a judgement of national security was coming first?

BW: Perhaps what we didn't do was manage people's expectations well enough for some of those other areas.

This was a little more difficult, because I am not sure what the news media expected at some of those locations. If there was an expectation that they were going to be getting detailed briefings on the operations as they were unfolding, what was manoeuvring where and things like that, that was probably an unrealistic expectation, because no military is ever going to roll out it's campaign plan in the middle of it so that the enemy can react to that. So perhaps, I mean I am willing to accept a large part of the blame, if there was dissatisfaction, perhaps it was because we didn't manage expectation enough about what one would be able to obtain at a location like Qatar or here in the Pentagon even.

I: Looking back would you have done anything differently today?

BW: it is a little too early in the after actions learned, or in the lessons learned process for me to make any sort of specific declarations there. I can tell you that undoubtedly we will learn things that we will want to do better. We will learn things that we have done well, and that we will want to try to continue in terms of best practices, we will find out things that we did not do so well on, and we will want to look at ways in which we can improve those.

I: What you are telling me is that to you embedding could possibly be the future of war journalism?

BW: Ah, so that is always the kind of a final question, have to throw water on it. I don't know, I don't know because just where we started this conversation is, I don't know when the next conflicts is going to be, I don't know where it is going to be, I don't know what

the conditions that is going to be fought under will be, I don't know what the news media technology will be, I don't know how people will receive their news at some future conflict.

I: If the Pentagon could decide, would you prefer embedding, would you recommend embedding once again, if the conditions and the technology was good enough to do it?

BW: I will always be in favour of keeping a well-informed public. And what I have to do is look at the nature of any conflict and the conditions that exists for that conflict, and figure out what is the best way to keep the American people informed. And if that happens to be through the use of embedded media then I am going to aggressively try to embed media.

I: The American public was better informed this time than they have been in former conflicts? Is that your perception of it?

BW: I guess that depends on how you define better informed. Certainly they got a greater depth and breadth of what was occurring because of the embeds. In terms you know how the campaign was developing and things like that and the briefings at the Pentagon. The briefings at the Pentagon during the '91 conflict were every bit as informative as the briefings were in 2002. We are always going to provide as much information and as much context as we can for what is going on without compromising the operation. So what was different was, the ability to see all these other slices of live directly of the field. So the breadth was wider, the coverage was wider. Does that equal better informed; I will let you make that judgement.

I: What surprised you the most during the war, what made the biggest impression on you?

BW: what I really look back on is that, this was not done without some risk. And when I think about this experience that we have just gone through, I applaud the courage of the department and the military commanders out there, and the wisdom of the leadership to allow us to embark on such an aggressive and widespread embedding program that we did. Because I had confidence from the beginning that if we were able to get experienced journalists, and let's face it news organizations sent their best and brightest. If we could get experienced journalists out there together with our mature commanders on the battlefield, that we would find, that both could do their job without compromising each other and that we would all be better for it in the end.

I: Did you ever doubt your decision as to embed during the war?

BW: I never did.

I: I only have for the record; I just have to state your title and your role during the war.

BW: I am the deputy assistant secretary of defence for media operations. I managed, organised and developed the embedding program.

I: You were situated at the Pentagon during the whole war?

BW: I was.

I: Have you been in Iraq after the war ended?

BW: Well, it hasn't ended. There are journalists that are embedded with us military units in Iraq today.

I: I think that a lot of viewers feel that it is over.

BW: It is certainly a key factor; there is no doubt about it. I mean you be best to talk to news organisations with respect to some of the other aspects, financial concerns.